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‘They don’t yet know that life is going to be  
hell’: Tracing Distress Through the UK Asylum  
Process

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## Abstract

As immigration has become a central and divisive topic in the political discourse of the UK and beyond, this thesis offers a timely portrayal of the lived experiences of those who are involved in the UK asylum process. This thesis draws on the growing literature of medical anthropology and of other disciplines on the mental health and experience of distress in asylum and refugee populations. Unlike much previous literature that focuses on one group of actors, this research offers a unique contribution to knowledge by drawing methodologically on Actor Network Theory. It is therefore concerned with the spread and circulation of mental distress among the various actors involved in the asylum process.

Based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Scottish city of Glasgow, this thesis carefully unpacks the affective experiences of asylum legislation and policy using structural violence as an analytical lens. It is organised around five themes utilised to explore distress: bureaucracy, paperwork, disclosure, emotional labour, and waiting. These interrelated themes illustrate how in certain contexts, distress spreads among actors yet in others it is impeded; how distress can be hidden in or drawn out of the materiality of paperwork that exists within the process; how the various conflicting idioms of distress that exist within the cultures that make up the asylum system come together in various spaces throughout the process; and how the political economy of asylum services demands certain coping strategies among its workers. Considering distress highlights the structural violence within the asylum process that is embodied through uncertainty, dependency, discourses of suspicion and deservingness, dehumanisation, stigma and shame.

This thesis contends that there is a cumulative effect from seemingly minor everyday assaults on asylum applicants' dignity, the pseudospeciation that operates in dealing with applicants, and the inequality regarding different actors' ability to protect themselves from distress. The research illuminates the implicit violence written into government legislation, policies and funding decisions regarding asylum applicants. It concludes that attention needs to be given to the way that the asylum process is built on, creates and recreates structural violence of which asylum applicants are the primary victims.

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## Key to transcription conventions used

All interviews were transcribed verbatim using the following conventions. Where passages from interviews are included, the format of these has been edited to make them easier for the reader to understand. Pauses, stutters and repeated words that I deemed not to be significant are not included in these passages. The researchers validating responses such as: *mhmm*, *uh-uh*, *okay*, have also been edited out.

The conventions used are presented here to assist the reader in their interpretation:

[...]	material that has been edited
(...)	incomplete sentences without editing
...	pause in speech
<laughs>	reactions/actions made by the interviewee
( <i>explanation</i> )	explanation offered by the researcher for purposes of clarity
<i>very stressful</i>	italicised text indicates speaker emphasis



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\*pseudonym

## Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name \_\_\_\_\_

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ANT	Actor Network Theory
ASF1	Asylum Support Application Form
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
COMPASS	Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Service
Convention	1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
DA	Dispersed Accommodation
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
FFT	Freedom from Torture
GP	General Practitioner
HOPO	Home Office Presenting Officer
IA	Initial Accommodation
ICIBI	Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
IRC	Immigration Removal Centre
MLR	Medic-legal Report
NAM	New Asylum Model
NASS	National Asylum Support System
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHS	National Health Service
O&S	Orchard and Shipman
SCIN*	Sunnyside Community Integration Network
SDV	Scottish Detainee Visitors
SLAB	Scottish Legal Aid Board
SRC	Scottish Refugee Council
UK	United Kingdom
UKBA	United Kingdom Border Agency
UNCHR	(Office of the) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
*pseudonym	*pseudonym

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## Introducing the topic

Anna: What do you think is the relationship between the asylum process and mental distress?

Oren: Oh, I really want to answer this question! I think the asylum process is designed in one of its utmost goals being to alienate, disorientate and to stress people mentally to the point that they leave the country. I think this is actively pursued by the Home Office. I think anyone that goes into detention without mental health issues comes out with mental health issues, with mental distress, I mean they have a hostile environment working group; it's called that. This is the aim of our government in its current incarnation and in lots of previous incarnations, is to make life here for people as horrible as they possibly can so they leave without the cost of a deportation. I think that they actively want people to suffer, and I think that even (*if*) they don't think that, I think that (*then Home Secretary*) Theresa May doesn't think that she wants people to suffer, I really don't. I might think Theresa May's a fascist, I might hate her (*section omitted due to Oren stating he was speaking 'off the record'*) but I don't think that she thinks that she wants to create a system whereby people are distressed. I think there are racist individuals within the Home Office that want that, but I think that, structurally ... the entire way the asylum process is designed all across Europe is to isolate people, to punish people, to repress people, to keep people silent, so keep people separate, and, yeah, to cause them mental distress.

This thesis tells the story of the many people connected, in various ways, to the UK asylum process and describes and analyses how mental distress spreads among them.

It deals with a particular type of migration, that of those seeking asylum, which can be placed within the category of 'conflict migration' or 'enforced migration' (Brettell, 2015). However, debates exist within anthropology regarding the utility of defining migration by motivation. It has been argued that, although migrants might leave their countries for a variety of reasons, their experiences as migrants in their new countries are similar. Malkki has argued that 'refugees do not constitute a naturally self-delimiting domain of anthropological knowledge' (1995: 496) and thus can be theorised in a similar manner to other displaced people. Other scholars have argued, however, that an analytical distinction is necessary, partly because it is often key to the context in which

they are researched (Brettell, 2015: 150). This thesis is not concerned with the reasons that those who have claimed asylum left their countries of origin and therefore distinguishing the 'type' of migration is only useful in that it specifically refers to those who have claimed asylum in the UK.

The context of the asylum process is crucial to the arguments made throughout this thesis. I argue that mental distress and the asylum process are intrinsically linked; indeed, asylum claims are founded on a fear of persecution. An asylum applicant is someone who is waiting for their claim for refugee status to be concluded. In the UK, asylum claims are made to the Home Office, the ministerial department of government that deals with immigration, security and law and order, headed by the Home Secretary. Decisions on these claims are made under Article 1A(2) of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, hereafter referred to as 'the Convention', which defines a refugee as

a person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

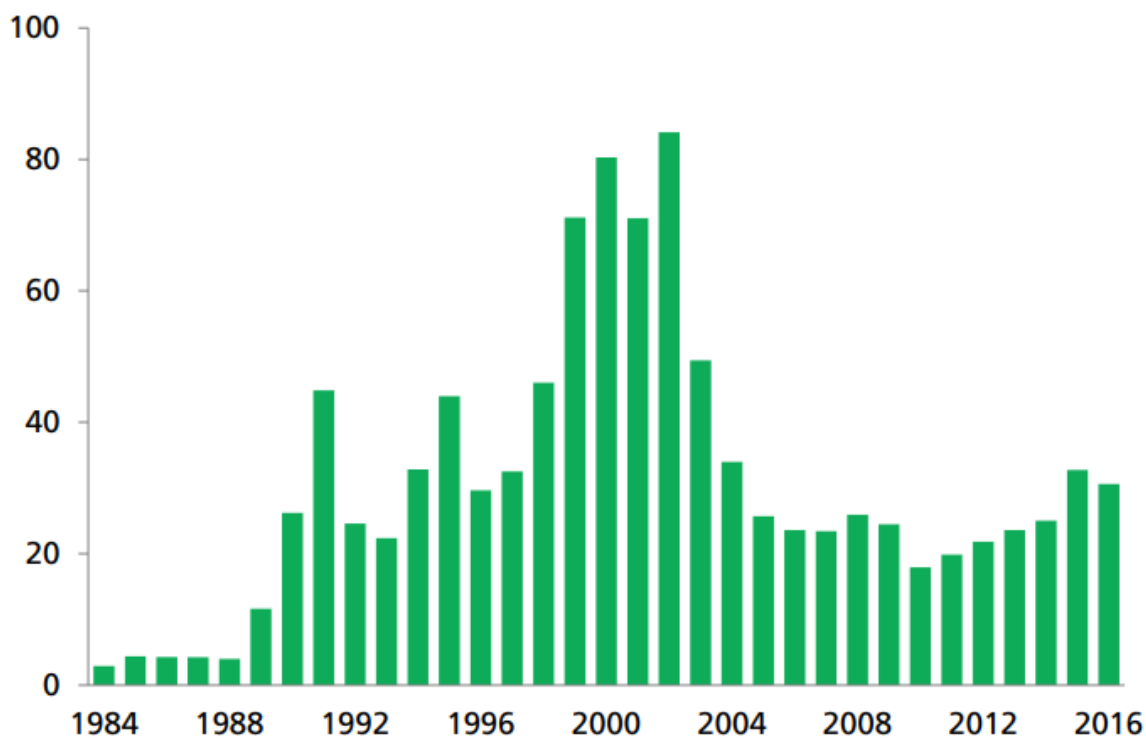
Throughout this thesis, I refer to the 'asylum process' as the various stages that applicants go through from making a claim to its conclusion. Therefore, I focus on what Kirkwood et al. (2016) have termed asylum applicants' 'second journey', that of negotiating the asylum policies and practices while in the UK. While I deal specifically with those migrants who have come to seek asylum, I did not probe individual participants' specific motivations for doing so as it was not germane to my research questions. In addition to exploring the lived experiences of applicants making this 'second journey', this thesis examines the lived experiences and the embodiment of practices of asylum policy through actors connected to the asylum process in a multitude of ways, including charity sector workers, activists, immigration solicitors, immigration officials and medical professionals.

Mental distress constitutes the empirical focus of the thesis; my definition of mental distress is broad, fluid and ultimately defined by the sufferer. I differentiate between mental distress and poor mental health; whilst mental

distress may include specific mental health issues, it also encompasses a wider set of experiences which are not necessarily situated within the medical realm. Furthermore, while mental health is commonly understood to be something experienced by individuals, mental distress moves through systems as wellbeing is constituted in the interactions between others and their social contexts (Petryna, 2015). Chapter Three provides a fuller explanation of mental distress and situates it within the theoretical and conceptual framework used in this thesis. Throughout this thesis I use 'distress' and 'mental distress' interchangeably.

This thesis is about structures that create ideas around genuineness and deservingness, 'us' and 'them'. It is about control, borders, racism, and violence. It is about people divided. Yet, it also includes moments of care, joy, intimacy and resilience that I have been privileged to engage in and witness. While focusing on distress, I do not want to add to an anthropology of abjectness (Gupta, 2012) or contribute to the construction of 'genuine' refugees and asylum seekers as helpless victims, reduced only to their needs, that has been promulgated across the political spectrum (Schuster, 2010: 345). Instead, I explore how the state constructs vulnerability through immigration controls and practices which 'produce and reinforce relations of dependency and power' (Anderson et al., 2009: 8).

During the 1970s, 80s and 90s, there was a noticeable increase of migration into Western Europe for various reasons: foreign labour was welcomed and seen as a crucial resource; recognised groups of refugees fled to Britain, such as the Ugandan Asians and Vietnamese in the 1970s and 1980s and Bosnians and Kosovans in the 1990s; and there was an increase in individuals making asylum applications after fleeing war, genocide and other forms of violence (Stevens, 2004: 164). During the late 1990s, there were marked increases in the numbers of asylum applications in the UK which hit a peak in 2002 with over 80,000 applications, see Figure 1-1. It was during this time that the government began to talk of immigration within a discourse of crisis and deterrence become the operational focus, even though the numbers had dramatically declined since.



**Figure 1-1: Applications for asylum in the UK, 000s. Asylum Statistics, House of Commons Library (Hawkins, 2017)**

Numbers of asylum applicants started to increase during 2015 and into 2016 as more people endeavoured to cross the Mediterranean fleeing horrendous living conditions. Nonetheless, many die in the attempt<sup>1</sup>. Across Europe this was quickly termed the ‘refugee crisis’ resulting in increased securitisation through fences, walls and barbed wire being erected at borders. The construction of this ongoing ‘crisis’ has resulted in those seeking asylum finding it harder to determine a path to the state of their choosing, in line with the Convention (Jubany, 2017).

Since the late 1990s, migration has become increasingly a central area of political and public concern and is often discussed within a discourse of social threat or crisis in the UK and beyond. Jubany (2017) argues that this has resulted in asylum seekers no longer being seen as people in need of protection, but as a menace that society must protect against. Indeed, she states:

As the concept of refuge has been perverted, from an ethos of protection to that of prevention, asylum seekers’ prospects for a brighter future in the West vastly diminish and they become

<sup>1</sup> See [15years.morizbuesing.com](http://15years.morizbuesing.com) for an interactive map of the deaths since 2001.

transformed into a class of undocumented and dangerous travellers (2017: 5).

In 2011, Hynes noted that hostilities towards asylum applicants and policy mechanisms to deter have increased over the last fifteen years; these have only grown since. In 2013, then Home Secretary, Teresa May, stated her government's desire to create a 'hostile environment' for 'illegal' immigration (Travis, 2013), illustrating the creation of a binary between those conceptualised as genuine refugees and those as bogus or illegal migrants. This unwelcoming atmosphere of fear around 'immigration' is manifest in Britain's political policies, political parties, media outputs and, crucially, seeps into the everyday practices of the general public and those making decisions on asylum applications (see Jubany, 2017). What is important to highlight is that a distressing context lurks (sometimes making explicit appearances) as the background to the context participants live within.

This thesis is based on twelve months of anthropological research that took place in the city of Glasgow, Scotland between January 2014 and January 2015. Anthropology takes the position that human behaviour and the ways in which people construct and make meaning in their lives and worlds are both highly variable and locally specific (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010: 16). The methodology was planned around a series of research questions, namely:

- Where does mental distress occur within the UK asylum process?
- How does mental distress manifest itself within the asylum process?
- How is mental distress understood and experienced by the actors involved in the asylum process?
- What are the variations in the different actors' presentations of mental distress attributed to by other actors involved?
- When and by whom is mental distress diagnosed within the asylum process?
- How is mental distress managed by the different actors involved in the asylum process?

Based on these questions, this research aims to provide a critique following Fassin (2012), who is interested in the day-to-day realities, ambiguities and contradictions of actors. Instead of the boundaries often drawn between



anthropological positions that a) challenge the structural violence of the world, and b) give an account of the unique ordering of societies, Fassin proposes a critical thinking that goes beyond this duality (2012: 245). He states that ethnographers produce critique on the basis of:

work not in the pure realm of concepts, but in the day-to-day reality of life [...] behind ideas and ideologies there are people with their contradictions and doubts, who belong successively or simultaneously to different worlds, who support varying positions and take their place within different logics; there are also situations in which the interpretations are delicate and the issues uncertain, in which relations of power shift and are even sometimes reversed (2012: 247).

Fassin (2012) contends, critique should include us, the social scientists, who are involved in the realities of life. With these dynamics in mind, there is a self-reflexive element to this research.

## **Locating the research in the literature**

This thesis engages with and aims to further contribute to two fields of scholarly literature. The first is the interdisciplinary field of forced migration or refugee studies, for a comprehensive review regarding anthropology's contribution to this field see Brettell and Hollifield (2015). The five empirical chapters (Five to Nine) in this thesis are organised around distinct themes relating to the asylum process (bureaucracy, paperwork, disclosure, emotional labour and waiting). Each one begins with a brief review of literature specific to its content, including literature on refugees from sub-disciplines of anthropology such as medical anthropology (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009; Ticktin, 2006; Fassin and d'Halluin, 2005), legal anthropology (Kelly, 2012a, 2012b; Good, 2007) and the anthropology of policy (Thompson, 2012; Fuglerud, 2004) which, in recent decades, has focused on the practices of states and their bureaucracies in dealing with migrant populations. These areas of research are not included in this section. Instead, I provide an overview of the key areas which scholars have explored that are relevant to the UK asylum system and experiences of those connected to it.

The second field this thesis contributes to is the sub-discipline of medical anthropology, a sub-discipline that has contributed much to the literature on the

wellbeing of refugee populations. The key concepts adopted by critical medical anthropological scholars, particularly that of structural violence, are laid out in Chapter Three to provide the theoretical and conceptual framework for this thesis.

Building on previous work within migration studies, this thesis explores the embodied experiences of state policies and practices and the informal, complex, social realm of boundary-making that results. Alongside the political and public obsession over immigration that has grown over the last few decades, investigations into forced migration began and continue to grow as an area of scholarly inquiry<sup>2</sup>. Refugee studies became a sub-field within migration studies in the 1990s, as the world refugee population rose to 20 million (Schuster, 2010: 342).<sup>3</sup> This emerging sub-field conceptualised refugees more broadly than their legal definition as set out in the Convention, and included topics such as mass displacement (Good, 2007: 7). However, it was not until relatively recently that scholarly inquiry, focusing on the politics of borders and the processes by which states control the movement of people, led to multidisciplinary work being produced around asylum.

States and their borders have been conceptualised in a multitude of ways (see Brettell and Hollifield (2015) for a comprehensive cross-disciplinary review). Within anthropology, nation-states and borders have been conceptualised in terms of social processes. The state, therefore, is not a coherent and reified actor and borders are not simply geographical or legal entities. The concept of transnationalism (Schiller et al., 1992) - reflecting both the more fluid reconceptualisations of nation-states, borders and citizenship and the general move away from culture being theorised in anthropology as a fixed, localised unit - transgresses the geographical, political, and cultural borders to understand migrants as people operating in social fields moving back and forth across international borders and/or maintaining ties to their countries of origin

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<sup>2</sup> There has also been a great deal of local, non-academic studies regarding the asylum system and its interlocutors such as research reports from third sector organisations and advocacy groups like the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC), Freedom from Torture, Medical Justice. These offer useful information channels, but the focus of this section is on academic literature.

<sup>3</sup> At the end of 2014, in year in which the data for this thesis was produced, this figure was 14.4 million (UNHCR, 2014: 27), however, in 2016 the figure topped 22.5 million, the highest number of refugees since the UNHCR was founded in 1950 (Edwards, 2017).

rather than being ‘uprooted’.<sup>4</sup> National identities are not only blurred but also negotiated and constructed (Brettell, 2015: 156-8). Viewing states and borders in terms of social processes, I follow Jubany’s conceptualisation of the state as being ‘a socially produced entity that is constantly evolving’ (2017: 8), and borders being made ‘real’ by actors engaged in border-control processes (2017: 15). Importantly, she highlights that the power immigration officials hold is obscured within the structure of the state institutions (Jubany, 2017: 28).

Fassin argues that the traditionally separated domains of borders, commonly viewed as territorial limits defining political entities (states) and legal subjects (citizens), and boundaries, considered to be ‘social constructs establishing symbolic differences (between class, gender, or race) and producing identities (national, ethnic, or cultural communities)’, limit the understanding of how immigration is experienced (2011: 214). He contends that

in effect, immigrants embody the articulation of borders and boundaries [...] they cross borders to settle in a new society and discover boundaries through the differential treatment to which they are submitted (2011: 215).

Connecting borders and boundaries brings together the state and the politics of immigration into one investigation (Fassin, 2011). Indeed, of late, much of the literature on states, citizenship/belonging and borders has been viewed from this post-structuralist perspective termed ‘the governmentality of immigration’ (Fassin, 2011). This work is inspired by Foucault’s concept of governmentality, discussed further in Chapter Three, and described by Fassin as:

Includ[ing] the institutions, procedures, actions, and reflections that have population as object. It exceeds the issues of sovereignty and complicates the question of control. It relates the power and administration of the state to the subjugation and subjectivation of individuals. It relies on political economy and policing technologies. Applied to the field of immigration in present dark times (Ardent, 1986), it has enriched our understanding of the subtle and complex games involved in the “biopolitics of otherness” (2011: 214).

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph, a key participant in this research, regularly sent money to his daughter in West Africa throughout his time in the asylum process (see Lindley 2007 in Zetter, 2007: 178).

Mulvey (2010) illuminates, what could be viewed as, the governmentality of immigration in his analysis of the policy-making process of the New Labour (1997-2010) government (their legislative changes are laid out in Chapter Four). He argues that there was a feedback effect of immigration policy on immigration politics which created a 'vicious cycle of hostility':

In a sense the initial decision-making over asylum seekers, and the language used by the Government to justify those decisions, created a policy momentum that was self-perpetuating. Immigration policy aided the development of a hostile politics that was then responded to by further immigration policy (2010: 456).

This cycle of hostility, further fostered by the media and attitudes within the general population resulted in migration being spoken of within discourses of threats to safety, social order, economy and (even) a nation's identity (Mulvey, 2010). This context permeates all aspects of immigration policy and its embodiment as Jubany (2017) illustrates through her attention to immigration officials who conduct asylum screening at UK borders. She argues that through the discourses of securitisation and asylum seekers viewed as abusing and threatening the state, what she calls 'meta-messages of deterrence' (the culture of denials and disbelief) are 'established as the core of officers' work' (2017: 6). Indeed, 'the state's goals in relation to denial of asylum status are clearly transmitted to the officers and play a significant role in directing their professional behaviour' (Jubany, 2017: 6).

The changing conditions in which policy makers operate have serious impacts on migration policy, including the normalisation of securitisation of borders and bordering practices (Brettell 2015: 170; see also Hall, 2012; Fassin, 2011; Sharma and Gupta, 2006; Ticktin, 2006; Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Ibrahim, 2005). Bloch and Schuster (2005) analyse how Britain's exclusionary practices of dispersal, detention and deportation (the legislation behind each practice is laid out in Chapter Four) have become normalised. Beginning as occasional practices within the UK's migration regime, they have by the end of the twentieth century become everyday practices, due to, argue Bloch and Schuster, a shift from welfare being viewed as a right to a finite resource (2005: 509). Termed the state's 'arsenal of control' (Bloch and Schuster, 2005), each practice (although not always directly) affected both the lives of participants going through the

asylum process, and others. Most of the applicants I researched with had been dispersed to Glasgow. Many had been detained prior to my fieldwork, yet all were at risk of detention and, if their claim was refused, deportation. This is an important factor, as violence has been viewed not just as a physical *act* but also as the *threat* of violence (Graeber, 2015: 67).

Alongside its marked growth throughout Europe since the 1990s, immigration detention is emerging as an area of scholarly concern (Bosworth, 2014; Hall, 2012; Gill, 2009).<sup>5</sup> While deportation explicitly excludes through removal from the state, immigration detention also excludes those detained from the rest of the receiving society. It differs from imprisonment in that the purpose is not punishment for a crime nor is the person on remand awaiting a trial (Bloch and Schuster, 2005: 499). Instead, detainees are held subject to migration control, outlined in Chapter Four. Regarding immigration detention in the UK, Hall argues that governmentality:

perfectly captures the productive relationship of power through which subjects and social groups become constituted via political interventions which appear to be reactions to self-evident political or social phenomena (2012: 7).

Hall (2012) argues that practices of immigration detention are both shaped by, and make explicit, the dichotomous categorisations of genuine/bogus, legal/illegal, deserving/undeserving (2012: 2). Detention is ‘a technique of government through which individuals and mobile populations become managed as illegal, undesirable or threatening’ (Hall, 2012: 7). This is carried out, Hall contends, through the complex and contradictory role of detention staff who are expected to create a ‘secure but humane’ regime for people who have been deemed ‘illegal’, a security risk, or are unidentifiable (2012: 165). Gill (2009) also analyses detention as a technique of governmentality, illustrating how the increasing practice of moving detainees between detention centres represents detainees as transient and fleeting to activists, advocates and immigration

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<sup>5</sup> There has also been a large amount of literature coming from the third sector and advocacy groups which has highlighted the serious costs to detainees’ wellbeing that detention brings about, in addition to a multitude of concerns regarding cost, efficiency, effectiveness, and the potential human rights violation of indefinite immigration detention (Equality and Human Rights Commission’s Human Rights Review, 2012; Medical Justice, 2012; Phelps 2011).

officials, both delimiting the work they are able to do on behalf of the detainees and also undermining their motivation to do it. Immigration detention practices are inextricably linked to notions of criminality (Kirkwood et al., 2016; Tyler et al., 2014) and illegality. Illegality in relation to immigration has become a relatively recent area of interest for migration scholars (see Brettell, 2015), and is touched upon throughout this thesis particularly in relation to the classification inherent in bureaucratic practices and notions of deservingness.

Unlike deportation and detention, dispersal (outlined in the next section) only affects asylum applicants. Block and Schuster (2005) argue that applicants are marginalised and socially excluded through the dispersal system which takes away any choice of where to live and removes them from their previous social networks. Hynes (2011) highlights the social exclusion that asylum applicants experience due to dispersal also increases barriers to accessing healthcare services. Sargent and Larchanché, go as far as to state, ‘the health of immigrants is directly correlated with their degree of social integration’ (2011: 346). Dispersal is related to practices and conceptualisations of integration which scholars, from a variety of disciplines, have addressed (see Kirkwood et al. (2016) for a review of this literature, and Ager and Strang (2008) for a comprehensive framework of the various ways integration has been conceptualised). Of relevance here is Ager and Strang (2008) argument that underpinning policy objectives regarding integration are the concepts of inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, racism plays a role in integration. Scholars have noticed societal shifts in targets of racism in the UK; traditionally, black and Asian people have been the targets of racism; they are now being joined by ‘Eastern Europeans, Roma and asylum-seekers’ (Schuster, 2010: 341, see also Kirkwood et al., 2016). Lewis argues that the term ‘asylum seeker’ has become a ‘catch-all term for any non-white person’ (2006: 5) illustrating that, among the general population, there is a lack of awareness and misunderstanding around issues to do with asylum, and that the prejudice towards them as a group stems from their perceived ‘non-British’ image or identity (Lynn and Lea, 2003: 427; Lewis 2006). Racism, Schuster argues, has been generated by the process of the UK, and other states, tightening their borders and developing ‘regimes of control that are more or less explicitly racialised, favouring the entry of some groups

over others, using entry criteria that are implicitly racist in terms of outcomes' (Schuster, 2010: 332-333).

Integration is affected by the public perception of migrants which, as noted above, has been seen to be inextricably linked to immigration policy and media outputs. Many human rights' advocates, in addition to scholars from a range of disciplines, have suggested that a 'culture of disbelief' permeates the UK asylum system and those connected to it (Anderson et al., 2014; Kelly 2012; Mulvey, 2010; Anderson et al., 2009; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009). (Much of the literature on the more specific mechanisms of the asylum process incorporates an analysis of the culture of disbelief as is detailed throughout the literature reviews that introduce chapters Five to Nine.)

Half a century after the advent of the Convention, the proportion of asylum applicants granted refugee status has declined dramatically. In the UK, the numbers of applicants refused at the initial decision went from 23% in 1987 to 64% in 2015 (The Migration Observatory, 2016). Fassin argues that these trends are interpreted by public authorities 'not [as] the result of a more suspicious politics of asylum, but the consequence of the augmentation of so-called bogus refugees' (2011: 220). As suspicion is increasingly cast on those claiming asylum, applicants are expected to provide 'evidence' of persecution. This phenomenon has been explored by a number of scholars in relation to the 'politics of proof' (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009) in the context of providing medical evidence (Kelly, 2012b; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009; Fassin and d'Halluin, 2007, 2005; Malkki, 2007). Kelly states that applicants are 'often faced with what seems to be an institutionalized disbelief about their claims, where the default position of immigration officials, judges, and the general public is that they are not telling the whole truth' (2012a: 171). Medical certificates from expert witnesses are, therefore, increasingly being turned to as a mark of truth over and above individuals' bodies or testimony (Kelly, 2012b; Fassin and d'Halluin, 2007, 2005; Malkki, 2007). This is explored further in Chapter Six in relation to the talismanic power of paperwork.

Alongside the burgeoning academic interest in migration over the last few decades, medical anthropologists have explored mental health within immigrant populations critically assessing the use of culture within services, healthcare

policy and definitions of psychiatric disease categories (Sargent and Larchanché, 2011: 350). More recently, related issues to mental health such as violence and psychological trauma are increasingly becoming areas of anthropological inquiry particularly regarding asylum: such as, the effects of trauma in relation to going through the asylum process (Herlhiy and Turner, 2007; Shuman and Bohmer, 2004), and the use of trauma within asylum claims (Kelly 2012a, 2012b; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009; Fassin and d'Halluin, 2007, 2005; Das, 2007; Malkki, 2007).

This thesis contributes to the emerging multidisciplinary literature on the UK asylum process. The critical scholarly work on the culture of disbelief provides a background for examining experiences of distress among those connected to the asylum process. Whilst distress is a factor in much of the literature reviewed above, it is rarely the focus. This is where this thesis makes its main contribution. The main body of literature on asylum focuses on the lived experiences of one group of people connected to the asylum process, such as immigration solicitors (Wilson-Shaw et al., 2012; Westaby, 2010); immigration decision-makers (Jubany, 2017) detention centre officers (Hall, 2012; Bosworth, 2014); third sector service providers (Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani, 2011), and asylum applicants (Rotter, 2016) who are often categorised into sub-groups by gender and country of origin (Beneduce, 2015; Blommaert, 2001). This thesis, drawing on much of the research detailed above, makes a unique and important contribution by examining the lived experiences of distress of multiple groups of people connected to the UK asylum process; and by revealing the affective networks, and how they work, of people, objects, organisations and policies.

## **Research site**

The City of Glasgow was chosen as the geographical location for this research for two reasons. Firstly, it is the only city in Scotland to which asylum applicants are dispersed. Secondly, I already lived in Glasgow and, prior to beginning this research I had worked for a charity that supported immigration detainees in Scotland. I therefore had some knowledge of the landscape and had contacts who worked in this area.

The 1999 Immigration Act introduced a no-choice dispersal system for asylum applicants in receipt of government support. This system, justified as a means to



relieve the ‘burden’ of the number of applicants residing in London and Southeast England, dispersed applicants to designated cities across the UK (Hynes, 2011: 46). Local Authorities were awarded housing contracts by the Home Office to become designated dispersal cities for asylum applicants.<sup>6</sup> Applicants were often housed in areas of multiple deprivation. Frequently the accommodation required refurbishing before applicants moved in. This was seen by the existing local residents, whose homes were also in need of repair, as unfair and therefore fuelled resentment towards the new arrivals (Bowes et al., 2009: 34; see also Kirkwood et al., 2016; Hynes, 2011). The provision of services for asylum applicants in dispersal cities was carried out by a number of ‘partners’ in the public, private and voluntary sectors contracted to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) (Hynes, 2011: 49). From 2000, those asylum applicants arriving in the UK who were eligible for governmental financial support and accommodation were dispersed to one of the designated areas in the UK. (Those asylum applicants who could arrange their own support and accommodation, or who opted for ‘subsistence-only’ support (no accommodation), could remain in London or the Southeast (Hynes, 2011: 46).) In 2000, Glasgow City Council was awarded the UK government’s asylum dispersal contract; this was the first-time asylum applicants routinely came to Scotland. In December 2014, Glasgow housed 11% (3,300) of the total population of dispersed asylum applicants.

Glasgow is a unique dispersal city due to Scottish devolution. Although asylum legislation is made and implemented by the British parliament and asylum support is granted by the UK Home Office, following devolution in 1997, the Scottish government has control over matters such as housing, health and education and, therefore, the agencies which deliver services to asylum applicants. Thus, policies around areas such as refugee settlement and integration are decided by the Scottish Government. Largely due to Scotland’s reliance on inward migration to meet its population target (Scottish government, 2013), Scottish policy tends to start from a more favourable position regarding immigration than in the rest of the UK (Bowes et al., 2009: 28). For instance, in

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<sup>6</sup> In 2016, the ten local authorities that house asylum applicants were, in order of housing the most to the least: Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool, Cardiff, Manchester, Bolton, Rochdale, Nottingham, Leicester, Swansea. Six of these cities have a median average income that places them in the poorest 25% of the UK (Lyons and Duncan, 2017).

Scotland, the integration of asylum applicants begins at the point of arrival, with services supported to assist in this such as 'integration networks' in Glasgow, in contrast to England, where integration policy starts when a person is granted refugee status (Scottish government, 2013: 29; see also Kirkwood et al. (2016) for an ethnographic study around integration based in two locations, Glasgow and, in England, Coventry). More generally, schemes such as the *Fresh Talent Initiative* (launched in 2003 and aimed to attract people from the UK and overseas to live and work in Scotland) and the *One Scotland* campaign (which aimed to tackle racism) have helped to create a welcoming atmosphere for migrants (Lewis, 2006: 6).

Messages from central government, however, 'play an important role in setting the context in which information about local issues is interpreted' (Lewis, 2006: 27). More strongly put, the political discourse, alongside media discourses and public perceptions, contributes to a cycle of hostility towards asylum applicants (Mulvey, 2010). While more favourable attitudes to immigration at policy level in Scotland may filter down to create a greater tolerance by the general public to asylum applicants, Lewis still found 'worrying' racist and hostile views in Glasgow directed towards those who were perceived to be 'asylum seekers' (2006: 5). One of the main concerns highlighted in the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) report was that the public often considered asylum applicants to have a negative economic impact on the local area (Lewis, 2006: 15). This attitude becomes magnified when asylum applicants are housed in areas of multiple deprivation, where communities are already competing for resources. In addition to issues regarding housing, asylum applicants are also seen by some local populations to increase the competition for jobs (Lewis, 2006: 15). This illustrates both a lack of knowledge of the asylum system, as applicants are not entitled to work, and the homogenising of all migrants as asylum seekers, discussed below.

In addition to political rhetoric, the media plays a 'pivotal role' (Lynn and Lea, 2003: 428) in the production and construction of the public's knowledge and (mis)understanding of asylum (Mulvey, 2010). Although Scottish tabloids have been found to be more sympathetic to asylum applicants and refugees than English ones, the public tend to remember the negative rather than positive

headlines (Lewis, 2006: 6). The negative portrayal of asylum applicants within media coverage often depicts them as a threat to the stability of society, for instance, the *Scottish Daily Mail's* front page story in January 2013 entitled 'Crisis as Asylum Seekers Target Scotland', thus seemingly justifying the political rhetoric of a 'crisis' of immigration.<sup>7</sup> This headline illustrates, moreover, the misinformation being propagated: the dispersal system for asylum applicants is done on a 'no choice' basis which belies their ability to 'target' Scotland. However, Bowes et al. argue that negative media coverage brought Glasgow people together in an attempt to counteract the images of asylum applicants and refugees it portrayed (2006: 34-5). Indeed, although a minority, there exists an active and diverse network of individuals and organisations within Glasgow who stand in solidarity with migrants. This thesis includes some of their voices. When negative or threatening images of asylum applicants are opposed, however, they are sometimes replaced by constructions of passive 'disempowered and vulnerable' applicants (Lynn and Lea, 2003: 448), discussed below. It seems that it is easier to adopt group stereotypes than to view asylum applicants as unique and diverse individuals.

## **Positionality**

The second reason Glasgow was chosen as the site for this research was my own background. I came to this research primarily through my work (2009-2012) at Scottish Detainee Visitors (SDV), a small independent charity that supports people held in Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre. As the co-ordinator of the organisation, I worked and communicated, in varying capacities, with individuals held in detention (many of whom had claimed asylum in the UK), immigration solicitors, staff at Dungavel, and other refugee support organisations such as the Scottish Refugee Council, where SDV was based. Through this work, I learnt of and witnessed the distress experienced by various people and its manifestation in numerous ways. Having previously undertaken a Masters degree in the Anthropology of Health and Illness, ideas around the politics of suffering were never far from my mind when working at SDV. Visiting individuals held in Dungavel and having meetings with officers always left me feeling

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<sup>7</sup> This story inaccurately reported the rates of asylum applications in Scotland as compared to the UK as a whole, and resulted in the Scottish Refugee Council lodging a complaint with the Press Complaints Commission (Scottish Refugee Council, 2013).

uncomfortable. There is a Kafkaesque<sup>8</sup> quality to immigration detention: for example, ‘combating distress’ workshops were on offer to individuals imprisoned indefinitely, which I thought a cruel absurdity. Absurd also were the many conversations I had with officers who were simultaneously locking doors behind detainees as they moved them around the centre and openly expressing upset that certain individuals had yet again had their bail applications refused. Hall’s (2012) detailed ethnography of the lived experiences of detention staff also highlights these contradictions. This background led me to reflect more widely on the asylum system and the experiences of those involved. Through conversations with others working in this area, I was led to Professor Alison Phipps, soon to become one of my three supervisors and, from thence, the PhD research commenced.

It is commonly accepted that research is not value-free (Becker, 1967; Gouldner, 1962). Research is a political exercise; what we choose to study and how we study it reflects our view of the world. Through my previous employment, and continued involvement as a committee member for SDV, I have experience of different positions within the field. Through this I have amassed a certain ‘social experience’ (Bourdieu, 2003: 288). I have accumulated attitudes and viewpoints which tend to sympathise with asylum applicants, often viewed as the ‘underdogs’ (Becker, 1967) in this area of work, whilst also acknowledging the pressures and stresses that service providers work under. Working in this field, and depending on who you talked to, the UK Home Office was to varying extents identified as the common ‘enemy’. Whilst in a very different position as researcher, it is important to acknowledge my previous experiences and how they have impacted on my research design, process and analysis. I aim to be visible in this research (Bourdieu, 2003: 287; Brewer, 2000 in Lumsden, 2012: 5) and honest about my beliefs and reasons for the chosen field (Devine and Heath, in Lumsden, 2012: 5).

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<sup>8</sup> Franz Kafka’s (1925) *The Trial* has been drawn upon, in addition to other existential works of fiction, by scholars interested in bureaucracy (Graeber, 2015; Auyero, 2012; Kafka, 2012) and waiting (Auyero, 2012; Rotter, 2010) within the asylum process.

## Conceptualising groups

The label 'refugee' and its application to particular people is problematic (Good, 2007: 5). Legally, a refugee is defined by the 1951 Convention, and asylum applicants are those who have made an asylum claim and are waiting for its resolution (as mentioned above). This is a narrow definition, however, and one that is 'inextricably bound up with the elaboration of concepts of human rights in the mid-twentieth century' since the mass displacement of people after the Second World War (Good, 2007: 6). As mentioned above, conceptualisations of refugees and asylum seekers are also generated by populist media, political and public discourses, and these change over time (see Zetter, 2007). During the late 1980s and into the 1990s, European governments responded to what was perceived to be a threatening rise in migration with domestic legislation. Mirroring this was the re-labelling of normative conditions of refugees' status determination (Zetter, 2007: 181). 'Genuine' refugees were separated from so-called 'bogus' or 'illegal' asylum seekers (Kirkwood et al., 2016; Good, 2007; Zetter, 2007). Zetter summarises the shifting labelling of refugees:

In the past the label 'refugee' shed light on the often disturbing impact of altruism and charity presented as humanitarian assistance. Now labelling reveals a process of citizen co-optation in a wider, and possibly more pernicious, political project (2007: 190).

Nonetheless, in the UK, human rights organisations, NGOs, advocacy groups and more liberal media have attempted to combat these hostile conceptions and public perceptions of refugees by offering sympathetic alternatives. Yet, by doing so, Pupavac argues, these organisations tend to construct refugees at the opposite end of the spectrum; as 'traumatised, depoliticised, feminised subjects' (2008: 272). These representations often emphasise the suffering and vulnerability of refugees (Rainbird, 2011; Schuster, 2010); indeed, the 'trauma tag' affirms suffering, whilst also suggesting impaired reasoning (Pupavac, 2008: 272). Conceptualisations of this kind were made of applicants by some of the participants in this thesis (see Chapter Eight).

It has also been argued that the language around forced migration dehumanises as it suggests that 'forced migrants have little or no scope for rational decision making; that they are simply passive victims of circumstances, carried along in

flows, streams and waves' (Turton 2003: 10, see also Malkki, 1995). Crucially, Turton argues, this language is carried through to the way in which states and international organisations respond to, control and manage refugees (see former Prime Minister, David Cameron, describing migrants as a 'swarm of people', and media reportage that refers to 'tidal wave of migrants' and 'floods' [Shariatmadari, 2015]), that is, as an anonymous dehumanised mass rather than as individuals (2003: 10).

In spite of the inherent difficulties, I utilise the legal definition and labels, 'refugee' and 'asylum applicant', as this thesis is concerned with the lived experiences of distress in relation to the UK asylum process (a legal-bureaucratic system). Methodologically, this thesis does not aim to describe asylum applicants as a distinct group but to place them within networks of actors involved in the asylum process. I do not want to homogenise the experiences of those who have claimed asylum. It is important, therefore, to state that those whom I term 'asylum applicants' or 'refugees' come from a wide range of backgrounds and have amassed a variety of experiences (there is no such thing as 'the refugee experience' [Turton, 2003: 7]). The primary commonality of this group is that they have all applied for asylum in the UK. I use the term 'asylum applicant' to refer to all participants at various stages of their claim, from those awaiting their initial interview to one who was granted leave to remain during the period of fieldwork. The exception to this is Ray, who already had refugee status at the start of fieldwork. By using 'asylum applicant' rather than 'asylum seeker', I emphasise the legally-defined category. In so doing I hope to avoid, as far as possible in this thesis, the negative connotations often associated with the term 'asylum seeker'. Despite using the legal definition to refer to participants within this thesis, I cannot avoid others' conceptualisations of these groups. This is crucial to bear in mind, as they impact on the lived experiences of both asylum applicants and those who work with them.

With regards to the other participants, I refer to them consistently as follows. The two participants from the Home Office are referred to as 'immigration officials'. I use the generic term 'service provider' for anyone who is a paid employee or a volunteer of organisations that provide a service for asylum applicants (and others). The service providers are those people working at

Sunnyside Community Integration Network (SCIN)<sup>9</sup>, Asylum Help, the National Health Service (NHS) Health Bridging Team; and also immigration solicitors and general practitioners (GPs). I use the term ‘friend’ to refer to those involved in Rise<sup>10</sup> as this is how most of them refer to themselves. It is important to acknowledge that the use of this term was a purposeful political move to attempt to break down dichotomies of citizens and non-citizens, those who help and those who are helped, providers and users. Importantly, being a service provider or ‘friend’ does not automatically exclude one from being an asylum applicant. At Rise and SCIN, some of the service providers and friends are going through the asylum process themselves (and therefore hold volunteer positions due to restrictions regarding work).

All of these categorisations of groups of individuals remain problematic. Firstly, the participants in this research did not necessarily describe themselves in the way I have but, if I were to use the multiple terms that they use to refer to themselves and each other, it would unnecessarily complicate the reading of this thesis. Secondly, I acknowledge the difficulty in defining people in terms of their status or relationship to the asylum process, just as defining people in relation to their mode of employment is difficult. All of the individuals who participated in this research are more complex than the constraints of labels allow.

## **Structure of the thesis**

This chapter contextualises the thesis; it introduces the research subject and research questions, situates the research within the literature and introduces the research site.

*Chapter Two* describes the methodology that guides this thesis. It begins by locating the anthropological field, one that is complicated by my positionality as a researcher conducting fieldwork in the city in which I live. The chapter continues with a description of the people and organisations with whom I researched and the specific methods of data collection that were utilised. The

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<sup>9</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>10</sup> Pseudonym

chapter ends with a discussion of the ethics of conducting an ethnography of distress; this is built on in the concluding chapter.

*Chapter Three* outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework that is adopted in this thesis. It outlines how health, illness and suffering have been conceptualised within medical anthropology. The importance of considering the macro-political and economic context when investigating health is highlighted and thus leads on to a discussion of structural violence. This chapter lays out the origins of structural violence and explores how it has been used within medical anthropology. It then makes the case for using structural violence as framework through which to view distress in the context of the UK asylum system. This chapter ends by drawing on the concepts discussed to provide a definition of mental distress as utilised in this thesis.

*Chapter Four* provides an overview of the main legislation and policy that govern asylum claims, up to and including 2014, the year of my fieldwork. Rather than analysing this legislation and policy, it lays out the legislative context for the next five empirical chapters. Readers who are familiar with the asylum process will already know much of this; it is included in order for it to be juxtaposed with how policy and legislation is embodied by those involved, as illustrated in the remaining chapters. This chapter also supplements the research field set out in Chapter Two by providing a policy context and discussing the services for asylum applicants in Glasgow.

The themes of the next five chapters were generated by the fieldwork, some of which I previously set out to study, others which emerged from the concerns of participants. These empirical chapters offer an analysis of distress through five distinct topics: bureaucracy, paperwork, disclosing distress, emotional labour and waiting. However, all of these areas are inextricably linked and the theme of uncertainty runs throughout.

*Chapter Five* explores the effects of bureaucracy. It repeats the chronology of the asylum process, as detailed in the previous chapter. The repetitive nature of this chapter is purposeful in order to mirror the repetitive nature of the asylum process emphasised by so many of those involved in this research. In particular, this chapter highlights the consequences of the way bureaucracies are



structured, such as the control of information remaining at the top and the sense of lack of responsibility that the division of labour fosters.

*Chapter Six* elaborates on the discussion of bureaucracy with a focus on the mass of paperwork that exists within the asylum process. Documents have been viewed as the material culture of states and bureaucracies (Hull, 2012b: 113), and are often researched together with bureaucracies. I have separate chapters to explore bureaucracy and paperwork due to the importance that each of these phenomena played in the lives of participants. I did not set out to study paperwork but it quickly became apparent how crucial it was to answering my research questions. Indeed, the term ‘papers’ was used synonymously with status mostly by applicants and their friends and families, thus connecting the material with the symbolic. The concept of ‘papers’ and the physical object of paperwork represented the hope and perceived freedom that being granted asylum brings but also the distress and anguish involved in waiting for an outcome. Asylum applicant, Matipa, was desperate to get her ‘papers’; for her, getting ‘papers’ was not necessarily being given specific material documents but the idea of being documented and had been her goal and reason to keep going for the last eight years:

You just have to believe and hope that things will be fine, I just feel exhausted now, feel *really exhausted* and don’t know what to do because I feel I’m going to die with stress if things don’t go well [...] I feel I don’t have strength to do anything, I don’t have any strength anymore, I’m too broken inside me so I just need some help, just need somebody to give me that paper.

Matipa’s desperation for these ‘papers’ is contrasted with the fear and panic produced by the actual paperwork that she regularly received from the Home Office and other agencies. In this chapter Actor Network Theory is used to explore paperwork not as a product but as an ‘actant’ that carries, contains and conceals distress within the asylum process. It illuminates the role documents play in the construction of subjects and objects as they ‘mediate between schemes of classification’ (Hull, 2008 cited in Hull, 2012a: 259).

One of the mechanisms in which paperwork can spread distress is through its power to disclose new information, written or visual, to audiences. *Chapter Seven* focuses specifically on applicants’ verbal disclosures of distress that

happen in everyday encounters with others involved in the asylum process. This chapter draws on much previous literature to emphasise how the asylum system necessitates the disclosure of distress, yet, at the same time, impedes various ways of expressing it. Whilst focusing on the experiences of asylum applicants, this chapter explores the dialogic nature of disclosure, in particular, how different interlocutors' expectations and cultures can collide in the process of disclosing distress.

Whilst the other four empirical chapters focus more on the experiences of asylum applicants, *Chapter Eight* is dedicated to the experiences of other actors involved in the asylum process. Using emotional labour as a concept through which to analyse these experiences, it suggests that time, both the micro, minutes and hours service providers, friends and immigration officials spend with applicants, and the macro, longer-lasting timeframes of years and careers, affect how relationships are built. It argues that the consequences of emotional labour are far-reaching. In the first instance, emotional labour can cause distress to those working with asylum applicants, usually manifested in stress, but in more extreme situations it results in burnout that facilitates the dehumanising of applicants. The effects of emotional labour ultimately harm asylum applicants while distressing many others along the way.

Time continues as a theme in *Chapter Nine*, in which the condition of waiting within the asylum process is explored. The focus is on applicants' experiences of the bureaucratically and legally induced waiting *in between* the main events that make up the asylum process, such as interviews, court appearances, decisions and so on, and how they are viewed as sources of distress. I argue that it is the uncertainty of the waiting that causes applicants the most distress, resulting in feelings of 'stuckness' (Hage, 2009b: 101), powerlessness and worthlessness. This final empirical chapter links back to bureaucracy to highlight the effects of uncertainty and arbitrariness. In waiting, uncertainty and arbitrariness creates compliance in the waiters (Schwartz, 1975; Auyero, 2012), which is related to applicants' dependency on others caused by the uncertainty and arbitrariness of bureaucratic procedures.

*Chapter Ten* brings together the main conclusions of this thesis and provides a final reflection on methodological and ethical aspects of the research.

## Chapter 2 : An Anthropological Approach

### Introduction

This chapter details the methodology utilised in this research. Methodologically aligning myself with a critical approach to medical anthropology, I thus worked towards ‘an active, politically committed, morally engaged anthropology’ (Scheper-Hughes, 1995: 415). This chapter is divided into five sections: the first discusses the conceptualisation of the research ‘field’ in particular reference to researching in the city in which I live and which I call home. The more specific landscape of Glasgow, in terms of service provision and policy implementation, is presented in Chapter Four. The second section explores Actor Network Theory and explains how this thesis draws upon it as a methodological tool to follow distress within the asylum process. The next section then details how I identified and accessed research participants by following distress. It also provides an introduction to the organisations and individuals involved in this ethnography. These smaller bounded sites such as an organisation’s office or an asylum applicant’s living room, act as windows onto these larger processes, imaginations and systems (Shore and Wright, 2011: 12). The fourth section lays out the specific research methods I used. In the final section, I discuss the ethics involved in conducting an ethnography of distress. Ethics are then revisited in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

### Locating the field

Glasgow City is the largest city in Scotland; in 2014, the year of fieldwork, it had a population of nearly 600,000 (National Record of Scotland, 2017), and housed 11% (3,300) of the total population of dispersed asylum applicants in the UK. Of that 3,000 applicants came from approximately seventy different countries, the largest numbers from the Peoples’ Republic of China, followed by Pakistan, Iran, Nigeria and Eritrea (COSLA). Whilst this research took me all over the city, I spent most of my time in two areas in the south of Glasgow that were home to SCIN, Rise, and many of the applicants that became participants. These are areas of Glasgow still suffering from post-industrial decline. These areas are poor; tenement flats are boarded up, others in desperate need of repair and dog poo was a big problem on the high street, despite the frequent poster campaigns

that covered entrance ways to buildings. Although visited by the underground line, getting in and out of these areas outside of its opening hours or outwith its relatively small geographical footprint, was a common complaint of those that lived there. These areas provided a sharp contrast, immediately visible as you step out of the underground stations, to the area of Glasgow that I live in; streets lined with cafes, expensive shops selling baby clothes and homeware. Indeed, this contrast illustrates Glasgow's 'schizophrenic personality' (Devine, 2010).

In the last few decades, although anthropologists had been working in their own countries for a long time before this, there has been a growing tendency for anthropologists to carry out what is often termed research 'at home' (Collins and Galliant, 2010: 8-9). Doing anthropology 'at home' has been defined and referred to in various ways including 'native' anthropology (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1987) and 'insider' anthropology. But what extent can we think of ourselves as natives or insiders? How does one *know* when one is at home? Coleman and Collins (2006) argue that anthropology at home requires the ethnographic context of study to be similar to that of the anthropologist. Strathern further defines the concept by arguing:

the personal credentials of the anthropologist do not tell us whether he/she is at home [...] but what he/she in the end writes does: whether there is cultural continuity between the products of his/her labours and what people in the society being studied produce by way of accounts of themselves (1987: 17).

Thus, at its most basic level, conducting anthropology at home depends on whether both parties are 'agreed that "society" or "culture" can be conceptualised as an object of study' (Strathern, 1987: 26).

Doing research 'at home' complicates the historical Malinowskian construction of the anthropological field. That is, one in which the lone, white (male) anthropologist travels to far-flung locations to compare two cultures or societies, theirs and ours, then 'bringing an exotic place to a home audience' (Strathern, 1987: 28). A construction that takes at its base level the radical separation between 'field' and 'home'. This construction, argue Gupta and Ferguson, has defined anthropology as a discipline; 'it is central to our

intellectual and professional identities' (1997: 2, see also Strathern, 1987). And, they state, is partially manifest through the trope of entry and exit stories that so often structure ethnographies (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 13). Heterodoxies have always existed to this construction and entry and exit stories have of course changed since Malinowski's time, in addition to the notion of the field more generally, to reflect a more self-conscious ethnographer. Yet, Gupta and Ferguson argue that something of this Malinowskian construction remains; there still exists a '*hierarchy of purity*' regarding field sites' (1997: 13, original emphasis), that is, some locations are viewed to be more unlike home and therefore more 'fieldlike' than others. Indeed, I came across occasional comments or odd looks from fellow anthropology students when I talked about my fieldwork being based in Glasgow, leading me to frequently ask myself 'Am I doing *real* anthropology?'

What is useful here is Coleman and Collins' depiction of the anthropological field, not as a geographical one, but one that involves social not spatial lines (2006: 12). For them, the field is an event; 'constantly in the process of becoming rather than being understood as fixed "being" in space and time' (Coleman and Collins, 2006: 12, see also Lee and Ingold, 2006). It is fluid, constantly in flux and constructed through ever-changing and never fully rehearsed performances and 'a play of social relationships' between anthropologists and their participants (Coleman and Collins, 2006: 12). Indeed, it is continually created and recreated throughout the whole research process from conception to writing up illuminating that the anthropological field cannot be disconnected from the academy (Coleman and Collins, 2006; Bourdieu, 2003).

My research 'field' was not a particular group of people or organisations but webs of meanings, relationships and connections articulated from and between people, power and systems at play against the backdrop of the UK asylum process. This research sits on the edges of what one may term anthropology 'at home'. It was conducted not only in the country in which I was brought up and remain living but within the city that I call my home. However, it took me to places in Glasgow I had never been and knew nothing of; a Pentecostal Church of Redemption in which I was the only white member of the congregation (and a very underdressed one at that), and an underground African bar and club whose

front door I had walked past many times whilst knowing nothing of what went on inside. Participants showed me *their* Glasgow (see Image 2-1 and Image 2-2); which at times was a very different city from the one I was accustomed to. This research is located in the transnational. It involved working with a plethora of different social groups; some individuals with whom I had amassed a certain amount of similar social experience (Bourdieu, 2003: 288), such as third sector workers and others whose experiences, knowledge, and epistemologies I was unfamiliar with. It comprised of relationships between myself and participants and extended beyond the ‘here and now’ (of Glasgow). The ‘cultural continuity’ between myself and participants was therefore on a dramatically sliding scale and I do not consider myself as an ‘insider’ or a ‘native’ anthropologist.



**Image 2-1: Photo elicitation project: remembering Africa. Glasgow, 2014**



**Image 2-2: Photo elicitation project: my city. Glasgow, 2014**

What is useful to take away from the discussions around anthropology at home are two issues highlighted by Okely (1987). Firstly, publications of ethnography in one's own country have a greater potential to negatively effect the communities being researched, which I discuss again in the concluding chapter of this thesis. And secondly, that anthropologists researching at home cannot just get onto a plane leaving the field behind to begin writing up from the safety of their academic surroundings (Okely, 1987: 70). However, understanding 'the field' as a set of relations rather than geographical boundaries (or even viewing the field in an interconnected world [Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 35]) means that perhaps anthropologists never really leave it. As I write, I have not left the geographical location of my fieldwork, although I did leave most of the specific field sites I researched in. Yet, researching in the same city in which one lives brings with it its own micro entry and exit stories, as I continually negotiated moving between my comfortable home life and the (sometimes) uneasy research situations.

## **Actor Network Theory**

Following an anthropological view of health as involving complex interactions between people and their social contexts rather than contained within individual bodies (see Chapter Three), this thesis is interested in the spread of distress within the asylum process. In this section, I discuss Actor Network Theory (ANT) and provide some examples of how it has been used within anthropology. As the

following section shows, ANT was influential in this thesis' methodology, in that, where possible, I followed (the path of) distress.

ANT originated in the 1980s within the field of Science and Technology Studies. It has come to be described as the sociology of *associations* which diverges from the more mainstream sociology of the social which, according to Latour (2005), upholds an artificial division between the material and the social. Indeed, he argues, the social has little meaning once separated from 'politics, biology, economics, law, psychology, management, technology, etc' (Latour, 2005: 6). ANT proposes the analytical focus of sociology to be the associations composed of humans and non-humans. Understood as the '*semiotics of materiality*' (Law, 1999: 4), it applies a semiotic insight to all material things: 'entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities' (Law, 1999: 3). Without denying the divisions between entities such as human/non-human, knowledge/power, materiality/sociality, activity/passivity, agency/structure, ANT proposes that the divisions or distinctions are effects or outcomes of these relations. Entities are performed in, by and through the relations in which they are located; 'actors are network effects' (Law, 1999: 5), making the networks of analytic importance.

Latour argues that there is 'no clear litmus test for ANT membership' (2005: 10), and lays out the following characteristics (2005: 10-11). Firstly, ANT grants a 'precise role' to non-humans; they are actors and 'not simply hapless bearers of symbolic projection': '*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor - or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant' (Latour, 2005: 71, emphasis in original). An actant is something which accomplishes or undergoes an act. The term was developed to overcome the objection that *things* do not have a consciousness (Prior, 2008: 828). All actants generate affect and have the power or agency to change other actants through their interactions; all actants are treated equally analytically. Secondly, the social must be understood as unstable; it is fluid, continually being made and remade, and thus cannot be used to explain a state of affairs. Everything is uncertain and reversible in principle, although it is recognised that entities perform relations that are relatively stable. Finally, ANT aims at reassembling and reconnecting the social, viewed as 'an association between entities which are in no way



recognisable as being social in the ordinary manner, except during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together' (Latour, 2005: 64-5 original emphasis).

The fundamental ANT approach is 'to treat the network as a whole as a causal process that defines its elements, not as a by-product of the agencies of various actants' (Hearn, 2012: 93). The network's agency is more significant than that of the individual actants. Criticism of ANT's failure to recognise intentionality in human agency is arguable, as it is the network that is the locus of power and that makes things happen (Hearn, 2012: 93). Latour argues, however, that power is an 'empty' concept and best done away with completely (1986: 278, in Hearn, 2012: 94). He is resistant to the idea of causation in regard to power; for him, 'power' and 'society' are not causes that explain events and bind people together but rather 'effects' of the ongoing performance of associations between elements of a heterogeneous social-material network (1986: 276, in Hearn, 2012: 94). Yet, as Hearn points out, effects are generally considered to have causes (2012: 95). ANT is influenced by Foucault's (1975) concept of power as being dispersed through capillaries, see Chapter Three. However, rather than assimilating power/knowledge as Foucault does, ANT 'disregards and dissolves power as an inter-human issue, dispersing it into heterogeneous networks' (Hearn, 2012: 94).

Although termed a 'theory', ANT can equally be viewed as a methodology, which is how I make use of it in this thesis, although my intention is not to achieve full Latourian reassemblage of the social. To utilise ANT, one 'follow[s] the actors themselves' (Latour, 2005: 11). This enables its analytical use in investigating the spread of distress within the context of the asylum system. As ANT conceptualises networks as having agency, I use it to explore distress among actants that make up the UK asylum process. Following Shore and Wright, my research does not focus on particular groups of people or organisations but rather on 'a space articulated through relations of power and systems' (2011: 11), and includes the governors, the governed, and the technologies that mediate between them (Shore and Wright, 2011: 12).

Anthropologists have drawn on ANT to explore the 'complex social lives' (Shore and Wright, 2011) of a range of subjects including the role of documents (Hull,

2012b; Kafka, 2012; Navaro-Yashin, 2007), material culture of medicines (Whyte et al., 2002), and policy (Shore and Wright 2011). For example, Whyte et al. (2002) trace medicines through consumers, providers and strategists. Viewing medicines as *social* incorporates both the notion that medicines take on their meaning through social experiences, in particular, social contexts, and that the use of medicines has social implications that go beyond the individual consumer (2002: 169). Medicines are viewed as actants, changing as they enter into relationships with actors, objects and institutions, and reinterpreted as they travel across cultural boundaries (Whyte et al., 2002). Whyte et al. argue that considering medicines as material culture opens up investigations into the larger processes of commoditisation, globalisation and localisation (2002: 13). Investigating the biographies of medicines allows anthropologists to describe these 'lives' in relation to as well as between people, contexts and wider social structures. Shore and Wright (2011) utilise ANT in order to frame non-tangible phenomena (2011: 20); they investigate policies which are embedded in particular 'domains of meanings' (2011:1), that create as well as reflect the social and cultural worlds from which they arise. Policies, they argue, are 'not simply external, generalised or constraining forces [...] rather, they are productive, performative and continually contested' (Shore and Wright., 2011: 11). The agency of policy to effect politics is a notion highlighted by Mulvey (2010) in relation to UK immigration, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

## **Following distress: introducing participants and organisations**

I began having informal conversations about my research with professional and 'friendly' contacts I had previously made in Glasgow. These individuals included asylum applicants, SRC staff members and volunteers, immigration solicitors, medical professionals and activists. Through these initial conversations, I gained an idea of who would be willing and able to assist me in investigating my research questions.

Joseph and Tendai, both asylum applicants whom I had known previously, became key participants in this process. Through conversations with them I followed their distress to the next point of investigation. For instance, Joseph had been having numerous problems with his solicitor which created a significant

amount of upset and confusion for both him and his partner Dawn. Therefore, I approached individual immigration solicitors, beginning with those whom I had known previously, to be involved in my research. All of the legal firms that I recruited participants from tended to receive the majority of their funding for asylum cases via the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB). I wanted to know how the distress felt by Joseph and other applicants (I had heard many similar stories) affected solicitors and their work. After interviewing them, I followed up on what they deemed to be the sources of their distress; most cited the Home Office as a source of their frustrations. Through a previous contact I had in SRC, I emailed the Home Office team in Glasgow and managed, after a certain amount of emailing back and forth, to access an immigration official who was willing to be interviewed. Following distress was not a straightforward, chronological, neat process; paths crossed, went full circle or ended in polite emails refusing my requests. Nevertheless, this method did allow me to think laterally and approach groups of people and individuals who are connected to each other in multiple and convoluted ways. Following distress also placed me in situations in which serendipitous encounters were frequent and fruitful.

Alongside following individuals' distress, I was introduced to Sunnyside Community Integration Network (SCIN) by a friend who had previously conducted some research with them. SCIN is a community-based charity financed by independent funding bodies, corporate foundations and the Scottish government. Originally set up as a support service for newly arrived asylum applicants, SCIN extended their reach to provide various services available to anyone in the local area. However, SCIN was primarily used by migrants, particularly, refugees and those in the asylum process. SCIN held a weekly 'drop-in': a three-hour session that provided tea, lunch, basic advice and a space in which to chat and make friends. However, the drop-in was much more than this for some people who attended, which was reflected in it frequently being referred to as the 'community'. This drop-in quickly became a place in which I spent a lot of time, I attended the sessions almost every week during my fieldwork period and it became an important place in which I recruited participants. I also attended SCIN's Women's Group held in their 'community flat', a flat that SCIN rent and use as a space for various groups and meetings. The Women's Group was another weekly session designed for women and

children and involved more focused activities. I attended many of these sessions and, although I did not recruit any of the women that used the group (as there had been several researchers working with them around that time), I did recruit some staff and volunteers that worked there.

Many of the people I met at SCIN spoke about Rise and the work they did; there was also some crossover with people who worked and went to both. Rise was an volunteer-led activist organisation that offered support and solidarity to all migrants in Scotland, however, if local White-Scottish populations came in for help, many of the volunteers would be as accommodating as possible. At the time of my research, Rise had no formal funding and relied solely on individual donations. Indeed, they had chosen not to apply for formal funding so as not to be restricted in the work that they did. As mentioned in Chapter One, Rise members worked hard to limit the dichotomy between ‘service user’ and ‘service provider’ instead referring to each other as ‘friends’. Rise was understood by many of its members to be a ‘last resort’ for applicants as they engaged with people who tended to be at the end of their claim and/or were in fairly desperate situations, that is, they may have gone ‘underground’, be in detention, or be at a high risk of detention and deportation. I turned up at Rise’s office without any prior warning (I had been told this was the best way of speaking to someone) to introduce myself and my research.

Through Rise I recruited various participants. In addition, I followed up on some of the organisations that those who engaged with Rise talked of as being sources of distress. This included Asylum Help, a sub-branch of Migrant Help a charity that supports migrants based in Dover. As of April 2014, they were awarded the government’s ‘Asylum Advice UK’ and ‘Asylum Support Application UK’ contracts, this is discussed further in Chapter Four. Being at Rise also directed me to the NHS Health Bridging Team which provides health screening for applicants in initial accommodation. Orchard and Shipman Group<sup>11</sup> (O&S), a property services company who are sub-contracted by Serco, who in turn are

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<sup>11</sup> Orchard and Shipman Group is a UK based ‘residential property management company’ that supplies housing across the public and private sectors. In early 2016, the SRC called for an independent inquiry into the allegations against O&S providing dirty and dangerous housing and tenants being threatened and humiliated (BBC, 2016). Despite this and much criticism from the charity sector, Serco was again awarded this contract in 2016.

contracted by the Home Office, to provide housing to asylum applicants. The Home Office was also an institution that was spoken about as being a source of distress. From all of these organisations, I managed to recruit at least one person. I arranged a meeting with the manager of Asylum Help who led me to some of the staff members who I interviewed. Fortunately, I had known the manager through my previous role at SDV so turning up for an appointment at their Glasgow office was a friendly introduction to the organisation and they were accommodating to my requests. In the case of both the Health Bridging Team and Orchard and Shipman, I was given the name of a person to contact by individuals I had met at Rise and SCIN.

Whilst this was a multi-sited ethnography, the organisations and individuals involved in this research were connected to one another in various explicit and tangential ways. Parallel to these relationships existed complex, intertwining and almost contagious feelings of suspicion and distrust originating from and directed towards multiple sources. Griffiths highlights a similar phenomenon within the UK asylum system arguing that ‘deception, uncertainty and mistrust are as much characteristics of asylum seekers’ perspectives of the immigration system as of the reverse’ (2012: 8). I found underlying feelings of suspicion to be almost an omnipresent facet to many of the relationships that I came across. For instance, immigration solicitor, Paul, was told by interpreters that clients never quite believed that everything they told their solicitors was confidential. Indeed, occasionally interpreters told Paul that his clients asked them not to tell him certain things. In other examples, Asylum Help worker, Emilia, told me that her clients would ask her ‘which side’ each lawyer, on a list of legal firms in Glasgow they gave out, was on. Rosa and Ian at the Health Bridging Team both talked of applicants’ general suspicion towards statutory services, including their own (see Bögner et al., 2010). Suspicion also existed between applicants; Seema and Hassan often told me that they did not believe the narratives of their, mostly Pakistani, asylum-seeking friends and acquaintances. I suggest, however, that this is more complex than the notion of suspicion allows. Indeed, it is interlinked with ideas around deservingness recreated within the culture of disbelief, whereby Seema and Hassan have embraced the rhetoric of ‘bogus’ to use against other asylum applicants whilst at the same time claiming the status of ‘genuine’ for themselves.

Much of the suspicion that I came across was focused towards the Home Office. Many applicants, Rise members, SCIN staff, Asylum Help workers and lawyers were wary and/or suspicious of Home Office practices for numerous different reasons and to varying extents. Moreover, many participants, mostly applicants and Rise members, felt that the Home Office were suspicious of them. These feelings of suspicion are explored further in the empirical chapters of this thesis. Importantly, I was not excluded from feelings of suspicion, which at times would affect my access to potential participants. For instance, a friend of Seema's who I had arranged to meet to talk about my research with cancelled at the last minute, which I later found out was due to her husband thinking that I was from the Home Office.

Whilst utilising previous contacts to access participants proved fruitful, there were certain organisations that I was unable to access. These included the NHS Compass service and Freedom from Torture, both of which, after many emails back and forth between myself and the gatekeepers (managers) of the organisations, told me that their staff could not afford the time to speak to me. In addition, the Home Office, a notoriously difficult institution to access as a researcher (Jubany, 2017: 19), allowed me to interview one employee but denied me access to any more representatives; being told in an email that 'unfortunately we do not have the capacity to free up any more decision maker time and so we will not be able to arrange any further interviews'. The Home Office also denied me access to staff at Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre. In addition, I approached various legal firms via email from whom I never received a reply. Whilst I fully respected these decisions, it highlights an important point about who the 'hard to reach' populations in a research project such as this are. The term 'hard to reach' is contested and ambiguous and often used interchangeably with 'disadvantaged', 'vulnerable' and 'marginalised' and it commonly refers to populations such as: sex workers, drug users, people from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex communities, disabled people, young people, elderly people, members of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, asylum seekers and refugees (Flanagan and Hancock, 2010; Pitts and Smith, 2007). My experiences (like others before me; see Jubany, 2017) turn this notion of 'hard to reach' on its head as it was the organisations who had the means and ability to protect themselves from researchers that were the hardest

to reach. At Rise and SCIN, I did not have to negotiate numerous barriers in order to access potential participants; I was able to simply walk through the door of Rise and speak to volunteers, walk up to asylum applicants sitting around tables in the SCIN drop-in and have a cup of tea with them. Indeed, the individuals I met at Rise and SCIN did not have the means and/or ability to be protected from researchers in the way that other organisations mentioned above did. This is mirrored in Chapter Eight which discusses the emotional labour that workers do.

### **Participants' demographics**

It is important to note that all the individuals who agreed to be involved in this research are certain types of people as shown by the fact that they engaged with my work, thus illustrating an openness to discuss and reflect on the idea of distress and the asylum process. Moreover, due to my positionality in the field and thus the previous contacts that I utilised to 'enter' the field, it is crucial that I pay attention to the fact that participants' political persuasions and attitudes may be more closely aligned to my own than if I were recruiting anonymously.

It is, of course, hard to put a figure on the number of people I came across only fleetingly during SCIN drop-ins, in Rise's office, and elsewhere that influenced this work. However, the data in this thesis were made up from 38 participants I recruited. All of the participants involved in this research were over the age of eighteen and had an adequate level of spoken English. Due to financial constraints, I did not use accredited interpreters and I deemed using family or friends to interpret conversations as ethically inappropriate due to the potential subject matter. Thus, without interpreters, it was important I worked with participants who had enough English to be able to provide the depth of information needed. Furthermore, a limited vocabulary might have resulted in participants struggling to convey exactly what they wanted, especially regarding emotions and illness categories, and conversation flow could be interrupted; both of which have the potential to leave participants (and myself) feeling frustrated and powerless. There were advantages of not using interpreters in this study, such as avoiding issues of misinterpretation and trust with a third

party<sup>12</sup>, yet, working only with individuals who are able to communicate in English meant that asylum applicants who potentially experience the most distress (by going through the asylum process without being able to communicate in English) were excluded from the findings. Crucially, the monolingual nature of the research limits its scope.

Research participants included thirteen asylum applicants and one refugee, nine men and four women, seven of whom had children. They were from the regions of West, Central and Southern Africa, the Middle East and South Asia and had varying educational levels, up to and including Masters qualifications. When I first met them, they were all at different stages of the asylum process and one had refugee status. In addition to those in or having gone through the asylum process participants also comprised of: five workers and volunteers at Sunnyside Community Integration Network (SCIN), four women and one man; three friends at Rise, two women and one man; six immigration solicitors from three different private firms, three men and three women who held various roles from trainee to managing director; three caseworkers from Asylum Help all of whom were women; one male caseworker from the Scottish Refugee Council; one female GP whose practice took on many asylum applicants; two members of the NHS Health Bridging Team, one woman and one man; a male ex-employee of Orchard and Shipman, the housing provider for asylum accommodation; and two immigration officials a female current employee and a male ex-employee.

In order to protect participants' anonymity, I have used pseudonyms for everyone and have changed, to varying extents, identifiable characteristics such as their gender and country of origin. SCIN and Rise are also pseudonyms. I have not anonymised Asylum Help, the NHS Health Bridging Team, Orchard and Shipman and the Home Office due to them providing a recognisable service, yet I have anonymised the individual workers by referring to all of them as service providers or immigration officials rather than their specific positions within these organisations. At times, I omitted data from this thesis when I believed it could hinder anonymity and cause harm to the individuals and/ or their

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<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, misinterpretation in research can take place even when both people speak the same language. Poland and Pederson talk of 'encultured silence' (1998: 298), whereby the researcher has an inability to hear the participant not because of language barriers but due to their insufficient familiarity with the person's cultural worldview.



relationships with colleagues, friends and acquaintances; this is discussed further in the concluding chapter of this thesis. I choose not to anonymise the city of Glasgow because the specific context is important; both the policy context of Scotland as opposed to England and the relatively small networks of individuals and organisations that provide services for asylum applicants in Glasgow.

## **Methods of data collection**

The main method of data collection utilised in this thesis was participant observation, the bedrock of anthropology, and described by Ingold as follows:

to observe means to watch what is going on around and about and of course to listen and feel as well. To participate means to do so from within the current of activity in which you carry on a life alongside and together with the persons and things that capture your attention (2014: 287).

Participant observation allows the researcher to observe and participate in, to a certain extent, participants' lives and daily practices. It is a valuable method when studying participants' networks, connections, relationships and everyday practices. It is also a useful tool to gain an understanding of the discrepancies between what participants say and what they do, thus enabling the researcher to make stronger and more reliable statements of findings (Bernard, 2011: 265-6). A further advantage of participant observation is that it allows time to build up relationships of trust between the researcher and participants. Thus, in the context of suspicion and fear that surrounds the lives of many participants, the extended period of contact that participant observation facilitates, is of significant benefit to my findings. Over the period of twelve months, I spent varying amounts of time with each participant. Most of my time was with asylum applicants and those connected to SCIN and Rise. All of my other participants were interviewed on a one-off basis with interviews ranging from 45 minutes to three hours. The ways I researched with different organisations and individuals was partially born out of the ease, or lack of it, with which I was able to access them (as described above). However, this also meant that I developed very different relationships with different participants. Spending considerable time with applicants meant that I witnessed the suffering they underwent, as it

happened, yet, I only heard of the distress immigration solicitors underwent during our relatively short meetings. Furthermore, I was able to discuss my ongoing thoughts about distress and the asylum process with those whom I spent more time with; indeed, hearing their lucidity and reflexivity greatly supported this research and my thinking behind the themes that arose (see Fassin, 2012: 246).

Throughout the twelve-month ethnography, I conducted participant observation at SCIN's weekly drop-ins and their Women's Group. In these spaces, my role, at time, was blurred between volunteer and researcher. I helped the other volunteers and staff make cups of tea, lunches and welcome new people. Every so often, I was also asked by staff members to assist with office-based tasks such as helping asylum applicants fill out various forms. This role allowed me to build relationships with staff, volunteers (which included some asylum applicants) and asylum applicants who attended SCIN services. I also conducted participant observation at Rise's office where I would help out with tasks just as volunteers did, however, I was never officially inducted as a volunteer. I visited their office regularly and would stay there for a few hours to a whole day.

A major benefit of participant observation for this research was its 'potential for discovering unexpected links between different domains of social life' (ASA, 2011:1). For instance, through SCIN I met Ray, an African refugee, who took me to a few services at his church, the Pentecostal Church of Redemption. I wanted to go with him because it was clear from the way he talked about it that it provided a great source of hope and acted as a coping mechanism for him whilst he was going through the asylum process and continued to be after he acquired refugee status.

To gain a more in-depth and focused understanding of how mental distress was understood, experienced and dealt with by participants, I used interviews, the topics of which were in part generated through participant observation. Interviews can only produce knowledge on a specific level, yet, they are useful events to reflect, define and communicate experiences and can be creative spaces where representations and understandings of experience are produced (Pink, 2009: 87). Importantly, interviews do not exist in isolation from the researcher's wider involvement in participants' lives (Pink, 2009), thus my

varying knowledge of and experiences with participants affected how I conducted and analysed interviews. Due to the wide range of participants involved in this research, I utilised different types of interviews depending on suitability and context. Therefore, the interviewing experiences were very different from one to another: interviewing immigration solicitors across their large office desks, chatting over a home cooked lunch with a Rise member, and walking through a supermarket with an asylum applicant.

I conducted many unstructured interviews during SCIN drop-ins, the Women's Group and in the Rise office. I did not have specific sets of questions, yet, I would always have a rough framework of topics in mind. These interviews, which often appear much like conversations, helped me to develop ideas for more structured interviews later on; they also assisted in exploring inconsistencies in the data. I also spent time journeying with participants. Walking is now a fairly established and useful way of learning through participation (Hogan, 2011; Pink, 2009, 2007; Lee and Ingold, 2006) and can be useful when working with participants, who may feel uncomfortable in more formal settings. Lee and Ingold argue that there is something distinctive about walking as a way of socialising because the communication is *through* the shared bodily interactions not above it: 'people look *with* each other' (2006: 82). Whilst these interviews are often named 'walk and talk', in this research, journeys were made in whatever form of transportation the participants utilise, that is, on foot or public transport. In addition to joining asylum applicants in the more mundane, everyday tasks such as food shopping, I journeyed with some to medical appointments (not the actual consultation), court hearings and to the Home Office reporting centre.

I used face-to-face semi-structured interviews to explore more specific topics. Using interview guides and prompts, I was able to gain more in-depth data, such that I could compare across interviews. These interviews were useful when there was only one chance to interview participants, and particularly professionals who had limited time (Bernard, 2011: 158). Nevertheless, I interviewed most participants using a semi-structured interview at some point during the fieldwork. I conducted semi-structured interviews with Rise members, SCIN staff

and volunteers, and asylum applicants after I had built some form of relationship and trust.

In addition to participant observation and interviews, I conducted one photo-elicitation project to investigate asylum applicants' experiences of emotions. Photo elicitation can offer participants 'alternative media and frames through which to express their emplaced, sensory and emotional experiences and ways of knowing' (Pink, 2009: 112). The benefits of this method can be manifold, including the ability to evoke memories and stimulate emotions where words are inadequate. Moreover, it can assist in overcoming potential communication difficulties that may be experienced in interviews (Harper, 2002). I gave five asylum applicants, that I had met through SCIN, disposable cameras and asked them to take a photo to represent any time they felt a strong emotion, whether negative or positive, over a period of a couple of weeks. I then used their images to fuel discussions with the aim of illuminating something of where mental distress did and did not occur within their lives. However, this method did not provide insights into distress in the way in which I had expected it to. Those who took photographs struggled to get across their meanings to me which, I suggest, was due to various reasons including: the project not being explained sufficiently; too much time elapsing between taking the photographs and discussing them which led to people forgetting why they had taken them; and some meanings simply getting lost in translation (see Image 2-3).



**Image 2-3: Photo elicitation project: the meaning of which I never understood. Glasgow, 2014**

Nonetheless, distress was illuminated through this project. When I asked Amir if he would be involved he replied, ‘I am depressed, when I get a visa<sup>13</sup> I will give you photos’. One man that did participate in the project did not want to discuss his photographs with me but instead wrote a description of them for me to read.



**Image 2-4: Photo elicitation project: ‘The street I stayed on’. Glasgow, 2014**

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<sup>13</sup> By this he meant granted protection.

Along with Image 2-4, he wrote:

This is the street I stayed on, or say it is the prison. I can no longer bear to live here in the isolation. This month [is] Ramadan, I am too far away from the mosque and from the city centre. I cannot even use the bike because I am too depress[ed] and I do not have means for the bus.

This description was one of the least extreme expressions of distress out of the eight photographs he gave me. Due to the content of his descriptions I decided, after much deliberation, to take them to Sarah and Lucia at SCIN as I was deeply worried and wanted some advice as to how to handle the situation. They were not a shocked as I was as they were already aware that this man had been suffering a great deal.

Making fieldnotes is a crucial part of ethnographic research. I kept written fieldnotes in a diary and occasionally, when I had little time, I orally recorded notes on my mobile telephone. After every meeting with participants, I always made notes; whether it was a description of what had happened at the Rise office that day or a reflection on an interview. When conducting participant observation over longer periods, I would sometimes find an opportunity to write my field diary away from the observation site but sometimes would do it in plain sight of participants as a visual reminder that I was in the space as a researcher. All the semi-structured interviews I conducted were audio-recorded, after gaining permission from participants, and later transcribed. All the participants' quotations throughout this thesis are direct quotes transcribed from recorded interviews, unless specified. I took photographs of locations and other things of interest but never participants. In addition to fieldnotes, Tendai, a participant in the asylum process, and I conducted multiple audio-visual recordings. This was a collaborative process; he wanted to make a film about being in the asylum process and I wanted to hear about his experiences. Prior to each occasion we filmed, we agreed upon the topic that we were going to discuss. We both own all the audio-visual files; I used them for the same purposes as written fieldnotes and Tendai is free to use them as he wishes.

The data that makes up this thesis was analysed using thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis was done both manually and using NVivo software depending

on the format of the data. It is important to acknowledge, however, that using NVivo results in data from interviews (inputted as Word documents) being prioritised over fieldnotes (inputted as pdfs) when theming analysis. This is due to the 'word search' function not being able to search pdfs.

## **Ethics in an ethnography of distress**

Prior to conducting fieldwork, I gained ethical approval from the University of Glasgow Social Science Research Ethics Committee. In addition to this, academic associations, such as the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth's (ASA), produce ethical codes and good practice guides of which I followed. Although these documents have been criticised as having the potential to mean almost anything (Pels, 1999) others have understood them as being 'tools for nurturing ethical literacy' (Shore, 1999: 124). The ASA's ethical guidelines state that, 'anthropologists have a *responsibility* to anticipate problems' in any research project (2011: 1, my emphasis). Researchers therefore need to make judgments based on their duty to protect the 'physical, social, and psychological well-being' of participants (ASA, 2011: 3). This has resulted in not researching with certain groups, for instance, Baillot et al. decided not to include asylum applicants in a piece of research exploring the way rape is handled in asylum claims to avoid the possibility of re-traumatisation:

for many [asylum seeking women who have been victims of rape] talking about these issues is shameful, difficult, and traumatizing [...] these women have had to tell their stories numerous times. We felt that asking them to describe such experiences again, potentially at a cost of further trauma, would not be necessary (2009: 205).

Yet, not including these women's voices, as Baillot et al. admit, 'somewhat ironically - repeats the problematic cycle of silencing that we seek to identify and challenge (2012: 273). I suggest that, in certain contexts, there can be a middle way, which this thesis follows. That is working *with* those who might be experiencing, or have experienced, distress but doing so in a slow and careful way allowing participants a safe space to speak *and/or* to be silent.

I followed the ASA Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice (2011). Pre-fieldwork, I had carefully thought about how to engage with participants in order to investigate their experiences whilst limiting harm. As the researcher, I

hold the power to decide the direction of the research, the issues that were brought into the participants' consciousness and the way in which participants are represented (discussed further in Chapter Ten). I was aware of the potential power involved in every question I asked. I chose and framed questions carefully and had spent time thinking about the reasons behind asking them; for instance, I never asked participants, who were in or had gone through the asylum process, their reasons for doing so, nonetheless, if they wanted to tell me, I listened. However, even questions that on the surface appear mundane have the potential to trigger memories of past and/or present traumatic experiences. Moreover, once a question is asked, regardless of whether the participant answers it or not, I have 'forc[ed] things out of silence, that is, of bringing [potentially] painful experiences into consciousness' (Poland and Pederson, 1998: 300). Nonetheless, it is important not to infantilise participants; they also have the potential for resistance; by refusing to engage in the research, telling me what they think I want to hear and presenting themselves 'in a light that is favourable' (Goffman, 1959).

The location of the semi-structured interviews was mutually agreed upon in advance; usually suggested by the participant, and included participants' places of work, their homes and various cafés around the city. It was important that participants felt as safe and comfortable as possible in the interview location. This was especially true for asylum applicants as I did not want to create a situation in which they were reminded of interview techniques employed by the Home Office and/or other governmental bodies and provided further reason to wait before conducting interviews with applicants. I gave participants advanced warning regarding the topics I wanted to discuss during these interviews and conducted them sensitively, stopping and inviting breaks, as and when appropriate. Where suitable, I explained the limits of my role as researcher and emphasised that I was not a trained counsellor. I always had on my person information regarding relevant support organisations that I could signpost participants to, however, I never used this. Moreover, participation in the research was on a voluntary basis. I made it as clear as possible both at the beginning of and during the research process what would be involved in taking part and that participants could withdraw from the research at any stage without needing to give a reason.



Negotiating informed consent is a crucial aspect of any research that involves human subjects (ASA, 2011: 4). However, there have been frequent debates regarding whether or not it can truly be achieved (Simpson, 2011; Ferdinand et al., 2007; Hamilton, 2009). Nonetheless, a careful and *continual* commitment to the ‘spirit of’ informed consent (Harper, 2014: 94), goes some way to minimise the risk of causing participants harm. To gain informed consent, to the extent that it is possible, from participants, I made the nature of anthropological research as transparent as possible. When conducting intercultural research, this is not as straightforward as one might imagine; indeed, due to anthropology’s colonial and imperial connotations, for some people, ‘the word itself, “research” is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005: 1). I aimed to achieve careful, collaborative and as co-produced research as possible (see Phipps, 2013); truly listening to the voices of participants, being aware that method practices can help produce the reality they describe (Law, 2004), and bearing witness to what I have learnt. Nonetheless, researching this way takes time and necessitates building relationships of trust between researcher and participants, indeed, an element that is key to a successful ethnography (Behar, 1996). Yet, these relationships add to the complexity of continual informed consent as the researcher becomes normalised in research contexts, which is discussed further in Chapter Ten.

I first introduced my research to participants either face-to-face or I emailed a short overview. I provided them with an ‘information sheet’ (see Appendix 1) which aimed to summarise the research in an accessible way, and a consent form (see Appendix 2). Consent forms, however, are a problematic way of making an agreement. For some of the participants, they worked well as they were used to signing forms in order to reify a mutual promise; for others, it was seemingly an unnecessary bureaucratic procedure that meant very little (see Wynn, 2011). Another issue with the use of consent forms is that it treats informed consent as a one-off event rather than an on-going process that ‘require[s] constant renegotiation over time’ (ASA, 2011: 5). Therefore, in addition to conversations I had with participants at the start of the fieldwork process, I reminded them of my role as researcher throughout. Usually this was done sporadically by explicitly stating my role as researcher, dropping the university or my research into conversations or writing fieldnotes in plain view.

However, these tactics were not always appropriate due to the distressing subject matter of some of our conversations. Furthermore, there were times in which I became first task-doer and second anthropologist when urgent tasks consumed my attention.

I identified and accessed many participants through organisations and thus needed to negotiate organisational consent. It was at this stage that the 'hard to reach' groups in this research became apparent. For those who did agree (to varying extents) at organisational level (SCIN, Rise, Asylum Help, NHS Health Bridging Team, the Home Office) I gained consent by from those in managerial positions. In the case of Rise, who operate as a collective whereby no one person takes control, I attended a members' meeting to explain my research and it was mutually agreed that I could spend time in their office as a researcher.

Organisational consent is more problematic than individual consent as few people are consenting for many. At SCIN and Rise I came across numerous people for whom my presence was not their choice and although only people I 'recruited' were included in my data collection others' experiences in these spaces may have been affected by me.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodological approach for the rest of this thesis. It locates 'the field' in social rather than spatial lines (Coleman and Collins, 2006), which provides an impetus for drawing methodologically on ANT to illuminate the workings of the networks of distress. This chapter described how I followed distress and, in doing so it introduces the organisations and participants with whom I worked. In addition, this chapter has argued that the common usage of 'hard to reach' groups within social science research should be reconceptualised to focus instead on those that are institutionally, and otherwise, protected from researchers. This chapter also provides basic demographical information of individual participants whilst highlighting that some of this has been changed to protect anonymity and outlines the methods of data collection utilised. It ends with a discussion around ethics, which is built on in Chapter Ten.

## **Chapter 3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a theoretical and conceptual framework for the rest of this thesis. It is situated within a critical approach to medical anthropology, a research tradition that seeks to:

identify the social origins of distress and disease, recognising that these origins are ultimately located within the processes and contradictions inherent in the capitalist world system (Janes and Corbett, 2009: 170).

This chapter is divided into three sections. Due to the analytical focus on mental distress that this thesis takes, the first considers how health, illness and suffering have been defined and attended to within anthropology, specifically a critical approach to medical anthropology. The second section outlines the theoretical framework for this thesis. It specifically explores the use of structural violence within medical anthropology, and beyond, to analyse health and illness. It begins by laying out the relationship between power and structural violence with an emphasis on knowledge and misrecognition, then looks at how power has been conceptualised through violence. The final section acts as a conclusion and presents the definition of mental distress utilised in this thesis.

### **Critical anthropological approaches to matters of health**

#### **Health, sickness and suffering**

One of the most quoted definitions of health is that of the World Health Organisation (WHO), which describes health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’ (WHO, 2003). Anthropologists, however, critique the notion of health as being a fixed condition. Instead, health is viewed as an experience ‘irreducible to a set of strict criteria of physiological and mental competence or to a set of cultural differences’ (Petryna, 2015: 571). What characterises anthropological perspectives on health is the use of ethnography (see Davis, 2012; Burbank, 201; Scheper-Hughes, 1979, 1992). Health is seen ‘not simply

originating in individuals themselves or deriving strictly from social forces, but as being engendered in complex interactions between individuals and their social contexts' (Petryna, 2015: 572). Therefore, in order to understand health anthropologically, one must work to uncover the patterns of everyday experience, local knowledge, and social networks that influence personal agency and access to health care (Petryna, 2015: 572).

The critical approach to medical anthropology coalesced in the 1980s through its main criticisms involving medical anthropology's intimacy with biomedicine and, related to this, biomedicine's relationship with the capitalist world system. (For a detailed history of what is also termed Critical Medical Anthropology see Baer et al., 2013; Singer and Baer, 1995). Yet, since the end of the 1990s, this approach tends not to be viewed as a separate one as much of it had been incorporated into medical anthropology more broadly as the sub-discipline assumes a critical analysis of hegemonic notions of health and illness. Unless otherwise specified, any reference to medical anthropology refers to medical anthropology that is grounded in a critical approach. Importantly, the critical approach has influenced the way health has come to be conceptualised within medical anthropology. Critiquing the dominant approach for its neglect of the influence of the larger political and economic context in local disparities in health, critical medical anthropology has sought to include this in its definition of health (Brown and Barrett, 2010: 11-12).

Originating from this critical approach, therefore, health has been viewed within broad understandings of well-being (mental, physical, emotional and social) and suffering that are shaped and defined not only biologically but by cultural meanings, social expectations and political economies (Rylko-Bauer et al., 2009: 8). Thus, health is defined as: 'access to and control over the basic material and nonmaterial resources that sustain and promote life at a high level of individual and group satisfaction' (Baer et al., 2013: 5). This definition of health brings together cultural factors, that is, what counts as satisfactory health, with the political economy of health, that of access to material resources. The term 'political economy', originated in the early nineteenth century within the discipline of economics, and offers a style of analysis of national wealth and international trade. Anthropologists, mainly in North America and following a

broadly Marxist framework, borrowed this term in the 1970s. This signalled a shift away from analysing cultures as bounded, localised entities to viewing them as connected to larger political and economic systems (Khan, 2015). Although this approach has been criticised for depersonalising the subject matter and individual experiences of health and illness by focusing on world capitalist systems (see Baer et al., 2013), I suggest that, when examining the lived experience of distress of those connected to the UK asylum system, it is crucial to pay attention to the political economy as forced migration is inextricably linked to global economic and political contexts.

Medical anthropologists have tended to focus ethnographic research around sickness or suffering rather than health. Sickness includes notions of disease, that is, the outward manifestation of altered physical function or infection which are grounded in western biomedical models, and illness, the *experience* of perceptions of adaptations in health, as informed by its broader social, cultural and political dimensions (Brown and Barrett, 2010: 5). Medical anthropologists have explored the social origins and social production of sickness by analysing health and illness from a macro-social level, that is, by ‘recognising that these origins are ultimately located within the processes and contradictions inherent in the capitalist world system’ (Janes and Corbett, 2009: 170; see also Singer and Baer, 1995).<sup>14</sup> Rather than ignoring the micro-level, this approach brings both micro and macro together to view sufferers’ experiences as inextricably linked to global structures. More explicitly, the sufferer’s experience is constructed ‘in the action area between socially constituted categories of meaning and the political-economic forces that shape the context of daily life’ (Baer et al., 2013: 51). This perspective highlights both the social, political, and economic production of distress and disease and the structures and political economy that affects healthcare practices (Sargent and Larchanché, 2011).

From cultural studies and queer theory, Cvetkovich’s (2012) work follows a similar approach to the one described above to explore (the common understanding of) depression. Cvetkovich makes a case for depression to be viewed as a social and cultural phenomenon and thus offering an alternative

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<sup>14</sup> This macro-level analysis is what distinguishes the critical approach from the approach taken more traditionally within medical anthropology.

model to the medical one, arguing that experiences of depression are often due to racial and political oppression rather than what are commonly understood as 'medical' causes. The source of depression, she argues, lies within the capitalist world system. Drawing on Foucault, she states:

Depression is another manifestation of forms of biopower that produce life and death not only by targeting populations for overt destruction, whether through incarceration, war, or poverty, but also more insidiously by making people feel small, worthless, hopeless (2012: 13).

This extract supports the notion that, by considering the macro-level, structural violence is brought into focus as a cause of distress, addressed in the second section of this chapter. Furthermore, it speaks to Malkki's (2007) identification of one of the unrecognised reasons (within the criteria of the Convention) for claiming asylum as being 'postcolonial poverty'. Poverty, like political violence, 'can be a violent assault on the body, the senses, and the psyche. It can be every bit as traumatizing as violence' (Malkki, 2007: 341). Not recognised as a reason for claiming asylum, those who suffer 'postcolonial poverty' are termed 'fakers' (Malkki, 2007).

Understanding the inextricable connection between personal health and suffering and societal health and suffering, Kleinman et al. utilise the term 'social suffering' in order to collapse the dichotomies of individual/social levels of analysis, health/social problems, representation/experience, and suffering/intervention (1997: x). They contend that, 'social suffering results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems' (1997: ix). Social suffering is interrelated with the concept of structural violence, discussed below. As Kleinman et al. highlight, although suffering exists everywhere it is an experience that predominately hurts the poor (1997: xi). They contend, moreover, that cultural representations of suffering shape how suffering is socially experienced and cast, in some cases, as 'normal' or 'natural'. However, what may appear as a 'natural' human condition in one moment of time and one context can change in 'the nexus of symbolic-moral systems and the political economy' (Kleinman et al., 1997: xii). Related to their argument about the cultural representations of suffering is their contention that

political and professional processes shape how social suffering is responded to and managed, thus, authorising or contesting forms of suffering (Kleinman et al., 1997: xii). Following Kleinman et al. (1997), this thesis evidences that the way in which suffering is understood and interpreted impacts on how it is experienced, responded to and managed. This is highlighted in Chapter Seven, where I address applicants' disclosures of distress.

## **Experiences and expressions**

Scheper-Hughes and Lock recognise that the macro-level analysis of health has been useful as an alternative to, what they view as, 'the pursuit of the *exotica*' of suffering characteristic of ethnomedical studies (1986: 137). However, they argue that it can result in depersonalising the subject matter and individual experiences of health and illness by focusing on world capitalist systems. Indeed, they contend, it has somewhat obscured the close-up reality: 'the particular, the existential, the subjective content of illness, suffering, and healing as lived events and experiences' (1986: 137). Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) suggest a 'three bodies' model, that is, ways in which the body has been perceived, the individual, the social, and the body-politic, as a link between the macro- and micro-levels of analysis of illness.

Scheper-Hughes and Lock conceptualise the individual body in a phenomenological sense; the 'lived experience of the body-self', that is, the physical feeling of distress or wellbeing (1987: 7). They highlight that the individual body is experienced by people in vastly different ways and that, despite the increasing problematisation of it, the dualistic Cartesian model of the body and mind obscures the 'mindful' causation of somatic states within biomedical practice (1987: 9). In conceptualising the social body, Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) follow Douglas (1970) in viewing the body as a natural resource offering rich metaphors and draw on the theoretical approaches of structuralism and symbolism. Baer et al. emphasise that people's images of their bodies in sickness and in health are mediated by sociocultural meanings of being human and 'express power relations in both a specific society and the world system' (2013: 8). Scheper-Hughes and Lock's (1987) social body exemplifies how representations of the body are drawn upon to contemplate nature, culture

and society. Of interest is the relationship between notions of a healthy body and a healthy society:

The body in health offers a model of organic wholeness; the body in sickness offers a model of social disharmony, conflict, and disintegration. Reciprocally, society in 'sickness' and in 'health' offers a model for understanding the body (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987: 7).

Relevant to the context of this thesis are the parallels that have long been drawn between the body and the nation state in terms of representing bounded systems in which their boundaries are threatened or precarious (Douglas, 1966: 142). Martin (1990) argues that the main imagery used in popular and scientific descriptions of the immune system in the United States is through metaphors of invasion and war. Moreover, migrant bodies are frequently discussed in terms of invasion within political and media discourse. Recently, Philip Hammond, a leading British politician, described migrants as an 'invading presence' (Perraudin, 2015). Migrant bodies are also viewed as attacking the health of the nation, as Hungary's right-wing Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, illustrated in his description of migration into Europe being 'not a solution but a problem [...] not medicine but a poison, we don't need it and won't swallow it' (The Guardian, 2016). The third level of analysis that Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) contemplate is the body politic. Here they draw on Foucault and poststructuralism to consider the 'regulation, surveillance and control of bodies' (1987: 7) to illuminate that conceptions of the body are also about power and control. The individual body is subordinate to the body politic as Foucault (1975, 1976) demonstrates through his analyses of the role of medicine, psychiatry, criminal justice and various forms of social sciences in producing new forms of power/knowledge resulting in definitions of 'normal' (as opposed to 'deviant').

Importantly, Scheper-Hughes and Lock's three bodies are interrelated as 'the stability of the body politic rests on its ability to regulate populations (the social body) *and* to discipline individual bodies' (1987: 8, original emphasis). For instance, when a community feels threatened it will react through heightened social controls in order to regulate the group's boundaries (Douglas, 1966); as the literature around refugees suggests, this has been happening in Europe for the last few decades (see Chapter One). For Scheper-Hughes and Lock, the



production and expression of health and illness comes about through the interaction between the three bodies:

Sickness is not just an isolated event, nor an unfortunate brush with nature. It is a form of communication - the language of the organs - through which nature, society, and culture speak simultaneously (1987: 31).

Scheper-Hughes and Lock argue that emotions should be included in analyses of health and illness as sickness, in all its many forms, are 'human events literally seething with emotion' (1987: 29). Therefore, they suggest that emotions, described as entailing 'both feelings and cognitive orientations, public morality, and cultural ideology' that are never free from cultural shaping and meaning, provide a 'missing link' capable of bringing together the three bodies (1987: 28-9).<sup>15</sup>

Nichter (1981) is also concerned with the multiple variations of cultural expressions and embodiments of health and illness. Opposing what he saw to be a static use of 'culture' within ethnomedical studies, Nichter (1981) developed the notion of 'idioms of distress' in which to explain differences in experiences and presentations of ill health. He argues that by paying attention to idioms of distress one is able to examine the:

interpersonal, social, political, economic and spiritual sources of distress, to appreciate tacit communication and to pay attention to cultural dimensions of illness experiences as well as responses to therapeutic intervention, from nosology to treatment, to sick and risk role identities (2010: 402).

Nichter developed his thinking through his ethnographic fieldwork, drawing particularly on South Kanarese Havik Brahmin women, and his position as a therapy facilitator in South India (Nichter, 1981).<sup>16</sup> Within the traditionally patriarchal society, Havik Brahmin women had limited access to education and rarely left the household and household duties. These women, therefore, communicated distress through expressions that were available to them, for

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<sup>15</sup> The nature of emotions is beyond the scope of this thesis, for anthropological discussions of emotions see Beatty, 2013, 2014; Lutz, 1988; Shweder and Levine, 1984.

<sup>16</sup> However, today, 'idioms of distress' feature in the DSM and are used as an agenda to enable practitioners to best diagnose, assess and treat patients (Nichter, 2010).

instance an obsession or ambivalence towards purity. In Brahmin culture 'cleanliness takes on deep cultural meaning associated with purity and pollution as well as one's biosocial identity' (Nichter, 2010: 405). Thus, extreme engagement with purity rituals are idioms through which these women can express social protest. Nichter emphasises that idioms of distress are inextricably linked to the values and norms of the particular society and therefore must be located and considered historically within the social conditions of the time (1981: 399).

Focusing on idioms of distress led Nichter to emphasise the importance of examining the 'micropolitics' of articulating distress before judging behaviour as maladaptive. In doing so, Nichter (2010) places idioms of distress within the social realm; recognising the social ramifications of expressing and interpreting distress in specific ways not only for the sufferer but for their social networks, that is in keeping within particular moral identities. This has also been recognised regarding getting well (Davis, 2012; Estroff, 1993; Parsons, 1952). In addition, Nichter (2010) highlights that it is crucial to consider the response (or lack of it) towards idioms of distress as these responses (or lack of) effect the experience and expression of distress. Thus, he states, only by considering this can we understand how idioms shift over time.

To exemplify this conceptual shift, I turn to Fassin and Rechtman who provide a detailed study illustrating how the concept of trauma has changed, over the last quarter of a century, from clinical psychiatry to everyday parlance (2009: 277). They consider how social agents, be it medical professionals, lawyers, activists and refugees, appropriate and reformulate the category of trauma to make use of it (2009: 12). Fassin and Rechtman (2009) argue that trauma as expressed by those fleeing persecution, has shifted from being conceived as a somewhat suspect condition, to something which has a legitimate status, excites sympathy, merits compassion and, crucially, has the value of proof. Looking specifically at asylum, they state that this shift has resulted in trauma becoming an additional way to testify to the reality of persecution. Resulting from this shift comes the increase in the mention of trauma within asylum claims, properly certified by mental health experts, and the heightened demand for medical evidence (see also Fassin, 2012; Fassin and d'Halluin, 2005, 2007). Trauma, argue Fassin and

Rechtman, has therefore become 'not simply the cause of the suffering that is being treated, it is also a resource that can be used to support a right' (2009: 10).

The phenomenon of medical certification within asylum claims has also been examined in relation to claims on humanitarian grounds (Fassin, 2012). As the acceptance of refugee claims has decreased, as applicants have become delegitimised, humanitarian reasoning for protection takes on a new significance. Medical evidence becomes more important. Fassin (2012) argues that this illuminates how moral sentiments have reconfigured politics by shifting legitimacy from social life to biological life (2012: 15). This has been detailed by Ticktin (2006) in her exploration of the French 'illness clause', a nickname for a 1998 immigration law that granted rights to immigrants with serious health problems and, in doing so, limited the numbers given political asylum.

The idea of suffering as a resource has been attended to by others. Medical anthropological literature on migrant health has emphasised the way in which the suffering body is used as a resource to make claims on the state (see Sargent and Larchanché, 2011). Kleinman et al. have highlighted that cultural representations of suffering are used in popular culture or specific institutions for political or moral purposes. They argue that collective suffering is a core component of the global political economy: 'there is a market for suffering: victimhood is commodified' (1997: xi). Petryna (2004) provides a specific example of this through her ethnographic study of Chernobyl-related suffering. She addresses what she terms 'biological citizenship', that is, the 'demand for, but limited access to, a form of social welfare based on medical, scientific, and legal criteria that recognise injury and compensate for it' (2004: 261), arguing that due to the harsh market condition of the time in Ukraine, people were pushed into appropriating radiation-related claims in order to escape poverty.

In a similar vein to Kleinman et al., (1997) arguing that political and professional process shape how social suffering is engaged with (see above), Fassin and Rechtman argue that the shifting categorisation of trauma illustrates how the truth of trauma 'lies not in the psyche, the mind, or the brain, but in the moral economy of contemporary societies' (2009: 276). The way in which trauma is understood affects how it is heard thus supporting Nichter's assertion of the

importance of looking at the micropolitics in which idioms of distress are expressed. The development of the category of trauma both establishes and reinforces a new figure, that of the victim, who must 'adopt the only persona that allows them to be heard' (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009: 279). This idea is explored further in Chapter Seven.

In summary, this section has illustrated that health, from a medical anthropological perspective, is a phenomenon that exists between people and is grounded in cultural, economic, and political systems of thought and belief. Medical anthropologists view human experience as embodied; we know about the world and each other through our bodies (Baer et al., 2013). This thesis follows a critical approach to medical anthropology, emphasising the importance of considering the political economy in analyses of distress. Within this thesis distress is expressed in a multitude of ways by the actors connected to the asylum process. Scheper-Hughes and Lock's (1987) 'three bodies' model and Nichter's (1981) idioms of distress provide a basis by which these expressions are formed. Moreover, they illuminate the importance of considering the 'micropolitics' in which distress is articulated, as, like Fassin and Rechtman (2009) demonstrate through trauma, categories of suffering shift in meaning and interpretation. Relatively recently, medical anthropologists interested in health and illness have gone beyond biomedical, and otherwise, defined conditions to include forms of violence as being a significant threat to health (Petryna, 2015: 573). The next part of this chapter illuminates the work regarding health disparities and consequences of structural violence but first situates the concept within wider debates on power.

## **Structural violence and power**

Rylko-Bauer et al. (2009) argue that violence always, if surreptitiously, comes to the fore when examining the root causes of ill health. Indeed, 'if we [want] to understand anything about health, we [have] to understand something of violence' (Kris Heggenhougen in Rylko-Bauer et al., 2009: 6). Following this line of thought I have utilised structural violence as a framework through which to analyse the data that makes up this thesis. In order to provide a background to the concept of structural violence, this section begins with a consideration of power as constituted through knowledge. It looks specifically at Bourdieu and

Foucault who view power *relations* rather than power itself as being of analytical importance. It then moves on to look at the relationship between power and violence to lay out the conceptualisation and use of structural violence.

## Power and knowledge

Philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist, Bourdieu, is a key theorist in the conceptualisation of power through knowledge. For him, power relations are structured through *practice*, a concept that acts as the linchpin to his work. He argues that behaviour is not learnt through the internalisation of strict social rules but through the more practical ‘doing’, the strategies of interaction (Hearn, 2012: 97). Crucially, Bourdieu argues that, through practice, actors are unconsciously complicit in reproducing the social structures in which they participate. Strategic practice is structured by one’s *habitus*:

The conditioning associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu, 1990: 53).

Importantly, *habitus* allows for the maintenance of domination; ‘the durability and tolerance of systematically unequal power relations’ due to it being experienced as natural and familiar (Hearn, 2012: 98). According to Bourdieu, power relations are misrecognised resulting in continued dominance within social structures, such as gender<sup>17</sup> and class. The notion of misrecognition is elaborated in Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic violence’, discussed below. Bourdieu argues that power as domination comes about through the process of ‘how we come to know the world and how knowledge becomes implicit and habitual’ (Hearn, 2012: 100). The way we classify objects in our world, he contends, is manifest through our *habitus* and ‘reflects our class location, expresses claims to symbolic capital, bears the impress of symbolic violence’ (Hearn, 2012: 100). Thus,

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<sup>17</sup> For Bourdieu and Wacquant, gender domination is ‘the paradigmatic form of symbolic violence’ (2009: 272).

domination, for Bourdieu, is the way in which knowledge, experience and understandings are shaped to become natural and ‘common sense for all concerned’ and therefore are continually reproduced (Hearn, 2012: 20).

Nonetheless, Bourdieu has been criticised for holding a static model of society which does not account for times in which power and domination fall apart or are overturned. Hearn has argued that his conception of power concerns itself with tacit forms of knowledge which ignore more explicit power struggles (2012: 100). In the context of this thesis however, tacit forms of knowledge and the reproduction of dominance through misrecognition are crucial when viewing a network of actors such as those connected to the asylum process.

Foucault is another theorist for whom power and knowledge are not independent entities but rather inextricably linked. Indeed, he began to refer to ‘power/knowledge’ arguing that our very subjectivity is shaped by wider societal patterns of the production of power and truth (Hearn, 2012: 20). Foucault claimed that the body is a political object of power and knowledge about it is always inseparable from this power (Delanty, 2003: 123), a notion embraced by Scheper-Hughes and Lock’s (1987) body-politic. He argued that power is productive and positive (in the non-normative sense), not inherently repressive or forbidding (Hearn, 2012: 88). Foucault did not view power as negating others of agency; rather, he viewed power as ‘action upon action’ (Foucault, 2000: 340, in Hearn 2012:90), the paradox of controlling through enabling (Hearn, 2012: 90). Moreover, Foucault argued that power cannot exist without resistance (Hall, 2012: 11). For Foucault there was no necessary clear direction to power relations and their effects. Indeed, he imagined power as being ‘dispersed, decentred and always circulating through the “capillaries” of the social body rather than emanating from centres of “sovereignty”’ (Hearn, 2012: 89), and therefore, should be analysed as such, that is, power is neither reduced to agency nor structure (Delanty, 2003: 124). Hearn critiques Foucault’s analogy of capillaries as weak since they are connected to the cardio-vascular system which has a clear and purposeful centre, moreover he views Foucault’s conceptualisation of power in general as ‘chronically vague’ (2012: 210). Nevertheless, Foucault made a significant contribution to social theory via his contemplation on modern, liberal power under the heading of governmentality;

which has informed medical anthropologists' examination of health and the body, as discussed above, and much of the literature around migration outlined in Chapter One.

Foucault defines governmentality as:

The ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that had the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument (2007: 108).

For Foucault, power is expressed through governmentality, 'manifest in the micro-structures of everyday life, in the 'technologies' of social institutions and in the self-governing practices of the individual' (Delanty, 2003: 124). He distinguishes governmentality from sovereignty, that is, direct power associated with force, law and violence. Instead, governmentality is concerned with 'multiple and infinite networks of power deeply rooted in the social nexus that creates the possibilities for certain kinds of identities to emerge' (Hall, 2012: 7 paraphrasing Foucault, 2000). Both Bourdieu and Foucault understand power relations as being upheld by those subject to them. For Bourdieu, this is through symbolic violence which is misrecognised as such and is therefore perceived as being the order of things. For Foucault, populations are instruments of government in what he terms governmentality.

### **Power conceptualised through violence**

Power and domination cannot be equated to violence, yet they are intimately linked. Violence, in relation to social suffering, is increasingly becoming a frequent theme within anthropological debates (see Rylko-Bauer et al., 2009; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009; Das, 2006; Das et al., 2000, 2001). Nevertheless, 'violence is a slippery concept -nonlinear, productive, destructive, and reproductive' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 1). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois understand violence as 'encompassing all forms of "controlling processes" (Nader, 1997) that assault basic human freedoms and individual or collective survival' (2009: 22). Studies on violence include the ethnographically visible *event* or *physical violence* such as war and its aftermaths but also the,

often obscured, *structural violence*, the ‘assaults on personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value’ (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 1).

### **Symbolic violence**

Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2009) is closely related to his theory of power and demonstrates that suffering is produced by symbolic domination. For Bourdieu, violence is everywhere in social practice yet its familiarity and everydayness obscures it (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 20-1). Because symbolic violence is generally misrecognised it is therefore an effective form of domination as it is perceived as natural and deserved; indeed, symbolic violence is ‘violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2009: 272). Looking at undocumented Latino migrants’ access to healthcare in the United States, Quesada et al. argue that recognising this type of violence, although they term it vulnerability, is crucial in resisting ‘the rhetoric of blame that legitimises the punitive retraction of access to health care’ for these individuals (2011: 352).

The omnipresent yet habitual misrecognised status of symbolic violence results in it being harder to resist (Schubert, 2012: 192). Thus, social hierarchies and categorisations are maintained without specific effort. Moreover, the social practices that uphold domination are reproduced by the actors within the systems that harm them, as it is often in their best interests to act in accordance with the dominant symbolic systems (Schubert, 2012: 181). Bourgois (2003) illustrates this through his ethnographic research with crack-dealers in East Harlem. He demonstrates how an oppositional street culture that resists the exploitation of low-paid, menial employment and social marginalisation results in harming its own people:

Street dealers, addicts, and criminals become the local agents administering the destruction of their surrounding community. On a daily level they perpetrate interpersonal violence, usually against their friends and loved ones<sup>18</sup>, as well as against themselves in the form of substance abuse (Bourgois, 2009: 303).

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<sup>18</sup> Often gendered violence, what Bourgois describes as the ‘symbolic violence of masculine domination’ (2009: 307).



Indeed, symbolic violence is a 'particularly insidious form of violence' (Schubert, 2012: 191), as it involves the misrecognition of the normative forms of violence that are hidden in the minutiae of social practices. Bourdieu and Wacquant state 'of all forms of "hidden persuasion", the most implacable is the one exerted, quite simply, by the order of things' (2009: 272, original emphasis). Bourgois opens his book *In Search of Respect* with a quote from Primo, a manager of a crack-house: 'Man, I don't blame where I'm at right now on nobody else but myself' (2003: 1), illuminating the misrecognition of violence resulting in it not being perceived as violence at all.

### Structural violence

The concept of structural violence arose from Liberation Theology<sup>19</sup>, anti-colonial resistance led by scholars such as Franz Fanon, and the discipline of peace studies, specifically Johan Galtung's (1969) paper *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*. In this paper, Galtung, in order to explore peace defined as 'the absence of violence', first explores the concept of violence itself. He adopted a broad concept of violence as being 'present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations' (1969: 168). Violence, for Galtung, is therefore about inequality; drawing on tuberculosis (TB) he illustrated how in the eighteenth century dying from TB was unavoidable yet in the twentieth century, with the advances in medicine, it is avoidable and therefore when deaths occur violence is present (1969: 168). Galtung distinguished between two types of violence: *personal or direct* and *structural or indirect*. Notably neither produce more or less suffering than the other and both can cause bodily harm; while bombs may kill in a dramatic fashion, structural violence can 'wither bodies slowly' (Farmer, 2010a: 369).

What distinguishes personal from structural violence is that the former can be traced back to a concrete actor. In the case of structural violence there may not be any such actor: 'violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances' (Galtung, 1969: 171). Gupta

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<sup>19</sup> A theology that attended to the suffering of the poor and the forces which promote it (Farmer, 2010b: 336).

explains: 'it is not a victimless crime but its opposite: a crime without a criminal' (2012: 21). Thus, structural violence deals with the less visible and less exceptional forms of violence; it does not involve weapons in the conventional sense but the 'insidious assaults on dignity' (Farmer, 2010b: 328). Suffering is 'structured' by social forces such as poverty, racism and other inequalities which constrict individual agency. This becomes embodied in the lived experiences of its victims. Just as Bourdieu's (1990) concept of *habitus* is 'structured and structuring', Farmer argues that structural violence is 'structured and structuring' as it *constricts* the agency of its victims (2010a: 369).

Physician-anthropologist, Farmer, was a key player in bringing the concept of structural violence to the field of medical anthropology in the early 1990s. Since then structural violence has been utilised by medical anthropologists to highlight socially structured patterns of distress and disease in a multitude of different contexts including violence of war zones as well as 'zones of poverty, zones of exploitation, zones of abandonment' (Rylko-Bauer et al., 2009: 9). Farmer provides a critical perspective on global inequalities of health which acted as a direct challenge to epidemiological research that generally explained health disparities in terms of presumed biological differences (Brown and Barrett, 2010: 12). He did so by focusing on what he saw to be unnecessary rates of mortality due to epidemic diseases in certain parts of the world such as Haiti and Rwanda (2005). For Farmer, epidemic disease is a 'biosocial' phenomenon: 'a composite event-process involving some factors that can be identified and isolated in a laboratory, and some that are economic and social in nature' (2010c: 153-4). He argues that epidemic diseases can therefore be caused by structural violence as 'epic poverty and inequality, with their deep histories, become *embodied* and experienced as violence' (2010d: 293). Four decades after Galtung (1969), Farmer also utilises TB to illustrate this: as a disease that requires a human host, it is effectively treatable and eradicable yet what is missing, Farmer maintains, is the money and political will to do so (2010a: 372).

For Farmer, epidemic diseases illuminate problematic explanations regarding agency, victimhood and blame; for instance, the frequent explanation within the field of global health that diseases, such as AIDS, are largely a result of people's ignorance regarding risk and transmission (2010d: 295). While Farmer does not

deny the importance of personal agency, he firmly contends that 'there is something unfair about using personal agency as a basis for assigning blame while simultaneously denying those who are being blamed the opportunity to exert agency in their lives' (2010e: 316). Indeed, he argues that much socio-medical literature ignores history and the political economy and is thus able to de-socialise disease and obscure the structural violence that occurs (Farmer, 2010d: 295).

Farmer advocates that structural violence should be viewed through the 'materiality of the social' as, like social life, it requires a 'deeply materialist approach' in order to be understood. Thus, the embodiment of structural violence, the ethnographically visible, must be considered (2010a: 355). Structural violence has also been utilised as an analytic concept within the wider discipline of anthropology. Focusing on extreme poverty in India (the world's fourth largest economy), Gupta (2012) argues that structural violence is the basis for the relationship between the Indian state and the poor and is 'enacted through the everyday practices of bureaucracy' (2012: 33). He illustrates how, in the Indian context, the poor are not excluded from political participation (challenging Agamben's (1998) notion of *bare life*), instead, it is at the scene of government-provided care and support that violence exists through corruption, the significance placed on written records and the expansion of bureaucracy. This is pertinent in the context of the asylum system, as this thesis demonstrates, asylum processes are set up to 'protect' individuals whilst simultaneously enacting violence (see Anderson et al., 2009). Indeed, Gupta argues that the 'overt goal of helping the poor is subverted by the very procedures of bureaucracy' (2012: 23). Other theorists (Graeber, 2015; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009; Hertzfeld, 1997) have made the connection between bureaucracy and violence, which is explored further in Chapter Five.

### **The violence continuum**

Medical anthropologist, Scheper-Hughes, has also made a wide and significant contribution to the anthropology of violence. From early in her career she has been concerned with social suffering and violence in everyday life. In *Death without Weeping* (1992) she first explicitly conceptualises 'everyday violence', illustrating how high mortality rates among the poor are normalised and

therefore tolerated. 'Everyday violence' has come to mean 'the implicit, legitimate, and routinised forms of violence inherent in particular social, economic, and political formations' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 21).

Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois' edited anthology *Violence in War and Peace* (2009) attempts to bring the analysis of 'wartime' (abnormal) and 'peacetime'<sup>20</sup> (normal) violences together to create a 'violence continuum' that illuminates the 'grey zones of violence' (2009: 22). Before them, Galtung (1969), and others, argued against analytically separating different types of violence. According to Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2009), separating types of violence risks the misrecognition of everyday state violence, the 'small wars and invisible genocides', and the normalisation of violence located in symbolic and social structures. Scheper-Hughes applies the term 'small wars and invisible genocides' to the everyday forms of violence that the poor mothers in Brazil (1992), and the black population of the 'new South Africa' (1996) suffer. The paradox of this is that the violence is not invisible or hidden from view but, following Wittgenstein, is the hardest to see as it is right before our eyes and therefore taken for granted (1996: 889). While Scheper-Hughes recognises the risk in over-extending the term 'genocide' she proceeds with the belief that it illuminates how people become desensitised to 'genocidal-like practices and sentiments that are daily enacted by ordinary citizens as if they were the most normal and expected behaviours' (1996: 890, my emphasis). Like Gupta (2012) this connects violence to sites of care as she illustrates through the 'bureaucratic indifference' of the Brazilian political leaders who readily hand out free coffins for babies whilst not providing the food required to keep them alive (1996: 891; 1992). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois argue that often the most violent acts are not the ones deemed deviant or disapproved but the ones thought to be 'virtuous action in the service of generally applauded conventional social, economic and political norms' (2009: 5).

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<sup>20</sup> This term is taken from Basaglia's series of essays entitled *Crimini di Pace, Peace-Time Crimes* (Scheper-Hughes, 1996: 890). For Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois peacetime crimes are instances when violence is sold as a greater good; for instance the ways in which prison construction has been sold as economic development to impoverished communities (2009: 20).

The 'violence continuum' incorporates 'all expressions of radical social exclusion, dehumanisation, depersonalisation, pseudospeciation<sup>21</sup>, and reification which normalise atrocious behaviour and violence towards others' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 21). Moreover, it refers to what Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois view to be the 'ease with which humans are capable of reducing the socially vulnerable into expendable nonpersons and assuming the license - even the duty - to kill, maim, or soul murder' (2009: 19).

In the context of the asylum process which creates the backdrop to this thesis, examples of the violence continuum include: the specific creation of a 'hostile environment' for 'illegal immigrants' embodied within the Immigration Act 2014 and 2015 (Yeo, 2015a); the criminalisation of migrants through the increased use of detention; the practice of indefinitely detaining men, women and children subject to immigration controls without making a case in front of a judge; the practice of dispersal and its effects in breaking applicants social networks (Block and Schuster, 2005); the destitution, or threat of it, that refused asylum applicants face (Hynes, 2011); the dehumanisation of asylum applicants by workers in order to cope with the emotional demands of their roles; the targeting of people smugglers rather than recognising the desperation of those making the life-threatening Mediterranean crossings (Anderson et al., 2009); the tens of thousands who have recently died attempting Mediterranean crossings; the externalisation of border control (Fassin, 2011); and the fences, walls and barbed wire erected at the borders of 'Fortress Europe' (Hayter, 2004).

## **Conclusion and (coming to a) definition of mental distress**

This chapter has provided a theoretical and conceptual framework for the rest of the thesis. Beginning with the second section of this chapter, I outlined different conceptualisations of power and knowledge. What is important for an exploration of the lived experiences of those connected to the asylum process is firstly, that power is multidirectional and secondly, that groups such as asylum applicants are constructed in practice through interpretations of others. It

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<sup>21</sup> 'Erik Erikson referred to 'pseudospeciation' as the human tendency to classify some individuals or social groups as less than fully human' (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2009: 21).

discussed the origins of the concept of structural violence and how it has been built upon within anthropology. This concept, however, is not without its problems; Gupta states that ‘structural violence is both necessary and problematic as an analytical category’ (2012: 19). Whilst being careful not to conflate the term and reduce violence to a meaningless shock tactic, the ‘analytical perils here are very real’ (Gupta, 2012: 21), I lay out reasons why it is a useful concept in the context of this research. Firstly, suffering is a recurrent (and expected) experience among asylum applicants and is viewed as natural and inevitable by many individuals involved in this research. Secondly, my fieldwork uncovered many instances whereby suffering (due to reasons including the political economy of services, bureaucratic procedures and policy decisions) was avoidable. When suffering is avoidable but is not avoided, it is violence (Gultang, 1969). Thirdly, structural violence underlines the constraints on individual agency; this phenomenon is illuminated throughout the thesis aided by the uncertainty that pervades multiple aspects of many participants’ lived experiences. It is important to state, however, that these constraints were very different and therefore experienced very differently by those involved. In addition, due partly to the effects of uncertainty and partly to the complexity of asylum policy and procedure, applicants often found themselves dependant on others for assistance. Gupta argues that a crucial reason to focus on violence rather than inequality is that it retains the attention on its impact on mortality (2012: 21). Thus, the final reason I utilise structural violence as a framework for which to analyse my data is that the asylum process is about life and death. Or at the minimum, the constant threat (of violence and death) that applicants live under, that is, waiting on the outcome of their claim in the knowledge that if it is refused it could result in detention and removal to the country from which they fled (Kirkwood, et al., 2016: 162). Indeed, Graeber (2015) argues that structures can only be created and maintained through the inclusion of the threat of violence, regardless of whether any violence ever actually takes place.

In the first section of this chapter I laid out concepts coming from medical anthropology regarding health, illness and suffering, in addition to the sufferer’s experience, and expressions of distress. Drawing on these, I provide the definition of mental distress as utilised in this thesis. Firstly, it is important to state that throughout this thesis I use ‘distress’ and ‘mental distress’

interchangeably. It involves negative feelings that are strong enough to effect and affect; for instance, ‘*extreme* anxiety, sorrow or pain’ (OED definition of distress, 2016, my emphasis). I distinguish between mental distress and poor mental health; as stated above, mental health is commonly understood to be something experienced by individuals whilst mental distress moves through systems. Mental distress may include specific mental health issues, it also encompasses a wider set of experiences which are not necessarily situated within the ‘medical’ realm. To state that someone experiences mental distress is not to label them as ‘ill’. My definition of mental distress is broad, fluid and ultimately defined by the sufferer and therefore accounts for participants’ manifold idioms, interpretations and experiences of distress. Importantly, these idioms of distress may co-exist, contradict and confuse, but they also communicate something of nature, society and culture in which they exist (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987).

Conceptualising mental distress in this broad way allows me to investigate distress that does not necessarily have specific health-based support services associated with it; for instance, as someone at Rise said to me ‘it’s hard to signpost someone when they just want a friend’. This thesis does not explore access to healthcare (see Sargent and Larchanché (2011) for a review on migration and access to healthcare), in the normative sense, however, it does consider participants’ coping strategies and care in a wider sense. It is not located within ‘formal’ healthcare practices or settings (although it does include the NHS Health Bridging Team and one GP). Instead, following a critical approach to medical anthropology, I consider alternative places or initiatives that aim to liberate people from suffering (Baer et al., 2013: 58), such as an integration network’s drop-in and a community-activist office. Furthermore, rather than concentrating on ‘health care systems’ as being constituted of ‘healer’-patient relationships, as is often the focus within medical anthropology (Baer et al., 2013: 8), I consider broader notions of care-based relationships. For instance, designated times for colleagues to eat lunch together, refugee-led women’s groups, and co-resisting procedural aspects of the asylum support system. Using this definition of distress, I am able to analyse suffering within the capitalist world system, whilst incorporating embodied experiences.

This thesis brings together the lived experiences of a variety of actors existing in different roles within one system of migration control: the UK asylum process. Crucially, distress does not exist in a vacuum; it moves through systems and spreads between people and things. Therefore, I have also drawn on Actor Network Theory to follow distress, as laid out in the previous chapter. By focusing on a range of actors enacting different positions within the asylum process, I am able to investigate how distress spreads among and between them. I argue that considering this range of actors allows for a greater understanding of the affective dimension of the network as a whole. The next chapter provides an overview of the legislative and policy structures that are key contextual elements in which those connected to the asylum process exist.



## **Chapter 4 : Asylum Legislation, Policy and Procedure**

### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to contextualise the ethnography within UK asylum legislation, policy, procedures and the services available in Glasgow. The notoriously fast-paced change in which immigration policy exists means that it is unviable to detail the most recent changes in this thesis. Therefore, all policy and procedures are detailed up to and including 2014, the year the fieldwork took place. This chapter is an overview and does not aim to provide a detailed analysis of the content; instead, it acts as a reference point for further chapters. It is divided into three parts. Part 1 begins by providing a brief historical overview of legislation relating to asylum, from the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees which provides the legal definition of a refugee up until the legislative context of 2014. Part 2 provides a description of the asylum application procedure as it existed in 2014. The final part of this chapter details the Glasgow-based services available to asylum applicants in 2014 and highlights two important changes that took place in that year.

### **Part 1: Asylum legislation**

I agree with my noble friend that no area is more complex than the whole business of the Immigration Rules and the procedures surrounding them (Lord Taylor of Holbeach, in Yeo, 2012).

#### **International and European legislation**

The UK must operate within the international framework of the 1951 Convention and, since the adoption of the 1998 Human Rights Act, the European Convention on Human Rights. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the international agency designed to provide surrogate protection to those asylum claimants whose own state is either unable or unwilling to provide protection itself (Thomas, 2011: 34). The 1951 United

Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol<sup>22</sup> is the primary legislation relating to refugee claims. It lays out the internationally agreed definition of a refugee as someone who:

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (Article 1A(2)).

However, the 1951 Convention has been subject to much criticism (see Good, 2007). Some European member states, including the UK, have argued that the Convention is too broad regarding who is included in the category of refugee whereas others have condemned it for being too narrow (Marfleet, 2006; Hayter, 2004). Schuster (2003) argues that due to the Convention originating during the Cold War it has resulted in it privileging those who are claiming civil and political persecution above claims based on economic and social rights.

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) has also become, since its incorporation into UK law by the 1998 Human Rights Act, an increasingly valuable tool in the protection of the rights of asylum applicants (Stevens, 2004). As the name suggests, the ECHR was established with the people of the European Union in mind, thus its applicability in asylum law 'is not altogether apparent' (Stevens, 2004: 143). Nonetheless, decision-makers must take account of applicants' rights under the ECHR in addition to the 1951 Convention. Individuals in the UK can qualify for protection under the ECHR if removal would violate their human rights. This is most often done under Article 3 of the Act which relates to protection from torture and inhumane and degrading treatment (Stevens, 2004: 143), and Article 8 which details the right to respect for his or her private and family life.

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<sup>22</sup> This removed the geographical and temporal limits of the 1951 Convention. There are categories of people who are excluded from the Convention's protection, namely people who have: committed a war crime or crime against humanity, committed a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to admission, or been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations (Stevens, 2004: 128).

Key policies implemented between the European Union member states regarding asylum are the Dublin Regulation and Eurodac.<sup>23</sup> The 1990 Dublin Convention, and the later 2003 Dublin Regulation, assigns responsibility to EU member states for examination of asylum claims. It was established to limit people to making one application on EU territory. In addition, it makes it possible for the state that the applicant finds themselves in to return them to the EU country through which they first entered or were registered (Stevens 2004: 368). Eurodac was established in 2003 and works in tandem with the Dublin Regulation as a European wide electronic database system for recording asylum applicants' fingerprints (gov.uk).

## UK asylum legislation

What Britain does welcome and what Britain does want - of course, we'll welcome asylum-seekers genuinely seeking asylum and take them to our hearts as we have over centuries [...] But we do need to send, frankly, a clearer message to people what we're not a soft touch in terms of people coming here (Cameron, Immigration Speech 2013).

National law sets out legislation and procedures for the UK asylum process. The UK's asylum policy is enacted through the Immigration Rules and supplemented by internal agency instructions and guidance administered by Home Office officials. Decisions about initial applications for asylum are at the Home Office's discretion; asylum is not an automatic right (Good, 2007: 6). The Home Office is independently reviewed by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) who reports directly to the Home Secretary; Thomas (2011) argues that criticism of the Home Office is almost part and parcel of the Inspectors' operation.

The 1971 Immigration Act was the first major overhaul of UK immigration legislation and provides the foundation for the current legal framework. Prior to the 1971 Immigration Act, there was no detailed legislation on asylum; 'neither the law nor the Immigration Rules explained the bureaucracy of the Home Office, and there was difficulty in keeping abreast of Home Office practice'

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<sup>23</sup> See Schuster (2011) for a detailed critique of the two.

(Stevens, 2004: 79). Whilst the 1971 Act did not specifically cover asylum it is employed today in areas of the asylum process such as immigration detention.

Asylum legislation has become increasingly restrictive over the last few decades through the implementation of policies to deter, detain, deport and severely restrict life in the UK for asylum applicants. It has been argued that the legislation itself breaches Article 3 of The Human Rights Act 1998 (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2012; Morris, 2002). Indeed, a High Court judgment in April 2012 found the Home Secretary to be in breach of Article 3 after detaining a Nigerian man with serious mental health problems.<sup>24</sup>

The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 first legislated asylum procedures in the UK and interpreted the 1951 Convention for domestic law (Hynes, 2011: 9). The Act established a statutory scheme for asylum determination and appeals. This included: the fingerprinting of all asylum applicants including children; the withdrawal of local authorities' responsibility to house certain types of asylum applicants; and the creation of a 'fast-track' system (Stevens, 2004: 164). The 'fast-track' system aimed to increase the efficiency and speed of the asylum process. It meant that applicants whose cases are deemed straightforward are processed more quickly allowing a few days for the initial decision (and any subsequent) appeals before the person is removed. This system is adapted in several of the subsequent Acts. Stevens argues that the 1993 Act was the beginning of asylum law whereby:

the asylum seeker has been subjected to a policy of deterrence, and on the occasion of exclusion, either by the introduction of specific restrictive measures targeted at the asylum seeker, or by the categorisation of the asylum seeker as *de facto* refugee, economic migrant, bogus refugee, or even quasi-criminal (Stevens 2004: 164).

After the 1993 Act, there was a relatively quick succession of new immigration and asylum Acts reflecting the subject's dominance in UK politics (Stevens, 2004). The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 built upon the previous one and was enacted, argues Stevens (2004) for two main reasons. Firstly, the Conservative government considered the 1993 Act to have been unsuccessful in its aim to deter asylum applicants from entering the UK and secondly, they

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<sup>24</sup> *HA v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2012]

viewed the tightening of asylum and immigration legislation as an election winner (Stevens, 2004: 169-170). The 1996 Act further increased the emphasis on deterrence and the speed of the asylum process. The eligibility for the 'fast-track' system was extended to most applicants. Alongside this came the creation of the 'white list', a list of 'safe countries' to which the Secretary of State had the power to remove people on the grounds that there was 'in general no serious risk of persecution' (Asylum and Immigration Act 1993 S 2 Para. 5(5), quoted in Stevens, 2004: 171). All 'white-listed' applicants were fast-tracked, which has been argued to be one of the Act's 'most contentious innovations' (Stevens, 2004: 171).

When the New Labour government was elected in 1997, it began its term of office declaring that it would introduce a time of 'managed migration' in the UK (Morrice, 2011: 24). Rather than creating policies that limited migration as a whole they recognised the economic value of certain migrants. This 'dual immigration policy' (Mulvey, 2011: 1478), allowed the Government to welcome labour migrants whilst being 'tough' on asylum applicants, thereby creating a 'scale of desirability' and reinforcing a dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad', 'wanted' and 'unwanted' migrants (Mulvey, 2011: 1478).

The Labour government was characterised by 'legislative activism in immigration matters' (Mulvey, 2011: 1477); passing six Acts within thirteen years. These Acts made up a three-pronged policy approach to deal with what was deemed to be a 'crisis' of immigration, see Chapter One, involving: the externalisation of asylum controls; revising asylum determination; and restricting provision for those going through the asylum process (Mulvey, 2010, 2011). The first of these New Labour Acts was the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 emerging from the Home Office white paper *Fairer, Faster and Firmer - A modern approach to immigration*. The 1999 Act involved a complete overhaul of asylum legislation including changes to detention under immigration powers; the complete restructuring of the welfare system for applicants; and the introduction of compulsory dispersal. Many people working with refugees and asylum applicants were disappointed by the Act and had hoped that the New Labour government would have actually taken a *fairer* stance (Stevens, 2004: 175).

The criminalisation of ‘illegal entrants’ was a key feature of the 1999 Act as the government was ‘seeking to tackle what it perceived as a growing problem of fraudulent asylum claims’ (Stevens, 2004: 188). The 1999 Act expanded on the 1971 Act, which named illegal entry as an offence, to include as an offence the submission of false evidence or admission that false documentation has been presented in an asylum application (Stevens, 2004: 188). The Home Secretary’s power to detain those subject to immigration control was first granted by the 1971 Immigration Act and updated in the Nationality and Immigration Act 2002.<sup>25</sup> These powers are wide, and there is ‘no automatic or independent scrutiny of the lawfulness, appropriateness or length of detention’ (Bloch and Schuster, 2005: 498-50). Anyone living in the UK subject to immigration controls may be detained in an Immigration Removal Centre (IRC), in which there is no time limit, or Short Term Holding Facilities (STHF), where people are held for up to seven days. Originally, the government had attempted to implement ‘end-to-end’ detention whereby asylum applicants would be detained on arrival and held throughout the decision-making process. The ECHR ruled this illegal, yet elements of end-to-end detention are maintained through the ‘detained fast-track’ process (Mulvey, 2010: 442).<sup>26</sup> The use of immigration detention in the UK steadily increased from the 1990s when the first permanent detention centres (later called removal centres) were established (Bloch and Schuster, 2005: 498-50), and seemingly used by the government ‘as a matter of capacity rather than principle’ (Mulvey, 2010: 442). In the year ending December 2014, 30,364 people had entered immigration detention and at the time of creating the statistics 3,462 were being detained (Home Office, 2016a).

The 1999 Act completely restructured the welfare system for asylum applicants through the creation of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS)<sup>27</sup>, a nationwide service within the Home Office responsible for coordinating and administering support, discussed further in Part 2 of this chapter. Notably, NASS separated asylum applicants from the UK’s mainstream benefit system whilst

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<sup>25</sup> See Bloch and Schuster (2005) for history of detention in UK.

<sup>26</sup> Between 2014-2015 Detention Action, a charity and lobbying group, took the Home Office to court over the lawfulness of the ‘detained fast track’ which was, after many appeals by the Home Office, condemned by the High Court as ‘systematically unfair’ (see Detention Action).

<sup>27</sup> During my fieldwork in 2014, NASS no longer existed as a discrete body of the Home Office, however, it was still the term referred to by service providers and asylum applicants.

simultaneously reducing the social security benefits they received. NASS support was initially given in the form of vouchers that could be exchanged in nominated shops. This was later abolished yet the system remains largely cashless, using instead the Azure Payment Card in which £35.39 a week is uploaded which can only be used in designated supermarkets and restricts the purchasing of certain items such as alcohol and tobacco. Another key feature of NASS was the no-choice dispersal system for applicants, already detailed in Chapter One. The dispersal of immigrant groups was not new, it was used between the 1970s-1990s for refugees coming to Britain, yet the key addition in the 1999 Act was the compulsory element. The 1999 Act introduced dispersal as an integral, rather than exceptional, aspect of the asylum process (Bloch and Schuster, 2005: 506).

The rigorous restrictions that the 1999 Act brought were presented by the government as incentives for individuals to return voluntarily to their country of origin yet framed by deterrence they ‘involved an inherently exclusionary logic’ (Hynes, 2011: 68). In 2001, the government removed the right to work from asylum applicants, justifying this by suggesting that it was a ‘pull factor’ for ‘illegitimate’ asylum claims (Mulvey, 2010: 441). Following the character of previous legislation, the Nationality and Immigration Act 2002 continued the same restrictive regime. This Act gave the Secretary of State the right to refuse support and accommodation to asylum applicants whose claims were not made ‘as soon as reasonably practical’ (Gower, 2010: 2); which, Steven argues, has been interpreted by the government to mean ‘immediately on arrival’ (2004: 201). The 2002 Act also made the distinction between applications made ‘in-country’ and ‘at-port’, withdrawing social support for the former, however, this was later ruled illegal in the Court of Appeal (Mulvey, 2011: 1481). Nonetheless, support is contingent on applicants having made their claim for asylum ‘as soon as reasonably practical’ and as long as they co-operate fully with their removal directions (Mulvey, 2010: 461). The 2002 Act also introduced the Application Registration Card (ARC) for asylum applicants; essentially the first ever compulsory identity card in the UK (Morris, 2002: 419). In addition, the 2002 Act increased the powers of the Secretary of State to detain immigration offenders and repealed the 1999 Act’s provision for automatic bail hearings (Hynes, 2011: 11).

David Blunkett (then Home Secretary) stated in 2004:

It was not until people reached our soil that our border controls came into effect so, by the time that they did so, they were entitled to claim asylum. By moving our border controls to France, operating pre-embarkation controls, photographing documentation and having liaison officers at airports across the world, we are beginning to be able to screen people before they reach British soil (in Mulvey, 2010: 441).

The 1951 Convention obligates members to consider any claims made within their territory (Morris, 2002: 417), however the Labour government created policies to externalise the examination of asylum applications; essentially shifting the national border and restricting or denying the 'right' to claim asylum. Legislation authorised UK immigration officers to work in France to prevent people reaching the UK border, facilitated through the Dublin Regulation and the Eurodac database (Mulvey, 2010: 440).

The next Act to come into fruition was the Asylum and Immigration Act (Treatment of Claimants) 2004. This Act introduced statutory rules to govern the assessment of credibility in claims (Thomas, 2011: 140). Decision-makers were able to consider applicants' behaviour which they deemed likely to damage or conceal information, mislead, obstruct or delay the handling or resolution of a claim as negatively affecting credibility. This was justified as being a step towards deterring and reducing invalid claims and promoting consistency within the decision-making process (Thomas, 2011: 157). The Act also reduced appeals to a single tier to again attempt to increase the efficiency and speed of the asylum process. The 2004 Act also withdrew basic support for families if voluntary return was not undertaken; expanded the list of 'safe third countries'<sup>28</sup>; made it a criminal offence to not co-operate with deportation; and introduced electronic monitoring and tagging (Hynes, 2011: 11).

In 2005, the Home Office published a five-year strategy, *Controlling our Borders: Making migration work for Britain* (Home Office, 2005), of which the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006 implemented key legislative aspects. The strategy aimed at further refining the immigration system in order

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<sup>28</sup> For a definition of a 'safe third country' see Refugee Council (2017a).



to 'enforce strict controls to root out abuse' (Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, in Home Office, 2005: 5). One aspect was the introduction of the New Asylum Model (NAM), rolled out in 2007. This model, once again aimed to speed up initial decision-making, whilst also tightening the management of the whole process and placing an emphasis on returning applicants whose claims were rejected. NAM also introduced a system of case ownership, in which one immigration official would be responsible for an application from its beginning to end, including handling any appeals (Institute of Race and Relations, 2006). However, a new Asylum Operating Model, confusingly shifting a lot of policy back to how things operated before the New Asylum Model (NAM), was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013.<sup>29</sup>

In 2006, it was discovered that the Home Office was sitting on a backlog of between 400,000 and 450,000 unresolved asylum cases, most of which had been waiting years for an initial decision (Thomas, 2011: 20). These cases became known as 'legacy cases' and the Home Office initiated teams across the UK to deal with the backlog within five years. In 2011, however, there were still 147,000 unresolved cases. In 2012, the ICIBI wrote:

The programme of legacy work is far from concluded [...] On the evidence it is hard not to reach the conclusion that cases were placed in the archive after only very minimal work in order to fulfil the pledge to conclude this work by the summer of 2011. This has serious consequences for asylum seekers who had already waited many years for the resolution of their case. In addition, through the inefficiency and delay of the Agency, those who would otherwise have faced removal will have accrued rights to remain in the UK (Vine, 2012).

Generally, adults qualify for settlement after ten years continuous lawful residence (see Yeo, 2013).

A year after the 2006 Act came The UK Borders Act 2007 which increased enforcement resources, extended the powers of immigration officers and added to the list of immigration offences. The Act also increased the use of identity technology, imposing compulsory biometric identity documents for all non-EU immigrants and increasing the exchange of information between the (then) UKBA

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<sup>29</sup> For more detail see: ILPA (2013) <http://www.ilpa.org.uk/resources.php/17810/asylum-operating-model-information-sheet>

and other agencies (Hynes, 2011: 11). Furthermore, the Act allowed for the automatic deportation of foreign nationals if they were convicted of certain offences or if they had been imprisoned for more than one year (The Guardian, 2009a). It is important to highlight that individuals can be sentenced to twelve months in prison for working without legal documents. Two years later, the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 was passed intending to simplify immigration law. It involved: strengthening border controls; extending the time it takes to gain citizenship; and introducing a concept of ‘earned citizenship’ (Hynes, 2011: 11). The Act also introduced a duty on the (then) UKBA to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the immigration and asylum system. Nonetheless, the power to detain children for immigration purposes remained (The Guardian, 2009b).

The political rhetoric of ‘crisis’ regarding inward migration to the UK embraced by the New Labour government from 1997 continued into the 2010 election of the Conservative-led Coalition government. Then Prime Minister, David Cameron, described the objective of the Coalition’s immigration policy as being ‘good immigration, not mass immigration’ (Gower, 2012: 1), aiming to reduce net migration to ‘tens of thousands’ a year (Gower, 2012: 2-4). One proposal to accomplish this was to advertise Britain ‘negatively’, in an attempt to dissuade potential Bulgarian and Romanian migrants from entering the UK (Syad, 2013).

The Coalition government also continued New Labour’s effort to speed up the asylum process launching an ‘Asylum Improvement Project’ in 2010 to pilot schemes for improving the speed, quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the asylum determination process (Gower, 2012: 7). Furthermore, and largely due to public pressure (see the End Child Detention Now campaign: [ecdn.org](http://ecdn.org)), the Coalition government committed to end the detention of children for immigration purposes. However, while the detention of children ended in Scotland in 2010, the Coalition government did not end the detention of children in England<sup>30</sup>. In 2011, the government also made a commitment not to enforce the removal of asylum applicants who would be at risk of persecution on grounds

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<sup>30</sup> Children are held in *Tinsley House IRC* and *Cedars* ‘Pre-Departure Accommodation’, in which ‘as a last resort, non-compliant families may be accommodated for 72 hours prior to departure in a new style of family friendly secure ‘pre-departure accommodation’ (Gower, 2012: 8). The pre-departure accommodation is essentially an Immigration Removal Centre in all but name.

of their sexual orientation (Gower, 2012: 8). This was something that had been left out of the 1951 Convention, with the UK's insistence that 'equality of the sexes was a matter for national legislation' (Good, 2004: 91).

After being formed in 2008 as an 'arms-length' agency of the Home Office, the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) 'a large-scale, heavily staffed administrative agency' (Thomas, 2011: 51), was disbanded in March 2013. Then Home Secretary, Theresa May, criticised the UKBA's performance as not 'good enough' at managing migration and having created a 'closed, secretive and defensive culture' (BBC, 2013). (A similar criticism levied against in 2006 by then Home Secretary, John Reid, who declared UKBA as 'not fit for purpose', as mentioned above.) The UKBA was subsequently split into two new departments, the Visa and Immigration Service and the Immigration Law Enforcement.

The Immigration Act 2014 received Royal Assent in May 2014, however, the provisions of the Act were not yet in force at the time of my fieldwork. This Act intended to create a 'hostile environment' for undocumented migrants (Yeo, 2015). The Act brought further powers of removal making it easier for the Home Office to remove those with no right to remain. In addition, the right to appeal was restricted, reducing the number of decisions that can be appealed from seventeen to four (Home Office, 2013a). Changes were made to immigration detention, such as bail not being possible if removal was scheduled within fourteen days and no repeat bail applications were allowed within 28 days (Yeo, 2015). Furthermore, the government aimed to 'end the abuse of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights' (Home Office, 2014a) which involved additional checks on marriages between British Citizens and non-EEA nationals.

## **Part 2: The asylum application procedure (as it was in 2014)**

This section provides a chronological overview of the process of claiming asylum according to Home Office procedures and guidance; the subsequent chapters offer an insight into the lived experiences of these policies and procedures. The process I outline below refers to the most common route for adult applicants,

variations exist for specific groups such as unaccompanied children and trafficked people.

## **Asylum application procedures**

An asylum claim is either made ‘at port’, the point or port of entry into the UK, or ‘in-country’ at the Home Office Asylum Screening Unit in Croydon.<sup>31</sup> An in-country claim can only be made in Croydon, unless there are exceptional circumstances.<sup>32</sup> Pre- April 2014, applicants in Scotland would often present to the Scottish Refugee Council to seek assistance in applying for asylum. However, the majority would have to travel to Croydon to make their claim. The Home Office expects ‘genuine’ applicants to apply for asylum as soon as they enter the UK (Good, 2007: 99) and, if they do not, it can damage their credibility. Most applicants are granted temporary leave to enter whilst their claim is being decided. If they are not, they will be detained through the ‘Detained Fast Track’ process.

## **Screening interview**

Soon after an individual has made a claim, they will have a screening interview. At the screening interview, applicants are photographed, their fingerprints taken and they are asked who they are and where they are from (Home Office, 2017a). At this point, applicants are questioned as to why they are claiming asylum. It is expected by decision-makers that applicants’ narratives remain the same throughout the various tellings. If it differs, information is added, or the chronology changes, the credibility of the applicant’s narrative is automatically questioned, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

At the screening interview, applicants are issued with an Application Registration Card and instructed where and how often they must report to the Home Office. Throughout the asylum process, and once refused, claimants are required to report to the Home Office on a regular basis. The Home Office

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<sup>31</sup> In the year ending June 2015, 90% of applications were made in-country (Home Office, 2015a).

<sup>32</sup> Exceptional circumstances may apply to unaccompanied children and those whose condition is such that they cannot reasonably be expected to travel to Croydon (Asylum Support Partnership, 2012).

Reporting Centre in Glasgow is located almost five miles from the main housing stock for asylum applicants.<sup>33</sup> At this interview, applicants are also asked about any medical conditions, medical intervention or drug treatment, and women will be asked if they are pregnant (UK Visas and Immigration: 8). It is worth noting that the screening interview is not automatically carried out in a private room and may be conducted by an immigration official of either gender. In 2014 the Asylum Operating Model was in place and therefore applicants were not allocated to one single case-owner throughout the process. At the time of my fieldwork, I was informed by Stacy, an immigration official, that substantive interviews were being conducted by officials based on their availability. After being screened, applicants are either given a grant of temporary admission while their claim is being processed or they are detained.

### **Asylum interview**

The Home Office website states that an asylum (also referred to as a substantive) interview will take place ‘soon after’ the screening interview (Home Office, 2017b). The Home Office explain that during this interview applicants should:

Give a full account of what happened to you and who you are afraid of, if you return to your country of origin. You should give as much detail as possible about all the reasons you left and why you are afraid to go back. Anything that is not mentioned during this interview but is disclosed later in the process may not be accepted by the Home Office as true (Home Office, 2014b: 11).

This interview is the applicant’s chance to disclose all the information regarding their asylum claim; it is crucial that they explain why they cannot return to their country of origin during this interview. Considerable problems arise if the applicant does not disclose something in the substantive interview that they later rely on as part of their claim. However, the interview is not routinely audio- recorded; it is up to the claimant to request this at least 24 hours prior to the interview (Asylum Support Partnership, 2012: 3). The Home Office will provide an interpreter for interviews if needed and applicants can request the

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<sup>33</sup> This was before initial accommodation was moved towards the end of 2014, see Part 3 of this chapter.

gender of their interviewer in advance; 'where feasible' this is accommodated (Home Office, 2014b).

### **Accommodation and subsistence**

The Home Office have a duty of care to support asylum applicants that would otherwise be destitute and therefore provide them with accommodation and subsistence support. After the screening interview, applicants are provided with initial accommodation if they have not been detained. In Scotland, applicants were usually in this accommodation for two to three weeks after which applicants would be moved into 'dispersed accommodation'.

The government provides accommodation and/or cash support (Section 95) throughout the asylum process for those who meet the destitution test, have submitted their application in the UK 'as soon as reasonably practicable' and have an ongoing asylum claim, this means that they are awaiting a decision by the Home Office or Tribunal (if it is an appeal). To meet the destitution test applicants must not have adequate accommodation or be able to meet living expenses for themselves or dependants within the next fourteen days (ASAP, 2016). When an applicant's claim is refused, and they have no outstanding appeals they become what is termed 'appeals-right exhausted', their Section 95 support is stopped, unless they have dependents under the age of 18, and they are expected to make arrangements to leave the UK. However, if they are making all reasonable steps to leave but there are barriers to their removal through no fault of their own, then the government may provide them with accommodation and limited financial support (Section 4). Section 4 support comprises of accommodation and subsistence support in the form of a payment card called an Azure Card in which £35.39, for a single adult (70 per cent of the standard benefit level), is uploaded weekly to spend in designated shops on designated goods (Gower, 2010: 1-2).

When applicants are housed in initial accommodation they are entitled to receive a healthcare screening carried out by a healthcare team independent of the Home Office (UK Visas and Immigration: 11). These vary depending on dispersal areas; in Glasgow, the National Health Service Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) Asylum Health Bridging Team provides these screenings. They

were based in the same building that housed applicants in initial accommodation until they were moved towards the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015. During these health checks, information regarding specific health needs which may impact dispersal accommodation is recorded and should be communicated to the accommodation provider. Once applicants are in dispersed accommodation, the accommodation providers are required to give an oral and written briefing, in a language the applicant can understand, regarding local services such as their local GP and dentist. If the person has a pre-existing condition or is in need of an urgent GP review, they must be taken to a GP within five days of arrival to the dispersal accommodation (UK Visas and Immigration: 28-9).

The provision of healthcare is devolved to the Scottish government which has directed NHS Scotland to provide services to asylum applicants including those whose claim has been refused (Scottish government, 2013: 62). Guidance states:

Anyone who has made a formal application for asylum, whether pending or unsuccessful, is entitled to treatment on the same basis as a UK national who is ordinarily resident in Scotland while they remain in the country (Scottish government, 2010: 9).

Within the rest of the UK, asylum applicants are eligible for free primary healthcare from the NHS until their final claims are refused whereby they may no longer be eligible (UK Visas and Immigration: 7). However, British Medical Association (BMA) (2012) guidance asserts that all asylum applicants have the right to apply to be fully registered with an NHS GP practice; in addition, NHS services such as Accident and Emergency, family planning, treatment of certain communicable diseases, treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and treatment under mental health legislation are free to all patients regardless of their status. Yet, the BMA acknowledges that there is a significant degree to which health professionals in the UK are uncertain of asylum applicants' rights to access health services (BMA, 2012: 1). Importantly, doubts regarding their entitlement to services results in many applicants not attempting to access services, which potentially leads to serious individual and public health problems (Hynes, 2011: 153).

## Decision making

The asylum interview forms the basis on which decisions are made. The introduction of the Asylum Operating Model meant that it may be a different individual making the decision to the one who had conducted the asylum interview. Decision-makers refer to international, European, and domestic legislation (Immigration Rules), Home Office asylum instructions, and guidance to make their decisions.

There are four possible outcomes of an initial decision. First, the individual is deemed to have fulfilled the criteria for refugee status as laid out in the 1951 Convention. In this case, the individual is granted five years limited 'leave to remain'. The permanency of refugee protection was ended by the Labour government in 2005, instead, applicants are granted an initial period of five years-protected status which is then reviewed (Mulvey, 2010: 1481). The second outcome is where the applicant does not meet the criteria for refugee status but is granted Humanitarian Protection (HP). Under the ECHR, the Home Office is obligated to 'provide protection for those at a real risk of serious harm in their country of origin but who do not qualify for refugee leave' (Home Office, 2017c: 6). Under HP, the individual is 'normally' granted five years-limited leave (Home Office, 2017c: 20). The third outcome is being granted permission to stay 'for other reasons' (Home Office, 2017d), that is, reasons that do not fit the legal definitions of either HP or refugee status. Many of the 'legacy cases' were granted protection under this outcome. The final outcome is that the asylum claim is refused.<sup>34</sup> In the year ending June 2014, there were 23, 515 asylum applications to the UK. Out of the 13, 795 that were given initial decisions, 37% were granted (some form of) protection and 63% were refused (Home Office, 2015a).

## Appeals

If an applicant receives a negative decision, they have ten days (five if detained) to appeal to the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT) (Hobson, Cox and

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<sup>34</sup>Service providers working with refugees tend to prefer to use the term 'refused' asylum seeker rather than the Home Office's terminology 'failed asylum seeker' which lays the responsibility on the individual applicant.



Sagovsky, 2008: 22). Appeals and judicial decisions are made by adjudicators at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal and the High Court, or Court of Session in Scotland (Good, 2007: 122). Decisions on appeal are determined by establishing credibility; the vast majority of appeals succeed or fail on the basis of the decision maker's view of the claimant's credibility' (Thomas, 2011: 134). There are no strict rules on how credibility is to be sought, however, certain factors are considered:

the consistency of an appellant's story throughout the decision process (internal consistency); its consistency with relevant country information (external consistency); its plausibility; the presence of corroborative evidence; and the weight to be attributed to medical evidence (Thomas, 2011: 140).

Internal inconsistencies or discrepancies are common reasons for the Home Office to disbelieve applicants (Thomas, 2011: 141). Thomas, however, highlights an underlying problem regarding credibility assessments as 'no-one really knows how to decide whether or not an individual can properly be regarded as credible' (2011: 165).

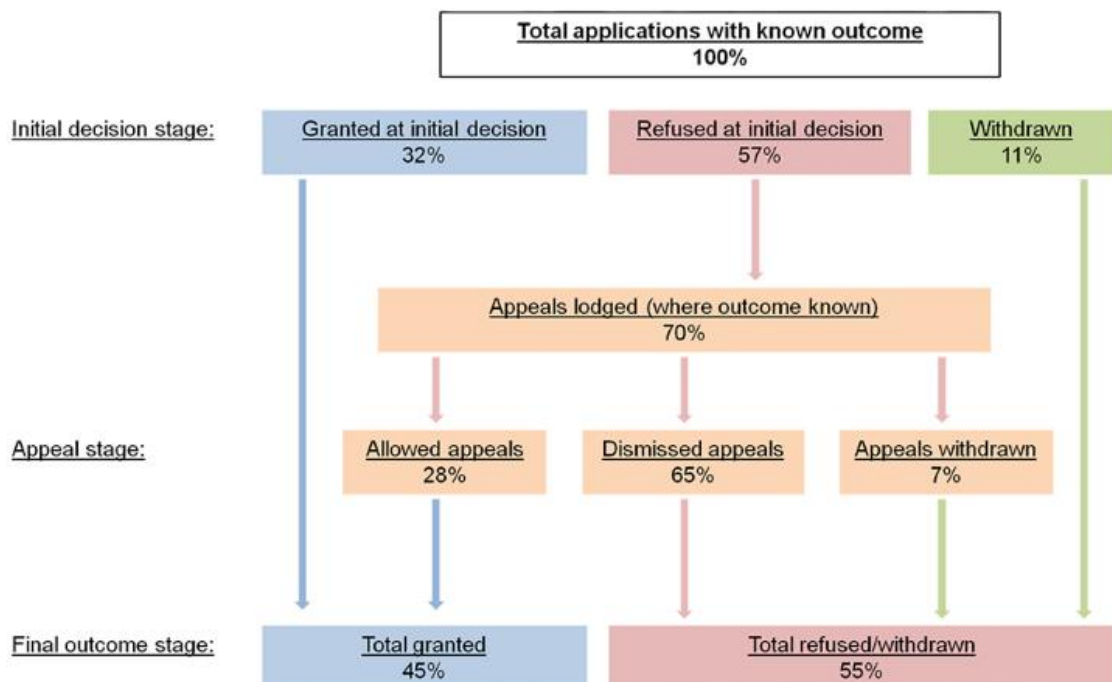


Figure 4-1: 'Indicative flows through the UK asylum system, where outcomes known, 2011-2013 data'. National Asylum Statistics, Home Office (2015a)

As Figure 4-1 shows, over a quarter of initial decisions are overturned at appeal. If an appeal is dismissed, applicants may be able to submit a fresh claim<sup>35</sup> or apply for a judicial review<sup>36</sup>. When the applicant comes to the end of an appeals process and they have not been granted protection, they are referred to by the Home Office as ‘appeals-rights exhausted’.

Individuals who are ‘appeals-rights exhausted’, have no claims pending and are not waiting for a decision on a judicial review are eligible for state enforced departure. Enforced departures can happen in three ways: the most common way is via ‘administrative removal’ whereby a person whose asylum case has been refused is removed from the UK. Another way is via deportation, this happens when the Secretary of State deems removal of an individual to be ‘conducive to the public good’ (Immigration Rules 13 para 363i, Home Office, 2016b). If an individual has a criminal sentence of more than twelve months, Immigration Rules state that their deportation is ‘conducive to the public good’ (Right to Remain, 2013). The third category of enforced removals is ‘voluntary departure’. It is important to note that ‘the term ‘voluntary’ describes the method of departure rather than the choice of whether or not to deport’ (Blinder and Betts, 2016). It happens either by the individual making their own travel arrangements or the through the ‘Assisted Voluntary Returns’<sup>37</sup> scheme. When individuals are subject to enforced removal, they are more likely to be detained, however applicants are at risk of detention at any stage of the asylum process.

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<sup>35</sup> A fresh claim is when an applicant gains significant fresh evidence to support an entirely new claim. The fresh claim must be accepted by the Home Office.

<sup>36</sup> A judicial review is when the adjudicator reviews the Home Office’s action, failure to act or decision.

<sup>37</sup> For those eligible, this scheme offers assistance in the form of £2,000 to start a business in the return country and help applying for travel documents and flights ( <https://www.gov.uk/return-home-voluntarily/assisted-return>). Between 2011-2015, the charity Refugee Action was contracted by the Home Office to run this scheme, under the title ‘Choices’. This was not without controversy among the asylum and refugee sector, however since 2015, the Home Office run the scheme in house (Refugee Action, 2015).

### **Part 3: Service provision in Glasgow and the changing landscape in 2014**

As previously mentioned, in 2000 Glasgow City Council was awarded the UK government's asylum dispersal contract; this was the first-time asylum applicants routinely came to Scotland. (In the following year, Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre was opened in South Lanarkshire, Scotland.<sup>38</sup>) Initially, Glasgow City Council provided accommodation for applicants. However, in 2012, under the policy framework COMPASS<sup>39</sup>, the Home Office awarded the contract and its associated services to three multi-national private companies. In Scotland, Serco was awarded this contract and ran it in conjunction with their sub-contractor Orchard and Shipman Group, a property services company. COMPASS permits accommodation for asylum applicants to be provided all over Scotland (Scottish government, 2013: 28), however, in 2014 applicants who were provided support were only housed in Glasgow.

Glasgow City's dispersal contract meant that for the first time, there was a significant need for specific services aimed at refugees and asylum applicants in Scotland. Organisations dedicated to providing services for asylum applicants and refugees in Glasgow emerged and developed from 2000 onwards (Scottish government, 2013: 23). The Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) is probably the best-known service provider for asylum applicants and refugees in Scotland and was often the first point of call for people who found themselves in Scotland seeking refuge.<sup>40</sup> The SRC was established in 1985; its main office in Scotland moved from Edinburgh to Glasgow in 1999. In addition to the direct advice service they ran, they produce research reports, support community organisations and respond to policy documents. However, in 2014, they lost 62% of their funding for their advice service due to the governmental asylum advice service being granted instead to Asylum Help (Briggs, 2011); the effects of this on the wider field are detailed below.

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<sup>38</sup> This is Scotland's only IRC. It houses both men and women, and detained children until 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Service.

<sup>40</sup> Anecdotally, talking to staff at the SRC I often heard stories of individuals wanting to claim asylum being left at the front door of the SRC by agents.

Alongside the SRC, services for asylum applicants in Glasgow include: legal firms that specialise in immigration and asylum law; specific medical services such as those that provide support for people who have suffered trauma or torture: Freedom from Torture opened an office in Glasgow in 2004; charities such as The Red Cross; Integration Networks made up of local agencies, community groups and volunteers and exist in poorer and more ethnically diverse areas of the city; activist organisations and networks; church groups; and a night shelter for destitute male asylum applicants. Figure 4-2 provides a map of services aimed at destitute asylum applicants, among others, yet the services listed also provide for applicants who are in receipt of government support.

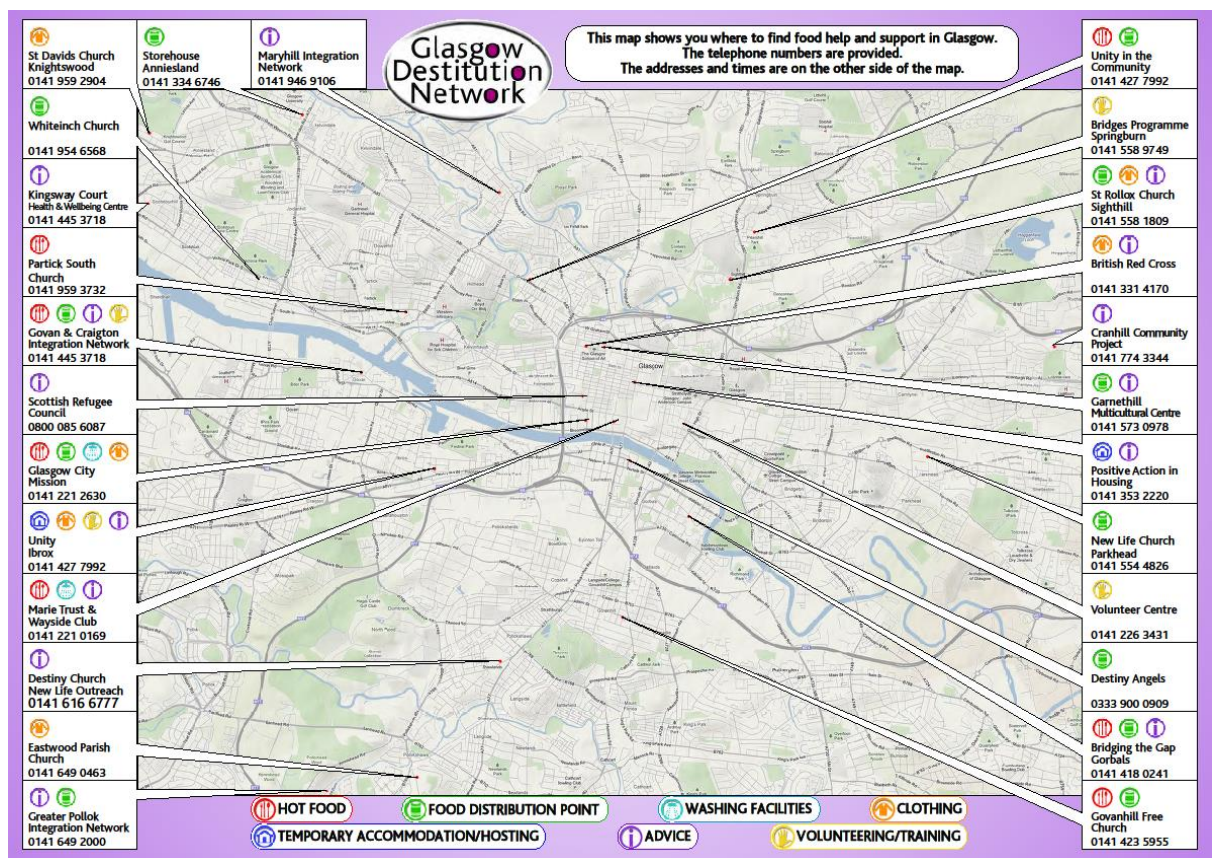


Figure 4-2: Map of Services in Glasgow, Glasgow Destitution Network

In 2014, the landscape of services for asylum applicants in Glasgow underwent significant changes. On 1st April, the government's asylum advice and support contracts, which the SRC had held for the past thirteen years, were taken over by Migrant Help (of which Asylum Help is a sub-branch). The Home Office stated that the decision to award the £7 million contract to Migrant Help was not due to cost-saving in real terms but that the service offered 'better value for money' and more consistency in the national service provision (Scottish Refugee Council,

2014). Critics, however, have argued that the decision reflected a more general attitude of rolling back services for migrants. In addition to the new advice contract being a reduced version of the previous one, Asylum Help workers based in a call centre in Dover had considerably less experience of giving advice to asylum applicants than the SRC. Furthermore, there had been a gross underestimation regarding the number of service users there would be and managers at Asylum Help admitted that they were ‘overwhelmed’ by the unanticipated number of calls to their helpline (Scottish Refugee Council, 2014).

The effects of the change in this contract rippled throughout services in Glasgow. As Asylum Help were based in Dover, with a sub-branch in Glasgow, this meant that, in Scotland, only those applicants in initial accommodation had access to face-to-face support. This was a dramatic change from the face-to-face drop-in service that the SRC had previously run for applicants at all stages of the process, termed the One Stop Service. After leaving initial accommodation, applicants could only access the service via a phone line; this number was free if dialled from landlines, payphones or major mobile network providers; however, it was not free from *Lyca* or *Libra*, the networks that the majority of those in the asylum process use. Asylum applicants living in government accommodation were not provided with landlines and therefore, if they needed to make a free call to Asylum Help, they either had to go to an organisation who could provide a phone line or use a public phone box; both far from ideal due to the potential subject matter being discussed.

Thus, the change in contract resulted in asylum advice being much harder for applicants to access and therefore other, generally smaller and less resourced, organisations (such as SCIN and Rise) began to fill some of the gaps. These organisations were not funded for these tasks, therefore workers tended to do this on top of their usual workload and without any specific training in dealing with such matters. Taking on these extra tasks changed the nature of the work that these smaller support organisations were set up to do. Oren, a member of Rise, told me ‘I honestly can tell you a year ago I’d never seen a Section 4 application and now that’s the bread and butter of what we do’. He explained that the change in services meant that Rise was assisting with Section 4 forms and arguing with Orchard and Shipman rather than their more ‘political’ work

fighting mass deportations. Likewise, SCIN found that, after the change to services, they had less time to focus on integration as they were forced to ‘firefight’ individuals’ more immediate problems.

The change in asylum advice services also created a huge amount of uncertainty for many of those involved in the asylum process, both workers and applicants. Many participants spoke of the frustrations involved in working with the new Asylum Help service. Trainee solicitor, Naomi, spent much of her traineeship dealing with Asylum Help and told me:

When Asylum Help took over from SRC, my immediate impression was that they had no idea of what they’d taken on [...] I don’t think staff are very well trained, I had somebody say to me “Why is the person claiming asylum?” and I said “Family planning in China” and they said “That’s not one of the reasons” and I said “I can assure you it is” and he said “it’s not one of the boxes in front of me” and I said “It’s a particular social group” and he went “Oh right, ok”. So *that’s* the kind of conversation you’re having.

The lack of specific knowledge and experience that Asylum Help staff on the end of the phone line in Dover had was questioned and flagged as potentially very serious by a wide range of people I came across.

Another significant change in Glasgow in 2014, causing further disruption to the lives of asylum applicants and the services they utilised, was the moving of initial accommodation. Since the advent of dispersal to Glasgow, asylum applicants were housed in the ‘Red Road’ flats<sup>41</sup> (see Image 4-1). Built in the late 1960s, the eight, 32-story concrete tower blocks became iconic architecturally, sociologically and culturally in Glasgow and beyond. These flats, although far from being good quality housing (Refugee Council, 2017b), meant that asylum applicants were living close to one another when they first moved to Glasgow. Furthermore, they were accommodated in the same building as the SRC’s One Stop Service (the office of which Asylum Help took over) and the NHS Health Bridging Team.

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<sup>41</sup> See [www.redroadflats.org.uk](http://www.redroadflats.org.uk)



**Image 4-1: The 'Red Road' flats. November, 2014**

However, regeneration projects across the city saw the slow demolition of the 'Red Road' flats between 2012 and 2015. For many months in 2014 only one of the six remaining buildings were occupied, housing only asylum applicants, Asylum Help and the Health Bridging Team. The demolition of this flats and the subsequent moving of asylum applicants was frequently talked about by many participants. However, the plans for moving applicants out of the flats were opaque, timescales were regularly delayed and there was much rumour and speculation generated among applicants, service providers and friends. Towards the end of 2014, asylum applicants were beginning to be moved out of the 'Red Road' flats and into accommodation across the city. Following this, the Health Bridging Team was moved to the East End of the city and Asylum Help to the West; the effects of this are explored further in Chapter Five.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided asylum legislation and the policies and procedures that arise from it to contextualise the ethnography that follows in the next five chapters. Part I, detailed the various parliamentary Acts that relate to the process of asylum. The many Acts exemplify the fast-paced nature of Immigration Rules and policy and its increasing focus on deterrence. In Part II, the basic details of the asylum application procedure were outlined, much of which is revisited in the proceeding chapters. The final part of this chapter aimed to provide a specific context to the asylum process as it was in Glasgow in

2014, the year in which my fieldwork took place. This section included some of the relevant governmental changes that took place in 2014 and how this impacted service provision for asylum applicants. While this chapter provided little analysis, the next five chapters juxtapose the policy and procedure laid out above with participants' lived experiences.



## Chapter 5 : Bureaucracy

### Introduction

As I sat drinking tea with Oren, an organiser and collective member of Rise, he told me how he conceptualised the networks of organisations and individuals that make up the UK asylum process:

Instead of having a factory that makes bombs where every worker knows that they're making bombs, (*the asylum process is*) like having a factory that makes the labels for bombs, another factory that makes the heads for bombs, and then everyone feels like they're just doing a job, they're contributing to something but it's really concealed that actually they're contributing to a war on people of colour in this country.

Nonetheless, he went on to explain how he did not blame the individual actors themselves:

There's a few (*service providers that work in the area of migration*) that really think they're doing good ... and this is how the state conceals itself, and this is how fascism and imperialism conceal itself [...] it's this buck-passing thing, instead of saying okay we have this one, all-encompassing institution that removes or approves the right to housing, that issues those houses, that does everything, instead it's spreading it out, privatising it, so every person is making one part of something that's really horrible.

Oren described how the division of labour, inherent in bureaucracies and increasingly so due to privatisation, allowed the effects of workers' actions to be obscured and therefore uncertain. Indeed, it has been argued that the creation of uncertainty is one way in which bureaucracies exercise and maintain control (Hull, 2012b). This chapter highlights how uncertainty is experienced by all participants involved in the asylum process, from the people at the receiving end of bureaucratic procedures to the bureaucrats themselves.

Rather than focusing on what happens 'inside' bureaucratic organisations that deal with immigration control (see Jubany, 2017; Mountz, 2010; Fuglerud, 2004), this chapter considers how bureaucracy unfolds into the everyday lives of those who make up the UK asylum system. I employ Lipsky's (1980) notion of street-level bureaucracies, that is, the public services in which workers interact with,

and have discretion over the dispensation of benefits and public services. Citizens (of the United States of America) are the clients of Lipsky's (1980) bureaucracies, however, in this chapter, the bureaucracies and bureaucrats engage with those who hold irregular statuses. Thus, in addition to acting as gatekeepers to benefits and services, the bureaucrats in this context embody state power through acting as gatekeepers to status and the rights, security, and perceptions of deservingness that come with it.

Following Gupta (2012), Beneduce (2015), and Graeber (2015), this chapter illuminates the structural violence that bureaucracies foster. It begins with a brief review of the relevant literature on bureaucracy in which I highlight some of the different conceptions of bureaucracy including: ideas around structural hierarchy and the division of labour; the notion of impersonality and its relation to indifference; and expertise. I then present ethnographic material to illustrate participants' encounters with bureaucracy; this follows a chronological account of the stages in which applicants experience the asylum process, from the screening interview to the appeals process as illustrated in the preceding chapter. However, in practice, the process is not as methodical as is laid out below and thus, some of the sections diverge into more general discussions. The difficulties in presenting a single, coherent, ethnographic account highlights the fictive nature of the account of the asylum process presented in the Chapter Four.

### **Bureaucracy: the 'belly of the state' (Mountz, 2010: xxxii)**

Conceptions of bureaucracy are wide-ranging and originate from various academic, literary and political perspectives. Melchior von Grimm's *Correspondance Littéraire* (1794), a newsletter of arts, letters and politics, contains what is thought to be the first appearance in print of the term 'bureaucracy'. This document recounted Vincent de Gournay exclaiming that 'we have in France an illness that takes a terrible toll; this illness is called bureaumania [...] a fourth or fifth form of government, by the name of bureaucracy' (in Kafka, 2012: 77). This notion establishes a very early link between bureaucracy and distress; one that has continued to be embraced within much existential/horror-comedy literature from authors such as Kafka, Lew and Heller (Graeber, 2015: 53).

During the early twentieth century, sociologist and political economist, Weber, wrote extensively on bureaucracy due to its increased presence in all types of political systems and large organisations. Indeed, Weber believed it to be at the centre of the modernisation process (Beetham, 1996: 3-5). Weber's bureaucratic model has been characterised as a:

systematic division of labour, whereby complex administrative problems are broken down into manageable and repetitive tasks, each the province of a particular office, and then coordinated under a centralised hierarchy of command (Beetham, 1996: 12).

For Weber, bureaucracy constitutes administrative efficiency and a hallmark of rationality comprising: hierarchy; continuity; impersonality, prescribed rules against arbitrariness or favouritism; and expertise, its practice carried out by trained professionals (Beetham, 1996: 9). Parallels with Oren's analogy of a bomb-producing factory are revealed in this model.

Nonetheless, Weber's vision of bureaucracy has received many challenges. Mountz, focusing on governmental departments of immigration control in Canada, suggests that in fact:

bureaucracies are inherently large, slow, complex administrative networks that compartmentalise the division of labour in such a way as to sometimes complicate the sharing of knowledge and the taking of action (2010: 40).

Research conducted on the UK's immigration bail process supports this notion: 'the fact that different officials within the Home Office are responsible for different stages of the bail process results in a profound lack of joined up thinking' (BID, 2010: 60). In this context, immigration officials examine an individual's case only in relation to the specific task at hand, that is maintaining detention, rather than considering their case holistically to include the initial decision to detain (BID, 2010: 60). Hierarchical structures and divisions of labour have been critiqued for their discouraging of individual bureaucrats' responsibility and initiative (Beetham, 1996: 13). These features allow for accountability to be lost as workers are more easily able to attribute responsibility to another person or department; 'disgruntled clients blame

bureaucrats, the latter blame “the system”, excessively complicated laws, their immediate or more distant superiors, “the government” (Herzfeld, 1992: 5).

Hierarchical structures and the division of labour, characteristic of bureaucracy, have also been noted for their protective functions for the bureaucracies and bureaucrats themselves. Indeed, state institutions keep a distance between themselves and ‘society’ in order to protect their legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1999, in Fuglerud, 2004: 25). In the context of immigration departments, Jubany argues that the UK Home Office ‘plays a key role in insulating officers, allowing them the space to establish professional rules that come to rationalise decision-making process in asylum screening’ (2017: 6). Within the Canadian Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Monutz illustrates how:

decisions regarding a client’s status are often made in remote administrative centres and handed down without reference to the individual decision-maker. The less accessible the decision-makers are to those whose lives they influence, the larger looms the power of the state to act without accountability (2010: 56).

Furthermore, rather than simply mechanically applying rules, bureaucrats learn to follow the patterns and culture of their particular organisational surroundings (Fuglerud, 2004: 29). Using the example of racial profiling by the police, Lipsky (1980) argues that although it is not an official policy, profiling becomes practice through bureaucrats’ social stereotypes and exercising of discretion that is learnt through others.

In his seminal book, *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, Lipsky (1980) argues that there exists ‘an essential paradox’ in bureaucracy. On one hand, bureaucratic work is highly scripted to achieve policy objectives and on the other it requires improvisation and responsiveness to individual cases. Indeed, he claims, exercising discretion is a critical dimension of bureaucrats’ work (Lipsky, 1980). In addition to the discretion bureaucrats are afforded, the arbitrary decision making within bureaucracies has also been unveiled by many scholars and associated with structural violence (Gupta, 2012; Beneduce, 2015; Graeber, 2015). Following Herzfeld’s (1992) formative work that view bureaucracies primarily as machines for ‘the social production of indifference’, Gupta uses ethnographic material conducted in state-run organisations in India to argue that

bureaucracies also produce arbitrariness (2012: 14). Being careful not to blame the bureaucrats themselves, as they too are often frustrated by their inability to work effectively (which we see throughout this chapter), Gupta states that the goal of helping the poor in India is subverted by the 'very procedures of bureaucracy' (2012: 23). He explains that whilst the Indian state has many programmes aimed at helping the poor, beneficiaries of these services are arbitrary as bureaucrats face a lack of reliable information to make decisions on individuals' eligibility and therefore decide based on guesswork (2012: 14).

Both Gupta (2012) and Beneduce (2015) focus on how violence is enacted through bureaucratic language. Gupta argues that 'writing is a key modality in which structural violence is inflicted on the poor' (2012: 141). While there are high levels of illiteracy in the context Gupta (2012) studies, he contends that structural violence cannot simply be associated with literacy, instead, it involves a more complex way in which bureaucratic documents are formed and bureaucracy practised. He states:

Poor people are not subject to structural violence because they lack papers or because they lack the ability to read the writing of state officials. They suffer from structural violence because they lack assets, and, more importantly, they lack the means to acquire assets and access to services that might enable them to survive (Gupta, 2012: 208).

Whilst gaining assets may be facilitated by literacy, it is not dependent on it; in Gupta's context it is more important that citizens have the right political connections or capacity to pay the relevant people (2012: 208). Similarly, he discusses how a citizen's decision to file a complaint against a state official 'had more to do with power than with literacy, with the cultural capital associated with the knowledge of state procedures rather than educational qualifications' (Gupta, 2012: 179).

Bureaucracies are not simply formal, depersonalised structures; they do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, bureaucracies 'encompass political decisions and transform cultural values into its own domain of rational administration' (Fuglerud, 2004: 31, paraphrasing Lefort, 1986). This conceptualisation of bureaucracy has been recognised within immigration departments in the UK (Jubany, 2017), Norway (Fuglerud, 2004), Canada, Australia and the US (Mountz,

2010). Indeed, Jubany argues that immigration officials work ‘beyond the extension of their legal powers’ as they act as social control agents whose practice is framed by policy initiatives, normative debates and moral panics regarding ‘the crisis’ of immigration (2017: 5-6). Crucially, these external influences contribute to the creation and recreation of the classification of people and things; an inherent aspect of bureaucracy. Indeed, the labels that are used to identify, sort and manage clients within bureaucracies have been shown to be produced and reproduced in a manner that is far from seemingly apolitical practice (Zetter, 2007, see also Jubany, 2017; Mountz, 2010; Fuglerud, 2004). Bureaucracy is the paradigmatic form of modern state organisation, whose rudimentary feature, argues Fuglerud, is that it *generates* these taxonomies which it then acts upon (2004: 31).

## Screening interviews

At the screening interview asylum applicants are asked to provide basic personal details such as their country of origin and date of birth. Attempting to ascertain this information highlights the varying systems of bureaucracy and the value of documentation that operates globally and how these different systems collide within the asylum process (Shuman and Bohmer, 2004). More fundamentally, Good illustrates how dates of significant events can get lost in translation by those dealing with asylum claims not taking into account that applicants may come from countries that do not use the Gregorian calendar (2007: 171). In the Euro-American world, bureaucracy ‘has become the water we swim’ (Graeber, 2015: 4), yet, asylum applicants come from legal and social structures outwith the UK and therefore, have to learn new rules, values and languages attached to British bureaucracy. Beneduce, and others, have argued that asylum applicants often narrate their stories and experiences using language that does not fit with the ‘bureaucratic grammar of human rights’ leaving them more vulnerable to accusations of noncredibility (2015: 552). I explore how cultures of distress collide within the context of applicants’ disclosures in Chapter Seven.

When I asked Matipa, an asylum applicant from central Africa, her date of birth, I assumed that I was asking her a straightforward question. Instead, it led to a ten-minute explanation of why she had two; exemplifying the cultural discrepancy that times and dates are subject to. Beneduce highlights that, due

to the structural fragility of many African public institutions and registry authority, it is easy to alter personal data, for instance, age, name and place of birth. Therefore, when applicants' personal information is considered by decision-makers within asylum systems, Beneduce argues it should be done within 'the context of social behaviours that are very common in countries of origin' (2015: 552). Furthermore, as applicants learn how to narrative their asylum story (discussed further in Chapter Seven), Beneduce (2015) argues that what decision-makers conceive to be 'deceits' and 'strategic lies' should be viewed through the moral economy of the situation applicants find themselves in; for instance, applicants tell the truths that they believe will afford them protection from that which they flee. In a similar vein, Das (2007) called for the rethinking of the existing static border between legality and illegality in relation to refugees as 'neither the intentions of people living in such zones of violence nor their methods of escape might be "legal", at least as the immigration authorities or even psychiatrists define legality' (Das, 2007: 334).

Blommaert and Jie note that "'truth" is not a property of texts or utterances, but it is an interactionally constructed judgement of value' (2010: 71). In the asylum decision-making process, applicants' narratives are heavily scrutinised for inconsistencies between various tellings, moreover, the 1999 Immigration Act made it an offence for applicants to submit 'false' evidence thus contributing to the criminalisation of asylum. Beneduce, however, argues that violence is enacted through the judicial-bureaucratic language of the asylum process that holds applicants to the same standard of proof as it does those guilty of a serious crime (2015: 559).

These high standards of accuracy do not always seem to be applied with the same vigour to the work of bureaucrats. Elizabeth, an Asylum Help caseworker, told me about clerical errors made by the Home Office that she regularly came across:

When you see (*immigration officials*) not paying little attention to just spell the name of (*applicants*) right, because that really frustrates me, something like someone's name, why do you not just attempt to speak to the person? Can you spell it for me or why do you think it's just right for you to just put anything on the (*document*) anyway? [...] if you see the amount of people coming (*to Asylum Help*) with "My name is, that's not my name, that's not my name" ... oh god

<laughs> there's too many, sometimes we see people ... just because they were in the same detention (*centre*), so one has his surname then the first name of the other one in the same document, come on!

Mistakes were also highlighted by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) who, on examining three hundred asylum case files in which a decision had been made between April 2014 and March 2015, found that roughly one in five of the files contained some form of administrative error. Some of which, 'had potentially serious consequences, like the failure to store a claimant's original documents securely' (Bolt, 2016: 38). It frustrated Elizabeth when the Home Office made mistakes with applicants' names and she viewed it as a lack of respect from them towards applicants. Yet, alternatively, it may be due to the 'mass processing' strategies that bureaucrats adopt in order to cope with the pressure on time and resources that they invariably work under (Lipsky, 1980).

According to ex-immigration official Mark, the Home Office's 'flaws' resulted from the structure of the organisation that created staff who were ill-equipped to do their jobs:

*(The Home Office use)* competency-based selection [...] the person that basically scores the most points gets the job. They don't look at anything like ability or past performance [...] so you can see people flying up the grades without getting any real experience of the jobs [...] you end up with quite young people becoming quite senior quite quickly ... you find people getting promoted who couldn't actually do the job of the people they were being promoted to be managers of.

Although Mark had experienced institutional bullying and was, at the time of our conversation, disgruntled with the Home Office, his description of inexperienced immigration officials parallels both the Chief Inspector's report (Vine, 2014), and Fuglerud's (2004) portrayal of the Norwegian immigration system. In Norway, many civil servants are in the immigration department on a short-term basis as they begin their careers there, due to the availability of jobs, then move on. Therefore, it is not only the seemingly minor administrative errors that are at issue but that relatively inexperienced individuals make decisions on asylum applications whilst not being invested in the department or necessarily caring about the issues at hand (Fuglerud, 2004: 34). Similarly, in the UK, the Home Office recruits gap-year students on temporary contracts during busy periods.

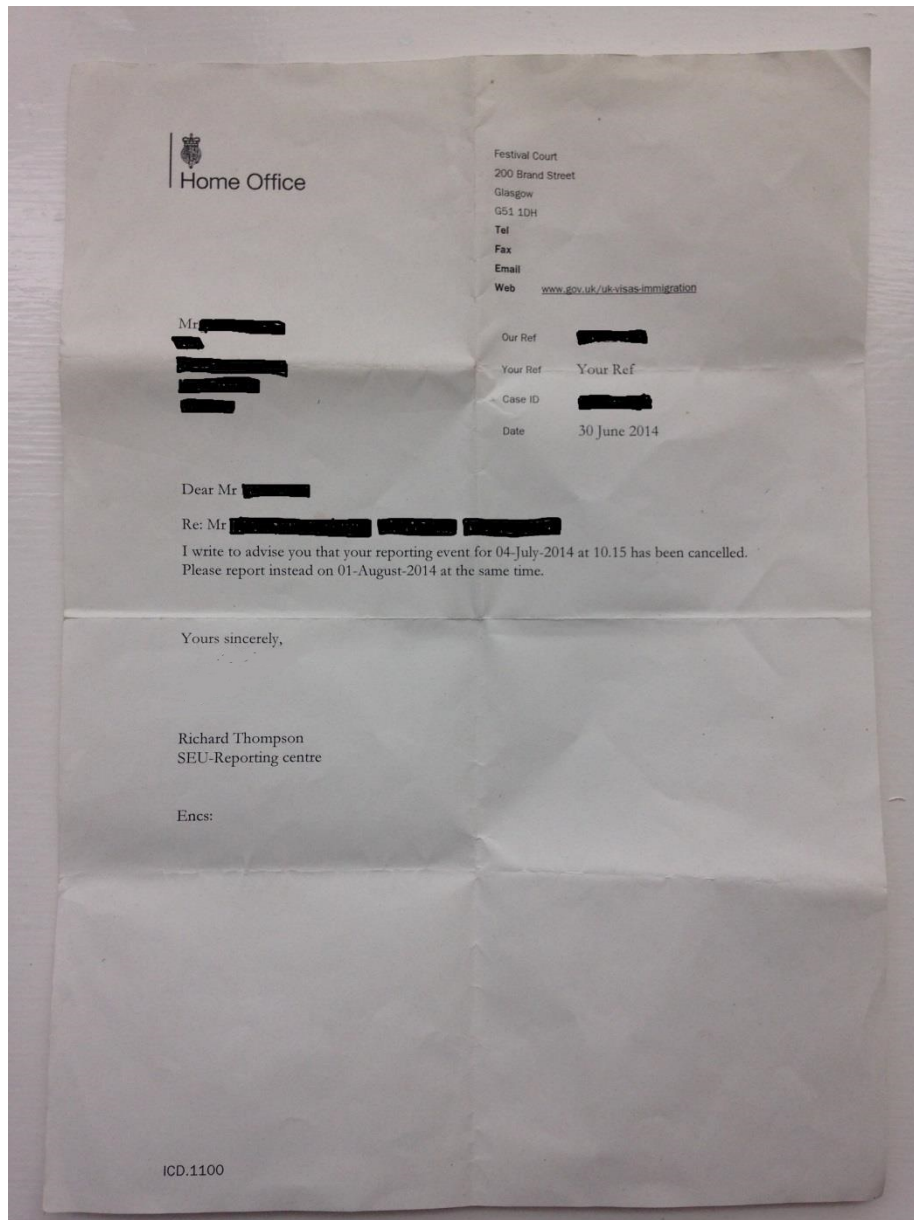


They are given the standard five-week training and then make initial decisions on asylum claims<sup>42</sup> (Taylor, 2016). I will return to decision-making later.

As soon as one registers for asylum, and then throughout the process, applicants must continue to report to a local enforcement office; this was viewed by participants as an often-dreaded task. The frequency of ‘signing’, as it was commonly termed, can change at any time and without any given reason, contributing to applicants’ anxiety towards it. Indeed, applicants, and often their solicitors, tended not to know why changes to reporting conditions happened. Even immigration official, Stacy, could not provide specific reasons as to why these changes occurred, as it was dealt with by a different department from her own. In some instances, the reason for changes coincided with events in an applicant’s case; in others it remained unknown. Regardless of the reason, applicants are sent letters from the Home Office to inform them of these changes. While waiting for months to hear the result of his appeal, Joseph was sent a letter (Image 5-1) from the Home Office stating that his next reporting date had been changed.

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<sup>42</sup> Some of these cases such as those based on the claimant’s sexual orientation, were given a ‘second pair of eyes’ (Bolt, 2016: 25).



**Image 5-1: Letter to Joseph regarding the change to his reporting**

Image 5-1 illustrates the control that the Home Office has over knowledge, a characteristic of bureaucracies (Weber 1978: 225 in Hull, 2012b: 25); importantly, this results in uncertainty for those not in control. For instance, due to the lack of explanation for the change in Joseph's reporting conditions, he and his wife were really worried by the letter. It led them to (wrongly) assuming that the court had told the Home Office that his appeal had been refused before telling him or his solicitor and, therefore, they were extremely afraid that the next time Joseph went to report he would be detained. Which, as it happens, was not an unfounded worry, as months earlier that was exactly what had happened: Joseph had gone to report and notified the immigration official that he had moved in with his wife, which resulted in him being detained from the reporting centre. Four days later he was released and told that his

detention was a mistake. Whether his detention at this time was unlawful or not remains unknown; Joseph's solicitor did not follow it up and he did not complain. His detention, however, provides an explicit illustration of the consequences of administrative errors and the way in which those errors have impacts beyond the immediate consequences. Moreover, it is important to highlight, that the use of detention, which has been steadily increasing in the UK since the 1990s, contributes to the portrayal of asylum applicants (and other irregular migrants) as criminals (Hall, 2012; Mulvey, 2010).

The Home Office's control over knowledge and the subsequent uncertainty experienced by applicants, in addition to the real fear of being detained, not only increases the worry and anxiety that applicants and their loved ones' experience but also creates compliance regarding applicants going to report. Indeed, detention, along with dispersal and deportation, has been described as the state's 'arsenal of control' (Bloch and Schuster, 2005). Bureaucracies, therefore, maintain control through the creation of uncertainty (Hull, 2012); although Joseph worried every time he went to report, he did so without fail, as the fear of the consequences of not doing so were greater. However, in Chapter Nine we see that Tendai did not hold the same attitude and commitment to following reporting restrictions.

While the instability of knowledge may reinforce a culture of upward referral clustering power at the top, it became clear that even those 'at the top' did not always have the relevant knowledge. Mark told me about his role as a Home Office Presenting Officer (HOPO):

It was absolutely crazy the amount that things would change, and very often we would find out about the change in court, because someone would say oh we've read about this in *The Guardian* and we'd be like really, and it's like we haven't even been notified of a policy change and we're the people who are going into court.

Thus, even for relatively high-level bureaucrats the fast-changing nature of the field of immigration can cause uncertainty (and embarrassment). This highlights how bureaucrats are not somehow separate from others but also feel the effects of bureaucracy as they are people engaged 'in a common symbolic struggle, using the same weapons, guided by the same conversations' (Herzfeld, 1992: 5).

In addition, it gives credence to Jubany's argument that border officials act as an autonomous group applying their own rules and values to decisions (2017: 6), furthermore, Mark's comment illuminates why practicing in this way may be their only option. The fast-changing legislative context does not only make immigration officials jobs more difficult but also the jobs of others working in the system, for instance, lawyers. Maria explained how the unstable context of asylum affected her:

Sometimes you feel like banging your head off whatever wall is available [...] you're dealing with a very unpredictable department (*the Home Office*) ... I mean what you say to (*a client*) one day can potentially change the next day without much notice, it's frustrating because there's no particular rhyme or reason.

This changeable landscape of legislation and procedure creates uncertainty and causes frustration and distress for those working within it as well as those regulated by it. Moreover, this complexity, argues Yeo (2015), has become part of the 'hostile environment' for illegal immigrants both the 2014 and 2015 Immigration Act implement. Thus, via the complex policy and procedure that is circulated throughout bureaucracies, government agendas are enacted.

This section has shown that bureaucratic systems create distress for applicants due to its cultural unfamiliarity, complexity and institutionalised control over knowledge. However, rapidly changing regulations, and a lack of filtering down of those changes also creates uncertainty for the bureaucrats working within the asylum process. In the context of bureaucracy, uncertainty is central to the experiences of distress of those connected to the asylum process.

## **Initial accommodation**

After the screening interview, asylum applicants are allocated initial accommodation. Whilst in initial accommodation, applicants were able to access the government-funded asylum advice at the small sub-branch of Asylum Help based at the Red Road flats. At this stage, applicants were also offered a medical check-up and had access to a Community Psychiatric Nurse through the NHS Health Bridging Team. However, as mentioned in Chapter Four, during 2014-15 the initial accommodation, Asylum Help and the Health Bridging Team were moved out of the Red Road flats causing a huge disruption for everyone involved.

One consequence was O&S, the housing provider, had to make sure that applicants, now housed around the city, had access to medical appointments with the Health Bridging Team that had moved to the East End of the city. (Much of the time, this resulted in O&S providing transport in the form of taxis.) Rosa, a member of the Health Bridging Team, explained the difficulties that this created for her and her colleagues:

We're reliant on (*Orchard and Shipman*) ... when Sally's on, she's pretty good, pretty efficient, but when she's off nobody else cares so you're double checking the numbers that you know are (*in initial accommodation*) to the number of service commission forms we've had, but it's not easy to do on a daily basis. For example, we're checking the numbers back, we found out in (*one month*) that there was 21 people that (*Orchard and Shipman*) hadn't even informed us of, that was people that had already been through the initial accommodation and moved on and we didn't even know they existed.

Rosa emphasised how O&S's inefficiency resulted in her and her colleagues being unable to fulfil their role of offering applicants a health screening, providing them information regarding the UK healthcare system and signposting them to GPs. Crucially, it meant that applicants might not register with a GP if they missed this initial stage, thus, potentially very vulnerable people went unnoticed by the NHS. Both Rosa and Elizabeth (above) illustrate how communication and relationships between organisations can break down. They can physically fail, in that people or documents are not directed or sent to the relevant services. But, they can also collapse at an emotional level; Rosa was hugely dissatisfied with O&S's work which resulted in her resentment towards them; 'that's the type of thing that Orchard and Shipman do' she would say.

The extract above also illustrates the individuality within a workforce, challenging Weber's notion of the impersonality of bureaucrats. Rosa believed that if Sally were not at work then the quality and efficiency of O&S's work slipped, as 'nobody else cares', which then impacted on the type and volume of work for the Health Bridging Team, GPs and beyond. For instance, O&S's slippage created new forms of work for Rosa and her team checking who they had and had not screened. The notion that certain bureaucrats (mostly immigration officials and O&S staff) exemplified a lack of care towards their work was common among the various service providers and friends I met. Indeed, if there is a lack of care among bureaucrats this could be due to various

reasons such as: being underpaid; feeling undervalued and overworked; social, political and media portrayals of so-called bogus asylum-seekers. However, the nature of bureaucratic practice may also create contexts in which there is a dearth of care among bureaucrats. The idea of the 'box-ticking' culture, often associated with bureaucracies, may be partly to blame. Samik, a former manager of O&S, told me about the one-day training course that he and his colleagues had received. The day covered suicide prevention; dealing with anti-social behaviours resulting from mental health issues; basic self-defence training; cultural awareness and more. Samik stated, 'to be honest it's just a box-ticking exercise to fulfil their contractual obligations and all the Home Office requires is confirmation that the training's been done'. This is not an exceptional statement, however, when individuals are carrying out tasks simply, in their view, to fulfil an obligation it may well demotivate them resulting in a lack of care or seriousness towards their practice. In regard to immigration officials, Fuglerud, and others, have argued that their indifference towards asylum applicants stems from their conceptualisation of 'cases' not as individual people but a 'series of issues materialised in a set of documents bundled together and carrying a particular registration number' (2004: 36). Moreover, this view reduces the emotional element of the exchange (Fuglerud, 2004: 36).

The potential lack of care among bureaucrats is especially critical within the asylum process as both housing-providers and immigration officials work with a group of structurally vulnerable people. This section has illustrated the close relationship between violence and care, in fact, Gupta argues that violence is enacted in the very scenes of care through systematically produced arbitrariness (2012:24). The government has a duty to provide services such as accommodation, monetary support, healthcare and advice to asylum applicants whose claims are being processed. Indeed, in his immigration speech, then Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated:

It is absolutely vital work that when people come here claiming asylum that they're properly looked after and we're generous in the way that we treat them.

However, in practice, the provision of services can sometimes be nothing more than a box-ticking exercise which more easily allows for bureaucrats' indifference towards those they are serving (Herzfeld, 1992). However, it is also

worth considering, as Gupta has maintained, indifference is an important tool by which bureaucracies ‘insulate *themselves* from social suffering’ (2012: 24, my emphasis), if not that, perhaps indifference is a response to their experiences and potential lack of support they receive.

## Dispersed accommodation

After initial accommodation, applicants are transferred to dispersed accommodation and may be moved numerous times. This not only increases the disruption of their lives, their social networks, support and access to healthcare (Bloch and Schuster, 2005), but also causes complications between the networks of organisations involved in the asylum process. Moreover, smaller, less well-funded, non-governmental organisations were often left to attempt to sort out problems regarding applicants’ accommodation.

To illustrate this disruption, I turn to a day I spent in Rise’s office<sup>43</sup>. At around 11am, a Nigerian man came through the door; he had not been to Rise before. Oren sat behind a desk at the back of the room and gestured to the man to come and join him. The man told Oren that he was an asylum seeker and had, knowing that he was eligible, applied to the Home Office for accommodation three months ago but had not heard anything from them.<sup>44</sup> Oren listened attentively to his story and then asked the man whether he would like him to phone the Home Office to find out what was going on. The man said ‘Yes’. Once Oren got off the phone, he relayed the conversation to both of us:

The Home Office said “He’s in his house”, I said “No, he’s not”, they said “Yeah, he is, he was accepted a month ago”, I was like “He’s not in his house, no one ever called him”, they were like “Okay you need to call Orchard and Shipman”.

So, Oren phoned O&S who replied:

“We tried to contact him and he didn’t answer so he got given a house but now it’s been rescinded [because it was not taken up in a specific period of time] so he will have to apply again”. Oren argued, “No, you

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<sup>43</sup> The quotations are from a recorded interview with Oren who relayed the day’s events to me.

<sup>44</sup> An ICIBI report notes: ‘guidelines were that applications [for support] should be decided within two days where the person was homeless and otherwise within five days. However, these were not being met in a significant number of cases’ (Vine, 2014).

didn't contact him", they responded, "This is the Home Office's mess-up. You need to contact them".

By this point both Oren and the man were fairly frustrated, although Oren informed us that he was not surprised by these turn of events as he had come across many similar situations in the couple of years he had been at Rise. Oren phoned the Home Office back and was told, "This is unequivocally Orchard and Shipman's mess up, we approved the housing, they took the agreement on this date, they should have housed him on this date, you have to speak to them". So, Oren called O&S again but to no avail; he suggested to the Nigerian man that they go to O&S's office in order to try and sort it out. He agreed and they set off together. Whilst there, they managed to find out that O&S had sent the letter detailing the accommodation not to the address that the Nigerian man had been staying at, but to a house ten doors further down the street. Once they returned to Rise's office, Oren told me that, in O&S's office their conversation continued in a similar vein to their phone call; O&S took no responsibility and continued to blame the Home Office for the mistake of address. Exasperated, Oren asked the O&S worker if they could get the Home Office on the phone to have a conversation with all parties to resolve the issue because, crucially, the man was homeless. The O&S worker told Oren that this was not possible as they had to go through their contact in Serco, who held the housing contract with the Home Office, if they wanted to speak to the Home Office.

It has been stated that, if you want to understand bureaucratic activities, you should follow the paper (Hull, 2012b: 22). Here, the paper trail illuminates how hierarchy and the division of labour create uncertainty and obscure accountability. As the letter detailing the allocated accommodation went from one place to another and was finally lost, the blame was passed between the Home Office, who determined the letter's production, and O&S, who processed it. Neither organisation, let alone individual bureaucrats, took responsibility for the mistake(s) made and the Nigerian man left O&S's office having gained no more information as to who was responsible for his current homelessness or how it was going to be resolved. Moreover, the denial of responsibility allows for the production of indifference (Herzfeld, 1992); it was Oren, the impromptu mediator of the two organisations, who reminded the Home Office and O&S



about the human issue at play, that is, a man, eligible for accommodation, had nowhere to live.

The Home Office manages most of their correspondence with applicants via letters. In another example of letters getting lost, I turn to Joseph. Having gone through numerous appeals, Joseph spent many months waiting to hear the outcome of one. He finally received a letter from the Home Office stating that his appeal had been refused on the grounds that his solicitor had not updated them as to his current situation. His solicitor, however, claimed that he had not received the written request from the Home Office asking for this information. Anecdotally, I heard of other similar cases of solicitors not receiving letters which the Home Office stated they had sent. The point here is that the relationship between paperwork and bureaucratic procedures allows for the non-accountability of mistakes (Mountz, 2010). Furthermore, it leaves those whom the letters concern, that is, in both the cases illustrated, applicants, powerless to act.

Obscuring accountability (and protecting those at the top of the hierarchy, that is, the Home Office) is made easier with the increase in privatisation and subcontracting. For instance, O&S were unable to communicate directly with the Home Office, instead, they had to go through Serco. However, this also illustrates a certain powerlessness of O&S employees, which contrasted with their outwardly powerful image. Indeed, Mountz found that in the Canadian context immigration officials were 'operating largely in the dark' (2010: 89) and, therefore, they 'were forced to articulate power while feeling powerless, providing the illusion of order and control while lacking adequate resources and policies to support their response' (2010: 91). Due to these daily practices of maintaining the public image of the state being in control (of immigration), there was, therefore, the inclination to pass blame whenever necessary (Mountz, 2010: 63).

The above is one example of many whereby bureaucratically-induced situations create dependent relationships between asylum applicants and others, which is related to the control over knowledge, discussed above. The Nigerian man found himself dependent on Oren, a Rise member, who had the knowledge and confidence to approach both the Home Office and O&S, in addition to O&S and

ultimately the Home Office for providing a service. This arrangement illuminates the subtlety of structural violence. Rather than simply blocking communication, complaining against state officials relies on cultural capital, knowledge of state procedures, (Gupta, 2012: 179) and perhaps the confidence that having citizenship or at least status and the validating impression that it generates. For Gupta, complaints 'are a highly important modality through which structural violence against poor people becomes visible' (2012: 167).

I witnessed various situations in which bureaucratic 'absurdities' (Graeber, 2015) occurred among organisations involved in the asylum process. In addition to the excerpt above, I heard of a two-year old who was given a work permit from an immigration official at her doorstep; a seven-year-old who was made to sign an application for Legal Aid because she had a separate case from her mother; applicants living on Section 4 support (in which monetary support is uploaded onto an Azure card) frequently being asked by the Home Office to provide passport photographs (for which cash is needed) for identification documents<sup>45</sup>. Graeber argues that

it is not so much that bureaucratic procedures are inherently stupid, or even that they tend to produce behaviour that they themselves define as stupid - though they do that - but rather, that they are invariably ways of managing social situations that are already stupid because they are founded on structural violence (2015: 57).

Indeed, he states that unreasonable demands are typical of bureaucratic practice: bureaucrats set demands that they consider to be reasonable and when people are unable to meet those demands, the problem is seen to rest with individual's inadequacy rather than with the unrealistic requests (2015: 48-9). Yet, these seemingly nonsensical requests have many consequences. They not only worry applicants, but some, such as the request for passport photographs from those with no access to cash, mean that they are either dependent on others to assist them or are 'corner[ed] into a situation in which, in order to survive, he has to break the (explicit) Law' (Zizek, 1998: 79, in Beneduce, 2015: 563), for instance undertaking paid employment while in the asylum process, in order to acquire cash. Furthermore, these seemingly nonsensical requests from

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<sup>45</sup> In addition, the cost of these photographs can be up to one-third of the weekly support.

the Home Office were often interpreted cynically among those who were directly and indirectly affected by them, that is, that applicants are simply not supposed to make sense of the asylum process.

Cynicism was rife among many of the participants and organisations involved in this research. Maria, a well-respected and experienced immigration solicitor who had been working in the field for twelve years, told me about the delays to the decision-making process that her Syrian clients (whom she believed should easily qualify for asylum if able to prove they were not members of the Assad regime) were experiencing. Maria offered a suggestion as to why delays in these cases were so commonplace:

Being cynical it might be because (*the Home Office*) know that the case law's good ... that's being extremely cynical, they may be thinking that the country situation will change then the case law will change.

Maria suggested that the Home Office purposefully delayed the asylum decisions that had a good chance of being granted, in the anticipation that the situation in the country of origin would improve and, therefore, making it easier to refuse protection. Her cynicism may have resulted from the effect delays have on her ability to work and represent clients, yet her reading of the situation is strengthened by Fuglerud who states:

The worst possible scenario to most immigration officers is to put themselves in a situation where, owing to legal precedence or pressure from organisations such as the UNHCR, rejecting applications from a particular country is made impossible (2004: 33).

However, Gupta emphasises that it is too easy and cynical to blame the bureaucrats, as, often, they too are frustrated by their inability to work effectively (2012: 23). Indeed, after admitting her cynicism regarding the inner workings of the Home Office, Maria went on to say, 'being probably more realistic is that the Home Office is just so disorganised that they just aren't processing anything, and they've maybe got a real influx of Syrian nationals'. Contradicting a Weberian view of efficient bureaucracies, disorganisation within the Home Office was highlighted by various participants as well as Thomas who states:

The [then UKBA] has sometimes been castigated as the UK's most opaque and unhelpful bureaucracy subjecting claimants to an almost Kafkaesque bureaucratic nightmare [...] another equally strong source of criticism has been the agency's apparent inability to function effectively; 'not fit for purpose' as a former Home Secretary [John Reid] once put it, in an unprecedented public denunciation by a government minister of his own department (2011: 53-4).

Whilst it was explained by immigration official, Stacy, as being due to understaffing, Maria, however, was willing to entertain the idea that it is not just disorganisation and staffing issues that led to delays in the system but something more considered or in keeping with the government's political aims of reducing net immigration.

## Asylum interview

Lipsky argues that citizens' individual interactions with street-level bureaucrats may 'deeply affect the benefits and sanctions they receive' (1980: xi). This was also stressed by many participants regarding their interactions with immigration officials. Moreover, these encounters were often referred to in terms of 'luck'. ('Luck' is also emphasised in a report by Bail for Immigration Detainees (2010) regarding the outcome of immigration bail hearings, that is, detainees need to be lucky both in terms of the specific adjudicator and the adjudicator's mood during the hearing.) Ray, a refugee from Central Africa who had received refugee status eight years after he first applied, told me about the asylum process: 'if you are lucky you can get paper ... it depends for the man who is in front of you (*at*) the Home Office because if someone good someone bad, it depends for the feeling'. Here, he asserts that the outcome of the decision rests on the individual bureaucrat's *feeling* towards the applicant. This was also mentioned by Rise member Oren: 'sometimes it really just seems like luck, if (*the applicant*) gets the right case owner things will happen for you, if (*they*) get the wrong case owner things won't'. The concept of luck either highlights how unknown and obscure the asylum process is for some people or it illuminates the arbitrariness of bureaucracy. What is important to bear in mind is how significant these initial interactions are for the future of applicants' claims.

Asylum interviews are not routinely audio-recorded; it is up to the claimant to request this at least 24 hours prior to the interview (Asylum Support Partnership,

2012: 3). After the interview, applicants are given a copy of the transcript, in English, for which they must sign to confirm receipt (Bögner et al., 2010: 530). Bögner et al., found that non-English speaking applicants would sign these transcripts without understanding what they said and only later, sometimes not until an appeal, hear a translated version (2010: 531). Some applicants have claimed that they were threatened with instant deportation if they did not sign the transcript (Asylum Aid, 1999). Moreover, applicants are only given five working days to make any comments or corrections to the transcript (AIDA, 2015: 21). This often involves willing solicitors, or other service providers and/or friends to devote time and emotional energy to go through these documents with applicants (which also potentially creates unwanted and/or unnecessary disclosures, as discussed further in Chapter Seven).

I met many applicants, and heard stories of several others, who believed that errors were made in the transcripts of their asylum, and occasionally screening interviews; words and phrases were heard, translated<sup>46</sup>, and/or written down incorrectly. Seema and her husband, Hassan, are a Pakistani couple, who when I first met them were in their late 20s and had one young child. They had claimed asylum when they moved to Glasgow. I went to visit them at their flat a couple of weeks after Seema<sup>47</sup> had her asylum interview. In her interview, she had been asked about her marriage to Hassan and told me that the interviewer recorded that she got married in ‘summer’ and ‘December’ at different points of the interview. She told me that she had in fact said ‘December’ throughout; in telling me this I could hear the similarity of the two words in her Pakistani accent. Seema then showed me the interview transcript to illustrate how the interviewer had also partially recorded some of her dialogue: when she had said ‘I am not a Muslim by birth’ it had been recorded as ‘I am not a Muslim’. Although asylum interviews are the basis for judging claims, there is, as was evident with Seema’s interview, ‘considerable scope for mutual misunderstanding and errors of omission and recording’ (Good, 2007: 101). Seema’s claim was relatively quickly refused on the basis that she was inconsistent in the details of when she and Hassan had got married and the

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<sup>46</sup> Adding an interpreter to the communication trajectory within the asylum process adds further significant difficulties, see Baillot et al., 2012; Bögner et al., 2010.

<sup>47</sup> The asylum claim was in her name, Hassan and her child were her dependents.

decision-maker did not believe that she had converted to Islam (which was the grounds of her case).

The examples above illustrate that mistakes happen. What I want to highlight here is that the effects of errors are significantly different for different actors. For the immigration officials who conduct interviews, repercussions, if any, will be minor. For Seema, however, the consequences were far more damaging, as it meant that her asylum claim was refused (see also Baillot et al., 2012). In the Indian context in which he writes, Gupta noticed a 'strong bureaucratic tradition of respecting negative judgements' (2012: 147). In addition to this, he argues that the frequent movement of bureaucrats around departments means that the new ones in an office are quick to befriend new officials and therefore more likely to rule in favour of the office rather than the applicant thus 'perpetuating the structural violence on the poor' (2012: 147). A similar occurrence can be seen within the UK asylum process: once a claim is refused, or an applicant's credibility is questioned, the negative stain on their case follows them throughout the process as decision-makers (and other actors they come across) refer back to this initial refusal. This is potentially made easier through the nature of bureaucratic practice as decision-makers (immigration officials and adjudicators) may only have case notes to go on or previous written negative decisions and thus, look at one aspect rather than the whole picture (see BID, 2010 for an illustration of this within immigration bail hearings). It also links to Fuglerud's point, mentioned above, that the basic feature of bureaucracy is that 'it generates taxonomies in order to act upon them' (2004: 31). These seemingly minor mistakes have a huge potential for violence. The refusal of an asylum claim can result in deportation and therefore the individual facing again the violence they were escaping; clerical errors, therefore, can become the difference between life and death.

## **Decision(s)**

This section considers how the characteristics of bureaucratic organisations affect immigration officials' practice; related to this, Chapter Eight provides an in-depth analysis of the emotional labour immigration officials (and others) undertake. The division of labour involved in the asylum process allows a physical distance between bureaucrats and applicants (Mountz, 2010). The

physical distance has been argued to enable bureaucrats to dehumanise individual applicants and produce ‘cleaner, more simplistic narratives’ of phenomena such as human smuggling as ‘bad’ (Mountz, 2010: 86). This is done, argues Jubany (2017), in the context of the institution itself creating an insulating space in which bureaucrats establish these narratives; or as Mark, a former senior immigration official, described the Home Office as being a ‘very closed shop, they don’t want people knowing what goes on, they don’t like people knowing how the sausage is made’.

The Home Office’s Asylum Policy Instructions regarding asylum interviews states:

Caseworkers must not prejudge the claim or approach the interview with scepticism. They should be aware that their own values, beliefs, prejudices and views, can affect the objectivity of their assessments and should avoid them influencing the conduct of interviews (Home Office, 2015b: 12).

Jubany (2017), Mountz (2010) and Fuglerud (2004), each exploring different immigration systems, evidence, however, that this is not the case: all three argue that bureaucracies do not exist in a vacuum and decision-makers are affected by wider discourses around immigration. Indeed, Jubany views asylum decisions as ‘a profoundly cultural process’ (2017: 6), and Mountz argues that ‘immigration officers embody the sovereignty of the state and thus make decisions according to their overarching ideas of self and other that manifest at the border’ (2010: 86).

Both Jubany (2017) and Fuglerud (2004) highlight immigration officials’ sense of national responsibility in safeguarding their nations from the threat of increasing volumes of unregulated migration. In the Norwegian context, Fuglerud (2004) suggests that it is both the generally high-ranking position of immigration officials in society and the *carte blanche*<sup>48</sup> policy for which they decide the criteria for evaluating asylum applications that allows them to feel as if they have a special duty to take care of the affairs of the state and to ‘do what it takes’ regardless of their critics (2004: 30). Stacy illustrated her own sense of

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<sup>48</sup> In the UK, there is also no set pro forma for asylum interviews, yet there are policy instructions (Home Office, 2015b).

'national responsibility' in carrying out her work, correlating with both Jubany (2017) and Fuglerud (2004):

I'm very open minded in the sense that you know there's a degree of understanding as to why people will try and come (*to the UK*) and make a different life for themselves [...] however, we have borders to protect and that's what it comes down to [...] we can't let everybody come to the UK that wants to come here [...] they have to demonstrate that they need international protection.

Fuglerud contends that the political arena in which legislation is regularly created aiming to restrict and control immigration results in immigration officials understanding the provision of protection to be a limited resource. Consequently, decision-makers view protection as being only for those truly 'deserving', 'those who need it most' (Fuglerud, 2004: 36). Stacy's comment above supports this idea.

Most immigration officials, argues Fuglerud, believe that the national responsibility they bear and the interests of the state and of politicians are best served if they do not give into public pressure; 'they see themselves as doing unpleasant but necessary work' (2004: 36). Again, Stacy presented a similar attitude:

It would be lovely if we could just hand grants over to everybody that we came across [...] I think there is a lot of people that struggle to see beyond that, you know, *not* every asylum seeker is genuine [...] I think the reality is we do see it from both sides, we do see the genuine asylum seekers but we also see people that very much abuse the system. Not just the immigration system but they will abuse other systems or parts of what's on offer here in the UK.

Just as classification is inherent to bureaucratic work (Fuglerud, 2004), Stacy categorised applicants into 'genuine' and those 'that abuse the system'. However, when I questioned her regarding what other systems she thought people abused she said, 'just in terms of the NHS or whatnot'. She did not reply with the same confident manner that she had maintained throughout most of the interview which led me to wonder whether her source(s) of knowledge were tabloid headlines, such as 'Sickly immigrants add £1bn to NHS bill' and 'Sorry but migrants will STILL abuse the NHS' (Mail Online), or from more informed foundation. Jubany argues that immigration officials recreate a world that



embodies both the tenets of the Home Office, that is, to restrict migration, and connect it to wider public and political ‘moral panics’ regarding immigration (2017: 3). Thus, she states, within decision-makers’ worlds ‘the crisis exists only in the form of numbers and abuse of the system’ (2017: 4). Exemplifying this, the then Immigration Minister, Damian Green, explained in a speech in February 2012, ‘our first priority has been, and remains, to get the system back under control, to get the numbers down and keep them down’ (Gower, 2012: 4). This idea of crisis of numbers is recreated by the pressure put on immigration officials manifest in the use of targets imposed on their work. Immigration official, Mark, told me:

Were expected to be getting an 85% dismissal rate at asylum appeals, not individual (*officials*) but the target across the board was 85% dismissal ... I was told this all the time [...] There are always targets, if you’re not meeting them there are questions of why aren’t you meeting these targets, and no one actually explains where these targets come from they are always very much made up.

Home Office ‘targets’ was also mentioned by an anonymous asylum caseworker in the Guardian as producing incentives to prioritise certain tasks over others (Anonymous, 2017).

Mountz claims that the media also influence both how Canadian immigration officials dealt with the ‘crisis’ of the boat arrivals of immigrants from China to Canada in 1999 and the new policies that the government created in the aftermath. She argues that state practices regarding the processing of boat arrivals ‘came alive in this space between formal policy and ad hoc arrangements’ (2010: 35), and that immigration officials’ daily operations were significantly oriented towards responding to media accusations of them being ‘too soft’ on border enforcement (2010: 68). Stacy was aware that the Home Office was perceived negatively by others: ‘on one hand you have people who think we are so horrendously harsh, the bad guys (*then*) you get other people that think you just let everybody in’. However, Stacy felt confident of her role within the highly political and, at times, fraught environment partially because she ‘knew’ that her and her colleagues were ‘getting (*decision-making*) right’. But what exactly did ‘getting it right’ look like? It contradicted what the ICIBI found to be the case:

I still find too much evidence that the Home Office does not get the basics right. This includes the quality and consistency of decision making but also having caseworkers with the right skills, aligning resources to the right priorities and having high quality management information that provides a sound basis on which to make decisions on future strategy and resourcing (ICIBI, 2014: 6).

Stacy's belief in her and her colleagues getting decisions right also juxtaposes the narratives and experiences of many others involved in this research<sup>49</sup> in addition to her own admission (below) regarding the comforting nature of systematic 'safety nets' within the asylum process.

Stacy and I spoke about the challenges she faced in a decision-making role and she informed me that knowing there was, what she termed, 'a safety net' helped her cope with the decisions she made, a notion supported by Baillot et al. (2013). Thus, her knowledge of the division of labour involved in an asylum claim protected her emotionally as she felt alleviated from the total responsibility of her decisions. Stacy explained:

There is definitely the worry of "Have I made the right decision?" ... but I suppose that's why we've got the appeals process<sup>50</sup>. That's the most important bit; that we're not saying "No" to anybody that actually is in need of international protection; that's why we've got that system in place so that it's not just one individual that could get it wrong and then they're removed or whatnot [...] even the appeals process has got lots of things in place that doesn't even just go to one immigration judge, one immigration judge can come along behind me and go "No, I think that was the right decision. Refuse it." There is still opportunity for that to be challenged so I think it's a pretty safe process in terms of making sure that those that are refused that the decision's the right one.

Stacy described this division of labour as creating a fair system; even if decision-makers were to make a mistake it would be rectified later on in the process. Indeed, between 2011 and 2013, over a quarter of initial decisions were overturned at appeal (see Figure 4-1). However, my argument here is that, in effect, facets of bureaucracy such as the division of labour allow for a high percentage (57% between 2011-13, Home Office, 2015a) of asylum claims to be refused initially as the impression of a 'safety net' make it easier for initial

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<sup>49</sup> Yet, it is important to bear in mind the unequal ratio of immigration officials compared to others.

<sup>50</sup> The 2014 Immigration Act however significantly reduced the avenues for appeals.

decision-makers to refuse claims due to the belief that if applicants are 'genuine' these decisions will be undone by a higher power. Thus, we come back to the analogy of the bomb Oren made at the start of this chapter and how the division of labour may aid non-responsibility. Yet, non-responsibility and emotional protection may be closely related as the division of labour allows bureaucrats not to dwell on the consequences of their actions as applicants are processed through the asylum system. Perhaps, for Stacy, the division of labour within the asylum process also obscured the consequences for applicants of bureaucrats' errors in interview transcripts and letters that go missing between organisations.

## Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated various aspects of bureaucracy and the impact these have on those involved in the asylum process. Using the chronology of the asylum process as a framework, it has shown that the Home Office is closer to Mountz' notion of bureaucracy: 'inherently large, slow, complex administrative networks that compartmentalise the division of labour in such a way as to sometimes complicate the sharing of knowledge and the taking of action' (2010: 40), than Weber's view of bureaucracies as being administratively efficient and a hallmark of rationality (Beetham, 1996). The above has provided ethnographic examples of the structural violence that is 'enacted through the everyday practices of bureaucracy' (Gupta, 2012: 33). It was shown how the Home Office's control over knowledge, a common feature of bureaucratic practice, meant that applicants' overwhelming experience of the bureaucratic processes is that of uncertainty, often experienced as fear. However, I also illustrated that those seemingly in control or holding the power can themselves feel powerless, for instance, O&S, in the face of the Home Office, and immigration official, Mark, who had to navigate ever-changing immigration policy whilst in court.

This chapter has highlighted that errors can be made by all actors at various stages of the asylum process, however, the accountability and consequences of those errors is strikingly different for the different actors involved. The example of the Nigerian man who was left homeless due to a mistake made somewhere between the Home Office and O&S illustrates how the division of labour within the asylum process enables buck-passing and makes accountability hard to come

by. Furthermore, by obscuring accountability, (in addition to the complex and ever-changing Immigration Rules) a dependency is created in applicants towards others. For instance, the rules, values and literacy attached to British bureaucracy mean that applicants may need others (with more cultural capital) to explain and guide them through the process. However, the division of labour has been shown to provide protective features for bureaucrats themselves, as it upholds a distance between them and those they serve. Moreover, it gives immigration officials the impression of a 'safety net' that will catch the 'genuine' asylum applicants, assisting individuals not to feel responsible towards those whose claims they are deciding.

Kafka (2012) argues that it is the paperwork that bureaucracies create that causes the most trauma for those subject to it. Although inextricably linked, the bureaucracy and paperwork involved in the asylum process deserve equal attention and, therefore, the next chapter is dedicated to the latter. Unlike the structural violence that disappears from view when embedded in bureaucratic action or non-action, the next chapter follows the visible materiality of paper.

## Chapter 6 : 'Wait till you see my love letter' - The Affective Life of Paperwork

### Introduction

Each time I entered a solicitor's office, I could not help but be drawn to the shelves upon shelves of hard-backed books, files, and reports that lined the walls and the piles upon piles of notes, court proceedings, reports and bundles that carpeted floors and crept up onto desks. These rooms were submerged by paperwork. The piles of paper, along with solid wood desks, computer monitors and so on, created a sort of fortress between solicitors and their clients, or me, as a researcher. At Rise, paper was also ubiquitous; posters covered the walls; leaflets were piled or shoved into any space that would hold them; scrap pieces of paper were scribbled on and left lying around. In addition, three grey, unlocked, metal filing cabinets snugly fitted among the tightly packed desks. These cabinets contained a file for each person they assisted and were arranged alphabetically (by name, surname or whatever the individual had chosen to give), and colour-coded according to whether the person was in detention or not. Each individual's file also contained photocopies of various correspondence, documents from state bodies, doctors' reports, letters and testimonies.

Like much of the literature on documents, I had not initially set out to study them (see Riles, 2006).<sup>51</sup> Yet, throughout my fieldwork, it became difficult to ignore. Riles notes that documents are 'ubiquitous features of late modern life' appearing at every turn in the constitution of modern bodies, institutions, states, and cultures (2006: 5). Nowhere is the omnipresent documentation and paperwork more apparent than within the systems and organisations that constitute the UK asylum process; there is a large amount of paperwork produced and circulated at almost every turn, multiplying during many interactions. Any legal procedure creates and recreates a large amount of paperwork. However, within the context of the asylum process this paperwork is added to in many ways; the majority of correspondence from the Home Office is done via letter, which is sent to applicants and/or their solicitors, yet it is not

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<sup>51</sup> I use the terms documents and paperwork interchangeably.

always clear who these are sent to<sup>52</sup>. If living in Home Office accommodation, applicants also receive letters from their housing provider, Orchard and Shipman, in addition to letters from healthcare professionals and others. Organisations like Asylum Help, SCIN and Rise produce their own paperwork that applicants deal with. Despite many applicants' protests of an information overload, Asylum Help worker, Emilia, would provide them with as many leaflets and flyers<sup>53</sup> as she could in their first meeting because she feared it could be their only chance to receive this information.

Most of the paperwork within the asylum process exists as duplicates; applicants keep official paperwork, as do their solicitor(s), the Home Office, and services that they are in touch with. Helping asylum applicant, Matipa, into my car one day, I picked up her handbag in order to pass it to her; I was surprised by how heavy it was, so I jokingly asked, 'What have you got in there?' She replied matter-of-factly that she carries all of her 'most important' paperwork in her handbag wherever she goes in case she comes home to find the locks to her front door have been changed<sup>54</sup>. As this chapter illustrates, there is an uncertainty around the value of paperwork that makes up the asylum process which, in my experience, seemed to result in applicants keeping almost all of it. Furthermore, much of the 'official' paperwork is written in English, highlighting the lack of multilingual communication within the asylum process but also the dependent relationship many applicants have with others who help translate information.<sup>55</sup>

This chapter offers a paper-centred, ethnographic view of the asylum process. It is concerned with paperwork, that is, material documents and other paper

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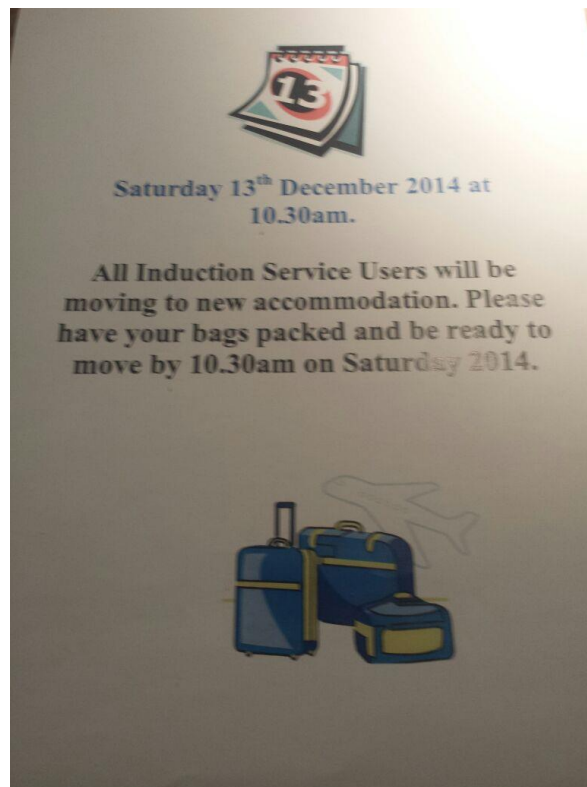
<sup>52</sup> Immigration official, Stacy, suggested that there was no fixed procedure for this, thus, it depended on how 'vulnerable' the applicant was deemed to be by the immigration official dealing with the claim.

<sup>53</sup> Such as information about local integration networks; maps of the city; where to go for free food; lists of colleges with free English classes.

<sup>54</sup> I frequently came across this worry among those asylum applicants who were living in government-provided housing and were waiting for appeals to be decided. Whilst a change in one's claim resulting in them being no longer eligible for support would result, first, in a letter from O&S asking them to leave their property, Matipa had heard stories of O&S changing the locks to the front doors of properties when the person is out, which had scared her. Indeed, this was not an unfounded worry as it happened to Tendai, see Chapter Nine; the 'alleged' practice in Glasgow was also reported on by the BBC (Ellison, 2016).

<sup>55</sup> The relationship between multilingual communication and the paperwork involved in the asylum process is an important one but is beyond the scope of this thesis due to participants all being able to communicate in English.

artefacts, rather than electronic forms, as paper is the form that most documents involved in the asylum process take. I take heed from Hull (2012a) who warns against confining ourselves solely to an analysis of paper documents in a world in which computers are so ubiquitous, yet, I maintain a focus on the material documents due to the ethnographic data I collected. Using Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), discussed in Chapter Two, as a lens through which to investigate paperwork, I explore paperwork not as a product but as an 'actant' demanding the same analytical attention as the human participants involved in this research. Actants make up assemblages or networks and, by visualising these assemblages, ANT allows me to trace the association and dissociations that arise between 'documents and institutions, documents and people, documents and concepts, and documents with each other' (Prior, 2008: 830). In this chapter, I am interested in the capacity of paperwork to carry, contain and conceal distress within the asylum process, indeed, viewing paperwork as affective actants helps illuminate the spread of distress within the asylum process. I therefore treat documents as things that 'transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry' (Latour, 2005: 39). Image 6-1 provides a clear example of this. It shows a poster put up by Orchard and Shipman in the lobby of the one remaining habited tower block in the weeks running up to clearing initial accommodation. Most of the people living in initial accommodation had recently arrived in Glasgow and were at the beginning of their asylum claim. Many people at this stage have limited English thus simple images are often utilised to aid communication. The use of a clip art aeroplane behind the packed suitcases therefore has enormous potential to generate fear of deportation into those applicants who do not read English.



**Image 6-1: Poster in the lobby of initial accommodation (anonymous). Glasgow, 2014**

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first provides a brief literature review; the purpose of which is not to provide a thorough review of anthropology's engagement with documents (see Hull (2012a) for a comprehensive review) but to bring into dialogue aspects that are of particular relevance to paperwork within the asylum process, such as the relationship with bureaucracy, the materiality of documents, and methodological approaches that follow ANT. The next three sections explore paperwork as a phenomenon that generates affect. The first section considers 'the form' as a specific type of paperwork; exploring how its character dictates the way in which it is interacted with and how it produces certain types of information. The next section looks at the symbolic status, weight and legitimacy that documents carry and how this relates to asylum applicants' 'collecting' certain documents. The final section explores the 'affective underside' of documents (Navaro-Yashin, 2007), particularly how they incite fear and panic in some people and comfort and protection in others.



## The materiality of paper

It is only in the last few decades, with the growth of institutional ethnography, that documents have been viewed as objects worthy of study in anthropology (Hull, 2012a). Previously, documents had been discussed in relation to disciplinary power and regimes of control (Foucault, 1975) and utilised as the sociologist's informant in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, in Prior, 2008). They were often seen as being containers of information rather than active agents. More recent anthropological scholarship has highlighted the need 'to restore analytically the visibility of documents' (Hull, 2012a: 253); to treat them as phenomena to look *at* rather than *through*.

In the previous chapter, the bureaucratic nature of the asylum process was discussed. Much of the time, documents and bureaucracies are studied together due to their intimate relationship (see Gupta, 2012; Hull, 2012b; Kafka, 2012; Thompson, 2012; Fuglerud, 2004). This relationship is heightened in the context of immigration where documents can define the lives of regulated immigrant bodies (Fassin and d'Halluin, 2005). Paperwork has been viewed as the material culture of states and bureaucracies, with verbal encounters with bureaucrats being recorded in files and reports (Hull, 2012b: 113). Indeed, bureaucrats are invested in a political economy of paper (Hull, 2012b). Moreover, documents are central to 'how the state comes to be imagined, encountered, and reimagined by the population' (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 12). Following paperwork, therefore, can provide insights into bureaucratic organisations and activities as their documents play a role in the construction of subjects and objects which 'mediate between schemes of classification' (Hull, 2008, in Hull, 2012a: 259; see also Gupta, 2012; Hull, 2012b). For instance, a letter detailing a positive decision on an asylum claim acts to prove the deservingness of a refugee, in contrast to the suspicion cast over an asylum applicant, who has not yet received a decision.

The agency of documents has been explored by scholars in relation to ANT. Navaro-Yashin (2007) draws on a very specific context to study documents as 'affectively loaded phenomena', capable of 'carrying, containing, or inciting affective energies when transacted or put to use in specific webs of social relation' (2007: 81). Her context involves Turkish-Cypriots, who since 1983 have

been ‘citizens’ of an unrecognised state (the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) which is considered illegal under international law. She explores this group of people and the interactions they forge with a very specific document used to verify identification in order to travel, yet, one that is internationally unrecognised. By approaching the study of documents using ANT, Navaro-Yashin illuminates ‘that state-like structures make themselves evident to the persons who inhabit their domains in the form of materialities’ (2007: 94). She argues that documents are ‘one of the most tangible phenomena which induce state-like affects’; tangible in the sense that they can clearly be seen to exist, but also because you can touch and feel them (2007: 94).

The material quality of documents regarding how they shape interactions has been explored by other scholars. In considering graphic artefacts, Hull (2012a) highlights the aesthetics, affect, and signs<sup>56</sup> involved in the way in which humans encounter material documents. For instance, how forms are spatially organised, the size of characters on a page and the signs and images utilised on headed paper all affect how documents are engaged with (Hull, 2012b). In a similar vein, Reed (2006) argues that the format or design of prisoner warrant forms contributes to the agency they hold:

Prisoners and wardens feel themselves to be passive actors, unable to pre-empt or go beyond format coordinates. There is an air of inevitability to the answers they provide, since every response calls up the same pattern [...] in a sense their answer is already there, forecast in the design of warrant cover and autograph (2006: 168).

Navaro-Yashin’s study also illuminates the ideological nature of documents; they are not neutral phenomena (2007: 88). Despite the specific context, her focus on how people negotiate the complexities of law and statecraft as they appear through documents draws many parallels with the topics discussed in this chapter. Navaro-Yashin argues that documents have an ‘affective underside’; they are not ‘self-contained or sterile, but transmit specific kinds of energy amongst their users’ (2007: 95). Connections between her findings and mine, specifically the fear and panic that state-produced letters and documents can induce in their receivers, are described in the final section of this chapter.

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<sup>56</sup> The way in which documents link to people, places and things.

Also, within the context of immigration, Thompson (2012) investigates a Congolese family's application for resettlement within a UNHCR-run refugee camp in Tanzania. Her approach is similar to ANT as she 'follow[s] the actors themselves' (Latour, 2005: 11), specifically, the envelope that contains the application. Although she does not begin at the conception of the contents of the envelope, she illustrates its journey from the family, via her, to a UNHCR official and then into what she terms as, a 'black box of bureaucracy'. This box refers to a large box in the boss's office at UNHCR in which all cases/envelopes are deposited. As a 'centre of circulation' it reveals 'how [seemingly] insignificant people working only with papers and signs become the most powerful of all' (Latour, 2011: 59-60, in Thompson, 2012: 200). Thompson's paper highlights the institutional power that documents have. The refugees that Thompson worked with recognised that although documents do not in and of themselves have the power to shape a decision (it is the UNHCR and state government officials that decide), they can validate past experiences. Therefore, refugees will put in great effort to collect these paper documents from their institutional sources while in the refugee camp (2012: 197).

The literature cited above has highlighted significant elements in the study of documents. Firstly, paperwork and bureaucracy are intimately related; following the former can illuminate aspects of the latter, hence, this chapter builds on the discussions of Chapter Five. Secondly, the material quality of documents is important in terms of how it affects those who engage with it. Finally, by bringing ANT into dialogue with the study of documents, it illuminates them as objects with affective energies; an approach the rest of this chapter follows.

## **Forms and facts**

Forms have been viewed as 'the prototype of bureaucratic writing' (Gupta, 2012: 144), as they 'enframe and categorise the world' (Gupta, 2012: 145). Forms, rather than narratives, are preferred in bureaucratic writing, as they provide an easier way of classifying people (Gupta, 2012: 156). A Weberian analysis might emphasise elements of standardisation, replicability, anonymity, and portability of the form (Gupta, 2012: 145). Yet here, what I want to highlight, through the examples of the Asylum Support Application Form (ASF1)

and medical evidence, is the capability of forms to incite affective energies (Navaro-Yashin, 2007), within the networks of actants involved.

Forms are ubiquitous within the asylum process; indeed, all applicants who access governmental asylum support must complete the 27-page ASF1 which is often done with the help of service providers and/or friends. Here, the format of the form can inhibit the spread of information including vital disclosures, by excluding certain options. Emilia illustrated this problem, when she explained that the ASF1 that she routinely filled out with applicants did not direct her to ask certain questions (see Figure 6-1):

We don't have a question in the application form asking if you've been raped or tortured which is the most common stuff, Home Office is not interested in this [...] its only mental health problems, serious physical health problems, trafficked, domestic violence, no torture, no rape, no sexual assault.

<b>Section 22. Your Special Circumstances</b>	Tell us if there are any additional reasons why we should prioritise your application
Brief description*	<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health problems <input type="checkbox"/> Serious physical health problems <input type="checkbox"/> Victim of domestic violence <input type="checkbox"/> Victim of trafficking <input type="checkbox"/> No additional reasons  <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

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Do you hold any supporting documents?*	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Details*	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

**Figure 6-1: Asylum Support Application Form (ASF1) (Home Office, 2013b)**

Drawing on her past experience that many applicants have endured torture and/or rape, Emilia overrode the options on the ASF1 by asking further questions: ‘after all these questions (*on the ASF1*), I ask “Have you been tortured or raped?” and I say nine out of ten people would say “Yeah I’ve been tortured”’. The ASF1, therefore, does not dictate exactly how one responds to it, challenging Reed’s notion of prison wardens feeling like ‘passive actors’ in

the face of the form: 'in a sense their answer is already there, forecast in the design of warrant cover and autograph' (2006, 168). Nonetheless, Emilia believed that not all caseworkers would ask the extra questions but might instead succumb to the form's agency in dictating what to write.

Gupta argues that writing is a 'form of action' and, therefore, if things are not written down they are seen as incomplete or considered not to have happened in the first place (2012: 188). Indeed, he argues that one can study forms for what they exclude just as much as what they include (2012; 145). In the case of completing an ASF1, Emilia claimed that, if applicants are not asked specific questions by those assisting them, information 'just disappears' as it is not recorded anywhere; having potentially huge effects for applicants' wellbeing and the care with which they are provided. Significantly, in order to deal with the omission of the category of 'rape' or 'torture', Emilia ticked the box 'mental health problems' whenever applicants disclosed such things. She saw this as her only option: 'I cannot put (*it*) under serious physical health problems if there is no signs (*so*) I explain in the box that the person is a victim of torture'. In doing so, the applicants' distress is still present, but the form has contained and concealed it; rape has been rendered safe, it is no longer a criminal act but a medical condition. Gupta suggests that by deliberately excluding what is unique about the circumstance of applicants, forms end up doing violence to individuals (2012: 145).

The practice of filling in forms generates effects among those involved. Emilia was driven to despair (Gupta 2012: 188; see also Graeber, 2015), by the omission of a box asking about rape. The affective underside (Navaro-Yashin, 2007) of the ASF1 is also illuminated through its categorisation of applicants' wealth. Figure 6-2 illustrates a small excerpt of the questions under the section 'material assets' that applicants are required to fill in.

asset?*	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Why not? *	<input type="text"/>
<b>Land in the UK?*</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Currency?*	<input type="text"/>
Value of the land in the UK?*	<input type="text"/>
Can you liquidate this asset?*	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Why not? *	<input type="text"/>
<b>Land outside the UK*</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Currency?*	<input type="text"/>
Value of the land outside of the UK?*	<input type="text"/>
Can you liquidate this asset?*	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Why not? *	<input type="text"/>
<b>Valuable Jewellery*</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Value?*	<input type="text"/>
Can you liquidate this	<input type="text"/>

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asset?*	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>TV/DVD/Electrical Goods</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Value?*	<input type="text"/>
Can you liquidate this asset?*	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Car/Vehicle</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Value?*	<input type="text"/>

Figure 6-2: Asylum Support Application Form (ASF1), Section 10

The preceding section asks about their ‘monetary assets’ including questions regarding savings and offshore accounts. Emilia told me how angry applicants would get with her when she asked them these questions, questions that tended to have the same, fairly obvious, answers for those who are seeking asylum in the UK and applying for government support. I assisted a few people in filling out these forms during my time in the Rise office. I always attempted to do it quietly in the corner of the often-busy office, as I could see applicants felt humiliated having to detail in specific terms all that they did not have. I also felt uncomfortable asking them.

Although not strictly a ‘form’, a document providing expert medical evidence used to corroborate applicants’ narratives in their claims also offers a good example of the affective dimension of paperwork and its role within a network of actants. In this chapter I deal with medical evidence that comes in different forms: both a report or letter from a GP and a medico-legal report (MLR), also termed a medical certificate, which:

documents, in accordance with internationally accepted guidelines for the documentation of torture, the clinical evidence of torture of an individual asylum claimant and addresses the degree of consistency between this clinical evidence and the claimants’ account of torture (Pettitt, 2011: 11).

Due to the increased suspicion and de-legitimisation of asylum applicants throughout Europe in the last few decades, medical certificates are playing a greater role in asylum claims than previously. Indeed, a significant proportion of Freedom from Torture's (FFT) workload is writing medico-legal reports (Freedom from Torture, 2011). As mentioned in Chapter One, this phenomenon has received much scholarly attention (Kelly, 2012a; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009; Ticktin, 2006; Fassin and d'Halluin, 2005, 2007). In a similar vein to Navaro-Yashin's (2007) argument, that documents originating from state institutions carry an image of proof and authenticity, so too can medical evidence (from certain organisations). The agency of medical evidence is in part due to the written word being viewed as being better at 'preserving and recording events and actions' than oral testimony, which is seen to be 'transitory and potentially more open to corruption and contradiction' (Gupta, 2012: 200). However, as is illustrated below, their agency is also dependent on who produced them<sup>57</sup> and how they are treated by other actors, highlighting the importance of looking at the network as a whole.

Immigration solicitor, Maria, told me a story of a male client she had from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who had 'quite severe torture marks all over his body'. His case had initially been refused, as his previous solicitor had acquired medical evidence from his GP rather than seeking a MLR and, therefore, Maria stated:

it was very easy for (*the adjudicator*) to refuse because it wasn't a proper medical report, (*it*) hadn't even looked at the scarring and it was basically coming from the clients' own mouth.

Her comment illustrates that medical certificates appear to be believed above applicants' own testimony (Fassin and d'Halluin, 2005). When Maria took on the case, she managed to get a supplementary report from 'one of the senior people (*at FFT*) who was so appalled at the response from the Home Office'. In addition to this document, Maria collected other reports from medical professionals, resulting in 'four different reports from four different people'. She told me:

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<sup>57</sup> For instance, FFT are the only organisation in Scotland that can affect delay on asylum decisions until the report is available (AIDA, 2015: 45).

The medico-legal report we had said that the marks which he had on his body couldn't be anything other than what he said it was, basically a hot metal rod that had been used to burn him [...] it said that he had marks to show that he had been anally raped and the mental health issues as well all basically backed (*this up*).

The case went back to the First Tier Tribunal but was refused again. Maria clarified that she was not shocked about this outcome, as she had expected it from that particular adjudicator, who was renowned for not granting asylum claims. She believed that the adjudicator had failed 'to engage with the medical reports properly, relying on issues from the first decision he had years ago' (immigration solicitor, Rifat, made a similar claim.) Indeed, despite the existence of case law which requires that medical reports are considered when making decisions on an applicant's credibility, this does not always happen (AIDA, 2015: 45). Maria, therefore, appealed and the case went to the Upper Tribunal where the hearing lasted 'between thirty seconds and a minute' and resulted in the adjudicator granting the applicant status after stating that the medical reports clearly specified that the scars on the applicant's body could not be anything other than torture.

Crucially, documents are not autonomous or self-contained affectivities (Navaro-Yashin, 2007: 81); instead, their agency is inextricably linked to their engagement in specific contexts of social relations. For instance, decision-makers can choose to view medical certificates as opinions, whilst simultaneously treating other documents, such as the transcript of an asylum interview, as factually accurate. Four years after Joseph had first claimed asylum, his case was ongoing through various appeals. The crux of the disagreement was around his use of the term 'wife' during his asylum interview. In fact, Joseph had never been legally married to his child's mother, and eventually managed to gain evidence to prove it; nevertheless, he called her his wife, because that is the term used in his country. This mention of 'wife', written and preserved in an interview transcript, was used by the Home Office to argue that his current marriage was a sham. The paperwork containing this term, although factually incorrect, therefore held a special permanence and authenticity. We saw a similar example in the previous chapter regarding Seema's interview transcript that recorded both 'summer' and 'December' as being periods in which she had stated she and Hassan had been married.



The status of medical certificates shifts. Sometimes they are merely expert *opinions* and therefore disputed (Kelly, 2012b). Thus, armed with reports, solicitors are still reliant on how adjudicators engage with them. Indeed, adjudicators, Good argues, often believe that medical experts are too ready to offer their opinion instead of sticking to the evidence (2007: 205-6). This is accentuated by the difficulty medical experts often have in assessing exactly what has caused a scar on the body, or the truth of the claimant's account of the causes of trauma. Moreover, medical opinions can conflict with legal ones, precisely because the doctor or psychiatrist's role is therapeutic, not adjudicatory (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009: 246). Sometimes, however, medical certificates are taken as fact, for instance, that scars could only be a result of torture. In either situation, expert medical reports are seen as more reliable than information from 'the clients own mouth', and, although they are regularly dismissed by decision-makers, they still act as the strongest form of supporting evidence available (Kelly, 2012b; Good, 2007; Fassin and d'Halluin, 2005). Both the ASF1 and expert medical evidence result in silencing applicants. The structure of the ASF1 can result in certain information disappearing, whereas, expert reports are seen as being a more reliable basis than applicants' words, regardless of whether they are viewed as opinion or facts.

### **The talismanic power of paper (and 'collecting' documents)**

Over a fairly rushed lunch break in a busy café close to her office, Sarah and I discussed her role at SCIN. Our conversation strayed to the endless and complicated paperwork that seemed to engulf the asylum process. Sarah stopped eating, paused, and said:

One thing I used to notice, (*asylum applicants*) kind of cling to these pieces of paper, it really kind of breaks your heart [...] they're almost faded 'cos they kind of think that this is the, if I just hold on to this then something good will happen and I remember one guy [...] he got refugee status and he held on to it so much that the paper was thin [...] 'cos it was so important.

Sarah was audibly upset, while she recounted this to me. I understood this, as I too had witnessed people who have been in the asylum process for years, carrying around tired, scruffy-looking identification documents, the ink worn

thin from being handled so much (see Image 6-2). I recognised the desperate hope that Sarah described applicants attaching to certain pieces of paperwork.

Home Office  
Festival Court  
200 Brand Street  
Glasgow  
G51 1DH  
Tel: Fax:

Port Ref: [REDACTED]  
HO Ref: [REDACTED] IS.96

IMMIGRATION ACT 1971 - NOTIFICATION OF TEMPORARY ADMISSION TO A PERSON WHO IS LIABLE TO BE DETAINED

To: [REDACTED] Date of Birth: [REDACTED] Nationality: [REDACTED]  
X [REDACTED]

LIABILITY TO DETENTION  
A You are a person who is liable to be detained<sup>1</sup>

TEMPORARY ADMISSION RESTRICTIONS  
B I hereby authorise your (further) temporary admission to the United Kingdom subject to the following restrictions<sup>2</sup>

- You **must** reside at the address shown at X above
- You **must** report to an immigration official at:  
Festival Court  
200 Brand Street  
Glasgow  
G51 1DH  
On 15 December 2014 at 15.45 hrs  
And then every 4 weeks thereafter on a Monday at 15:45 Hrs  
Until further notice when you must report to an Immigration Officer at the address shown above.
- You are NOT allowed to work or engage in any business unless you have been explicitly granted permission to do so.

Failure to comply with any of the above restrictions, without reasonable excuse, is a criminal offence<sup>3</sup>.

ANY CHANGE OF RESTRICTION  
If these restrictions are to be changed, an Immigration Officer will write to you.

- Although you have been temporarily admitted, you remain liable to be detained
- This document does not confer a right to work and must not be accepted as such.
- You have NOT been given leave to enter the United Kingdom within the meaning of the Immigration Act 1971

Date 21 November 2014 On behalf of the Secretary of State\*

<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 16 of Schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971  
<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 21 of Schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971  
<sup>3</sup> Section 24 (1)(e) of the Immigration Act 1971

IS 96

Image 6-2: Joseph's Identification.

After Joseph's asylum claim became a Human Rights claim through his marriage to Dawn, his Asylum Registration Card was taken from him and he was left with a piece of paper with the Home Office logo in the top left corner and the details of his reporting conditions as the body, as his only form of identification. This piece of A4 paper was folded up and carried around in his wallet everywhere he

went; it was extremely important to him as it constituted his only form of identification. Nonetheless, only a few grammes, dirty at the edges and worn at the folds, this document weighed down on Joseph disproportionately. It acted as a constant reminder of his uncertain and undocumented status, the shame associated with it, his lack of rights, and the bureaucracy and control under which he lived.

Both Thompson (2012) and Navaro-Yashin (2007) argue that state-produced or official paperwork carries a certain symbolic status, which is anchored in a 'visible connection to the documenting authority' (Gordillo, 2006: 164, in Thompson, 2012: 197). Moreover, a signature or stamp from a state authority contains the image of proof and authenticity (see also Gupta, 2012). Navaro-Yashin sees documents or letters as emblematic sites for the operation of statecraft, as they bear the symbol of permanence in West European contexts (2007: 84). There is an interesting complexity regarding the symbol of permanence within paperwork that documents refugee status: applicants talk about these 'papers' as being the key to a new life, feelings of safety and security, however, all forms of protection are for a limited number of years after which they are re-evaluated (Home Office, 2017d). This reinforces Thompson's point, that the perceived value of documents can lead to their fetishisation, and a belief that they hold a special form of almost magical power (2012: 197).

In this section, I show that other documents are also awarded this talismanic quality. The pieces of paper that Sarah mentions as being well-carried are not only letters confirming applicants' acceptance of asylum but the many documents applicants are given by the Home Office such as identification documents, or various bits of paperwork that applicants hope will one day contribute to getting them status, such as medical certificates, letters or statements of support and character references. Power is projected onto certain documents through rumours that exist among various actors involved in the asylum process. Moreover, desperation and the seemingly unending hope that many applicants have of eventually being granted asylum recreate this power.

Applicants may be advised by lawyers (and other people offering guidance) to collect written letters from organisations and individuals that they are in touch

with, in order to document their relationship, so that they can demonstrate that they have strong ties in the UK. If relevant, these documents can be used as supporting evidence in a claim. This collection and circulation of documents creates associations of actants from various contexts, whilst contributing to what Fuglerud (2004) terms a 'grid' of documents that decision-makers base their rulings on. These documents embroil various people connected to the asylum process into 'the enactment of bureaucratic objects' (Latour, 2005: 18). I was asked by participants on a few occasions to write letters of support for them, which meant that I became involved in their lives (and asylum cases) as something more than just a researcher.

The practice of collecting documents for an asylum claim was regularly talked about and encouraged among applicants and others; Thompson (2012) discusses similar practices in the Tanzanian refugee camp where she conducted research. Hassan, a Pakistani asylum applicant, explained where he collected letters of support from:

(*You*) get a letter from Mosque [...] then Home Office will get an idea that this person will go to the Mosque frequently, (*you*) go to your near and dear ones, like any persons you know and try to get a letter from an English person that you are frequently visiting [...] if you go to the library get a letter from that library, if you go to any organisation, if you go to any charity get a letter from that.

Hassan seemed to be collecting these documents to build as strong a case as possible. It was not entirely clear who had told Hassan to do so; I imagine that it was fellow applicants that had advised him to collect letters of support as there appeared to be a trend among applicants to 'collect' written documents to 'evidence' various aspects of their lives. Indeed, much of the paperwork discussed in this chapter existed in an air of uncertainty for some; I heard various participants express their confusion over what exactly certain documents were, in what situations they were to be used, and what value they held.

Ray, also described the continual nature of documenting life whilst he was in the asylum process:

You have to show what you were doing [...] because we (*him and his partner*) were studying, and integrating, contributing, for anything

and we showed the paper [...] I did a lot of stuff with a lot of projects, with policy as well, we're going to school to teach people and lots of stuff for SCIN, (so) they wrote a lot of testimony and when they give (it) to the Home Office they agree and that's why they give me status.

Not only do these two extracts illustrate how widespread the documentation of life was for Ray and Hassan, whether necessary, or just perceived as such. They also exemplify the value and power that both men attributed to certain documents. Indeed, Ray believed that being able to demonstrate, through written documents, his contribution to British society meant that the Home Office granted him protection. Applicants often wanted to show me their various documents in addition to telling me about them. Whilst this may be due to them feeling that I would not believe them if they could not produce something, or that they are so accustomed to having to provide documentation for everything that they do it automatically, it highlights the value they placed in the material object of paperwork. The phenomenon of applicants 'collecting' documents also illuminates the dependent relationships that those in the asylum process have with people who produce the various letters and testimonies. Sarah mentioned how difficult it was when SCIN staff were asked for letters of support from people, whom they had only met once or twice; people who, she assumed, had only attended the drop-in in order to get such a document. The point here is that, applicants' need, perceived or otherwise, to document their lives whilst in the asylum process impacts on their everyday interactions.

Particularly prized among the documents applicants may collect are medical certificates. Many applicants that I came across aimed to get some form of medical certification due to the 'real or imagined authority conveyed by them' (Fassin and d'Halluin, 2005: 598). Early on in his claim, Joseph was keen to get a psychological report to *prove* that he was depressed which, he believed, would add to the credibility of his claim. Amir, a very distressed Iranian applicant, told me that 'if doctor give you the paper permission, Home Office give you the support'. Amir had had no luck in getting a letter from his doctor, yet his belief in the value of this type of documentation did not diminish. Hassan and Seema were also under the impression, due to advice that they received from other applicants, that a letter from one's GP holds a certain amount of power. Hassan believed that a doctor's report stating that one is 'mentally distressed' could cause the Home Office to 'linger' on a claim, allowing more time for the

applicant to prepare their case. In contrast to the waiting discussed in Chapter Nine, waiting, in this instance, was seen as positive. Hassan and Seema were advised by other applicants to visit their GP regularly so that there would be a continual documentation of their 'suffering', although I was unclear what precisely they meant by their suffering. In addition, they informed me that just being able to evidence to the Home Office that one regularly visits the GP provides sufficient proof to gain practical support such as a bus pass. Whilst there may be some basis for the relationship between a letter from a medical professional and applicants' support (see Matipa's story below), I have never heard of anyone being granted a bus pass in this way.

However, according to the medical professionals I spoke to, medical evidence is often given excessive value by applicants. Rosa, a member of the Health Bridging Team, declared that it is a 'myth' that a medical diagnosis is helpful in an asylum claim. She therefore often refused to provide reports when solicitors asked, explaining:

Well first of all because I'll tell people this is not going to assist your asylum claim in any way and I don't want to be seen as a vehicle for that ... don't get me wrong, I have done a few letters for people but it's been quite specific and I've been quite clear about that as well. I think if you get into it you'll get people asking you all the time, which I really don't want to do, in certain cases I will do it, if that person is somebody who is traumatised I'll do it then, I'll see that person's need and if that builds into that then that's okay, but definitely not routinely.

Although Rosa was sceptical about the value of medical professionals providing supporting documents for asylum claims and saw it as interrupting therapeutic relationships she would do it in certain cases. Fassin and Rechtman tell a similar story and suggest that one reason that medical professionals might provide certification despite reservations about doing so is that they still *hope* that the document will contribute to a successful outcome for the applicant (2009: 246).

Juliette, a GP in her late 40s who worked in the East End of Glasgow where her patients consisted of many people going through the asylum process, was also unconvinced by the power held by reports from doctors, especially when evidencing mental distress:

I would say actually from personal experience that writing down that someone is depressed is going to make absolutely no difference to their asylum claim <laughs> [...] I'm just very sceptical about it. I think the only thing that could make a difference, and even then doesn't always, is physical scarring and kind of things like that and even then I've seen the Home Office completely discount it, not actually discount it but make something else more important that then discounts it effectively.

Significantly, what both extracts show is the disparity between how medical evidence is seen and valued by applicants (and some others), how it is viewed by those that can produce them and how it is treated within the legal system. Appadurai argues that knowledge regarding the production and consumption of a commodity diverges, becoming partial and even contradictory, as the temporal (and I would add socio-cultural) distance increases between its producers and consumers (1986: 56; see also Thompson, 2012). The bureaucratic division of labour, detailed in the previous chapter, plays a crucial role in this (Appadurai, 1986). Thus, the distance between applicants, medical professionals and decision-makers allows medical documents to become somewhat phantasmatic in the eyes of those that desire them; as applicants' project magical powers onto official documents (see Gupta, 2012; Thompson; 2012; Navaro-Yashin, 2007).

Nonetheless, there are times in which a letter from a medical professional *can* do something. One of the eligibility criteria for Section 4 support is that the individual is unable to leave the UK due to a physical impediment to travel which can be evidenced by a letter from a doctor stating that they are 'unfit to travel'. The Scottish Refugee Council warns applicants that: 'this criterion is very strict and you must have a signed medical declaration from a doctor stating that you are "unfit to travel". Most medical problems will not be considered serious enough' (Scottish Refugee Council, 2017). During a day I spent at Rise, Matipa came in to ask for help as she had received a letter from the Home Office informing her that they would be stopping her Section 4 support. She had come to the end of a six-month course of medication which, with a statement from her doctor, had provided evidence that she was unfit to fly. Matipa explained that she needed to get another letter from her doctor in order to clarify that she had begun another course of the medication. A friend at Rise telephoned her doctor to request this letter. Whilst the doctor was annoyed at the prospect of

having to write another letter, she agreed to do so after it was explained that the Home Office had requested evidence of Matipa's current health in order for her to keep her accommodation.

The complexity of the asylum process in addition to the differing opinions as to the agency of documents and the various ways in which actors engage with them creates an air of confusion, sometimes translated into a magical power (Thompson, 2012), around paperwork within the asylum process. This confusion often manifests in applicants 'collecting' documents in the hope that they will have the power to do *something* for their claim.

### **The affective underside of documents: paperwork as protective and panic-inducing**

In Chapter Five, it was argued that applicants are translated by immigration officials into 'a series of issues materialised in a set of documents bundled together and carrying a particular registration number' rather than individuals with their own stories (Fuglerud, 2004: 36). The same could be applied in the context of solicitors with their clients, as Paul illustrated:

I guess you have to emotionally detach, it's awful to say but you find yourself looking through everything and "Okay so you say you were tortured, and what exactly happened?", and then "Alright, thanks, yeah, I'm noting that down", next client, "Ok so you say you're a bit depressed".

Paul viewed this type of detachment as necessary in order to cope with his job, a notion that is built upon in Chapter Eight. Here, I contend that material paperwork has a significant role to play in this detachment. Farrell notes that solicitors may look at their files or papers instead of their clients, as a way to protect themselves from difficult accounts (2012: 140; see also Garot, 2004), just as Goody claims, that through the physical act of recording, writing or typing narratives onto paper, the solicitor and applicant are distanced from each other (1986, in Gupta, 2012: 141-2). In this way, emotional distance is aided by the paperwork that metamorphoses the applicant, sitting across the desk from the solicitor, into a bundle of documents.



To further illustrate this point, I return to decision-making in asylum claims discussed in Chapter Five. Multiple documents, such as reports, letters of support and testimonies are active within the asylum decision-making process. Together they create 'grids' of documents (Fuglerud, 2004), and may be the only source of knowledge that decision-makers have on which to base their decision. During initial asylum decisions, decision-makers rely on documents in the form of asylum legislation and guidance. Immigration official, Stacy, explained:

Although it's you that makes the decision we have guidance [...] (*applicants*) have to meet the legal requirements that are set out in terms of what qualifies for asylum [...] we're bound by pieces of case law [...] the one bit that will often fall to the individual is credibility 'cos there's no real, you know, you can't, tick a box for certain individuals as to whether they're telling the truth or not.

Stacy told me about the process of making credibility assessments for unaccompanied children's asylum claims. She admitted that she found it hard:

That's still a child sitting across from you that has somehow managed to end up in the UK on their own, so you know it's just there's an element of that that's just a bit heart-breaking regardless of what their claim is.

But she reaffirmed that having the legislation to refer to allowed her to 'have a degree of empathy or whatnot but ... not let that impact (*her decision*)'. She stated:

I suppose it is that you know the legislation does very much account for these things maybe not in the same nice warm way that we sit talking about it but you know there is legislation that is designed to look out for the best interest of the child and whatnot so I suppose it's just about factoring it in [...] it is still there to look out for them, but yeah that can be difficult ... particularly if you're making a negative decision it's not easy.

This brief account demonstrates how documents, specifically written legislation and guidelines around international protection, act as a validating mediator, creating a distance between the decision-maker and their decision. These documents, therefore, enable the decision-maker to detach from the individual whose case it is and, thus, allow them to better 'cope' when refusing an asylum claim.

Graeber argues that bureaucratic knowledge is commonly schematised in a way that invariably means ignoring all the subtleties of real social existence (2015: 75). Medical certificates, like others documents utilised in decision-making, such as written testimonies or interview transcripts, may, therefore, contain a protective power for decision-makers; a power resulting in the negation of much of the sensory story (Baillot et al., 2012). Applicants' tones of voice, pauses, sighs, moans, their facial expressions, body language, tears and distress are edited and translated into words on a page. This process distances applicants' suffering bodies and/or minds from audiences of the document.<sup>58</sup>

Whilst the distancing effect of paperwork may aid some actors in carrying out their roles, Immigration solicitor, Rifat, shared his frustrations regarding how written reports can create a distance between applicants and adjudicators:

You obviously are probably party to the evidence in a different way than the judge would be, so for example when (*a client is*) coming in (*to a solicitors' office*) and giving their statement, you're hearing their words, you're writing them down but I think in the written format it kind of gets lost sometimes in the tribunal because it's just put up and a judge reads it, perhaps he doesn't read it in its entirety.

Baillot et al. (2012) heard similar views from immigration solicitors. However, it was not only immigration solicitors that were upset by the potential emotional distance that paperwork can bring. Joseph's wife, Dawn, also felt angry and powerless against the role paperwork played in decision-making. In the extract below, she talks about this regarding the adjudicator questioning the legitimacy of her marriage:

(*Adjudicators*) don't see our wedding pictures, they don't see the videos, they don't see the cards that we make for Christmas and New Year, they don't see my husband getting up and cooking at seven o'clock in the morning so I've got food to take to work [...] they don't see him putting it in the little container and putting in a wee chocolate bar and wrapping it up and having it sitting there for me to go for work, they don't see him cleaning ... so I feel that they make decisions on just what they read, and whether they dae read it or no who knows, who absolutely knows.

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<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, it is important to note that applicants may be required to perform an oral version of the medical report in court. Performances of suffering are discussed in the next chapter.

Dawn went on to tell me how she wished she could invite the adjudicator to their home to show him their life together. Moreover, Dawn, Rifat and Maria queried whether the decision-makers actually engaged with the paperwork that was submitted. As discussed in the previous section, documents are engaged with and responded to in many ways; adjudicators have the power to choose whether to read certain pieces of ‘evidence’.

The above has illustrated the capacity that documents have for creating a distance between individuals involved in the asylum process. Another aspect of using paperwork within the decision-making process is the ability for the Home Office to send applicants letters to detail decisions rather than telling them face-to-face. Stacy explained the effect of the changing models in which the Home Office dealt with asylum claims, from NAM to, what was utilised at the time of my fieldwork, the ‘Asylum Operating Model’:

When I started, you served your decision in person to somebody [...] (*having*) to tell somebody “Yeah, we’ve refused you and you’re now liable for removal” was never nice ... then on the other hand when you were telling somebody they’ve been granted it was lovely, it used to make your day <laughs>. When they started to do away with that (*model*) I suppose it did make it a little bit easier in that you were putting a letter in the post.

While posting letters detailing decisions to applicants might ease the emotional labour (see Chapter Eight) that immigration official must do, many applicants spoke about how difficult it was waiting for these letters. Both Joseph, and his wife, Dawn, spent many anxious hours, days and months waiting for decisions from the Home Office or the courts. Dawn told me:

I mean there’s sometimes when that paper lands (*on the doormat*) and your stomach’s pure churning and your heart’s pure beating, oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, but you just need to be like let’s hope and pray it’s what we’re wanting.

The content of ‘that paper’ lands with a metaphorical thud on the floor. This is because the weight of the document has the potential to reframe their future (Yngvesson and Coutin (2006) in Thompson, 2012: 197), by either validating Joseph’s suffering or threatening his deportation. It is not just the actual typed words on these letters that provoke fear and worry but anxiety is printed onto

these envelopes with invisible ink and posted through applicants' letterboxes. On one occasion Joseph received a letter from the Home Office on the day of his and Dawn's anniversary. They had planned to go out for the evening and so Joseph insisted that they not open the letter but instead put it away in a drawer to be opened the following day. Choosing not to engage with this letter immediately resulted in a stressful evening spent imagining the possible contents of the letter. Contrasting this example with that of adjudicators seemingly not engaging with documents illustrates the unequal affective energies (Navaro-Yashin, 2007) that paperwork has for different people involved in the asylum process.

Due to the lengthy, and often opaque, timescales in which the Home Office operates, letters may arrive unexpectedly and, as described above, the content of these letters is never known prior to opening. Furthermore, due to the bureaucratic-legal complexity of the asylum process, the content potentially remains unknown after opening. Matipa often came into Rise announcing that she was 'very stressed' after receiving what she described as 'threatening'<sup>59</sup> letters, often from the Home Office but also from other agencies such as Orchard and Shipman. Indeed, she felt fear and panic every time she received an official letter creating a situation in which each time she heard the postman deliver anything she became extremely worried, despite the fact that the content might be mundane. Letters, therefore, despite their origin, transmitted an effect of nervousness for Matipa. This was spoken about by other applicants and is mirrored almost exactly by Navaro-Yashin who describes the 'rushes of panic' a Turkish-Cypriot experienced when receiving correspondence with state bodies (2007: 82).

Navaro-Yashin's (2007) description of the London-based community centre used by Turkish-Cypriot immigrants also draws many similarities with Rise's office in the way in which the community centre workers help immigrants cope with the affective documents they encounter. What Navaro-Yashin (2007) does not discuss is the affect that these documents have on the people assisting in this office. Matipa regularly made the hour and a half journey to Rise and once there, Rise volunteers assisted her (and many others) with a wide variety of

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<sup>59</sup> Graeber highlights that violence is not just a physical *act* but includes the *threat* (2015: 67).

paperwork. These documents incite affective energies in the friends at Rise in addition to applicants. Oren told me about a time that he was given a document containing ‘the most graphic depiction of torture’ he had ever read, by an individual who had come seeking help with his claim. He recounted:

*(it)* included things that are so horrible that I wouldn’t even say them again, I didn’t say them to anyone afterwards, I’ve never even, you know, *(seen anything as bad in)* horror movies, I’ve never dreamed of anything as horrible as this.

Whilst there are times in which reading applicants’ accounts can be less emotionally taxing for the audience than hearing them as mentioned above, some documents affect the reader enormously. Oren’s vivid account of this experience was evidently still with him months after the event. I would argue that this was due to, the different way in which he engaged with applicants, compared to how solicitors or medical professionals might. This may be a result of his political and moral position in relation to applicants, for instance as ‘friends’ rather than ‘service users’ as detailed in Chapter One, but also his lack of professional training in terms of how to deal with such images.

Nonetheless, whilst paperwork often induced fear in applicants and can spread distress to those working with them, some individuals found creative coping strategies. Anika, an Indian woman in her 40s who had been in the asylum process for years, was a frequent visitor to Rise. She would often come into their office before and/or after reporting to the Home Office. One morning, when Oren and I were in the office, Anika came through the door, marched straight over to Oren and exclaimed, ‘Wait till you see my love letter’. She scrambled around in her bag, ‘I have a beautiful love letter from my lover; wait till you see it’. She pulled out the letter and handed it to Oren. The letter had the familiar Home Office logo in the top left-hand corner, and it read (something like), ‘Dear Anika, your accommodation is being terminated and you are due to be evicted in one week’. Oren and I looked at each other, sharing, I think, a similar admiration towards Anika’s reaction to this letter. Anika had received many letters containing ‘bad news’ during her time in the asylum process and often, I learnt, reacted in the same way. Here, the affective underside of the document is manifest in irony and humour. Moreover, Anika’s projection of her document brought joviality into the Rise office, illustrating the wider network of affect.

## Conclusion

Much of the paperwork examined above may retire into the metal filing cabinets at Rise, into solicitors' bundles on the floor of their offices, or among other pieces of paper packed into plastic bags in applicants' homes. Indeed, Gupta argues that 'the vast majority of bureaucratic writing is never read, even by other bureaucrats whose job it is to monitor subordinates. It is a form of production without a consumer' (2012: 152). To a certain extent, the paperwork discussed also moves through and is transformed by this thesis:

To study documents [...] is by definition also to study how ethnographers themselves know. The document becomes at once the ethnographic object, an analytical category, and a methodological orientation (Riles, 2006: 7).

Indeed, anthropologists are embedded in the production and use of documents just as those we study (Hull, 2012b; Riles, 2006). I produced my own paperwork, as I transcribed audio-recorded conversations with participants and noted observations into field diaries (see Image 6-3) (Hull, 2012a; Riles, 2006). These documents then acted as memory aids when collecting, coding, analysing and writing this thesis. They became active agents in the production of knowledge (Prior, 2008), as I extracted words (my own and others) from their original contexts to create something new. In my office, I was physically distant from those I conducted my research with. Initially, this distance did not make it any easier to emotionally deal with the stories I had heard and experiences I had shared; I found it harder reading through interview transcripts on a computer screen and fieldnotes in diaries than I did hearing participants' stories directly. In my office, I was no longer able to reach out, touch and hug individuals, instead, I was engaging with them through written words. However, through the process of writing, participants' words are increasingly edited and slowly replaced with my own analysis. Therefore, the individuals I write about fall further and further away. This is an uncomfortable feeling yet one that a researcher interested in the affective life of documents must attend to.



**Image 6-3: All nine fieldwork diaries. Glasgow, 2015**

Documents as material objects of law, statecraft and the more mundane, carry, contain and conceal distress within the asylum process. Yet, crucially, documents are not autonomous or self-contained affectivities (Navaro-Yashin, 2007; instead, as I have argued above, their agency is inextricably linked to their engagement in specific contexts of social relations. For instance, forms and reports may categorise applicants in certain ways, but human actants can override, to a certain extent, the text boxes that make up forms, and reports can be dismissed or ignored. Paperwork has an affective underside (Navaro-Yashin, 2007), that is manifest in various ways throughout the asylum process including the comfort guidance brings to decision-makers and the fear that applicants experience when a letter comes through their letterbox. Uncertainty regarding the purpose, value and effectiveness of different forms of paperwork and documents has been a theme throughout this chapter. While this uncertainty can lead to applicants (and others) projecting a talismanic power onto certain documents, it produces frustration in others, such as solicitors who are powerless regarding how reports are engaged with by adjudicators. By viewing paperwork as affective actants involved in the passing, or inhibiting, personal information, this chapter has illuminated the spread of distress among the network of people that make up the asylum process. This chapter has focused on paperwork, the materiality of bureaucracy (Hull, 2012b); the next chapter deals specifically with the spread of distress through applicants' verbal disclosures.

## Chapter 7 : ‘I am depressed and distressed, I have both’ - Disclosing Distress

### Introduction

Disclosures involve a particular kind of telling: ‘the action or fact of disclosing or revealing new or secret information; the action of making something openly known’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2016). ‘Secret’ information suggests that disclosures involve exposing something personal or intimate. In lieu of specific written evidence or documentation, asylum applicants’ disclosures of fear are fundamental to their claim. A ‘well-founded *fear* of persecution’ (Article 1A (2) of the 1951 Convention, my emphasis), must be established in order for the applicant to be granted refugee status. However, over the course of my fieldwork, I found that applicants would also often disclose very intimate and personal information to many other actors involved in the asylum process. This chapter focuses on these disclosures; it not only considers the ‘official narratives’ that applicants tell decision-makers but also applicants’ ‘everyday’ disclosures of distress divulged to multiple different audiences including Rise members, solicitors, doctors, and myself. Indeed, disclosure is inextricably linked to the ethnographic research process and is explored further in relation to ethics in Chapter Ten (see also Kokanovic and Philip, 2014; Wolf-Meyer, 2014; Buchbinder, 2010).

I work on the premise that, for applicants, distress is inseparable from the asylum process; a notion that was supported by many participants occupying various roles. Stacy, an immigration official, who conducted asylum interviews, stated, ‘In my experience almost all your interviews are going to involve some degree of distress, everybody that you interview is claiming to need international protection’. Rise member, Oren, told me:

I presume that every new person (*that comes into Rise*) is suffering, because it almost always seems to be true [...] even just to fill that category ‘I am an asylum seeker’ is to be a fugitive, it’s to be in mental distress.

Whilst highlighting the pervasiveness of asylum applicants’ distress, Stacy and Oren’s comments also illustrate the crucial role of audiences in both witnessing



and interpreting disclosures. Disclosures are necessarily dialogic; the audience affects how the discloser tells (Davis and Manderson, 2014; Buchbinder, 2010). Indeed, I follow Manderson, who states that disclosures ‘tells us much about the teller, the witness, and the social times in which such acts of disclosure take place, as well as of the secrets that are disclosed’ (2014: 1).

Just as we saw distress being carried, contained and concealed through paperwork in the previous chapter, disclosures also have social lives (Manderson, 2014); once told, the discloser does not have full control over that information which can be revealed to others in numerous ways. Intimate information is communicated through both human and non-human actants, including interpreters, service providers, friends, family, letters, documents and medical reports. Indeed, disclosures are not necessarily verbal but can be embodied or made by proxy, for instance, openly taking medication to illustrate a specific health status (Manderson, 2014: 4; Squire, 2014), or providing a document for someone to read. This chapter however focuses primarily on verbal disclosures.

An important caveat to this chapter, and a challenge that lies at the heart of asylum claims, is that some things are unknowable. Elaine Scarry notably argues that pain is incommunicable using language; ‘physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it’ (1985: 4). Therefore, a full disclosure of distress may never be possible. Disclosures may only ever be half-stories existing alongside multiple, different narratives. For the purpose of this thesis, the existence of unavailable knowledge and feelings is less of an issue, as I am not interested in establishing or exploring the veracity of claims individuals made about themselves, but the process through which those claims, both officially and in the everyday, are made. Disclosing distress, therefore, adds to the uncertainty that surrounds the asylum process portrayed throughout this thesis.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first considers the ‘official’ disclosures that applicants are expected to communicate in asylum interviews. Much has been written on the obstacles involved in this process and thus, this section also provides an overview of the literature. The second section is concerned with expectations of actors on both sides of disclosures, that is, applicants and the various audiences. These expectations are related to knowledge of the asylum process, one’s own ‘culture’ and ideas of others’

'culture'. The third section looks at how and where applicants repeat their disclosures of distress and argues that there is often little space for them to retain privacy. As a researcher, I too am responsible in creating spaces in which applicants once again repeat parts of their stories. Pre-fieldwork, I had carefully thought about my role and relationships with applicants and pointedly did not enquire into details of their past or reasons for claiming asylum. Nevertheless, I still felt very self-aware that my role, as a researcher, hindered applicants' ability to maintain privacy. The final section of this chapter explores the requirement of applicants to present a 'victim' narrative and how this sits uncomfortably with how they may wish to present themselves. Throughout the chapter, I hope to illuminate the 'assaults on personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 1), that exists in the process of applicants disclosing intimate information. Applicants are forced, in many situations, not only to tell others intimate information but to risk their disclosures being interrogated and disbelieved. Crucially, the asylum system necessitates the disclosure of distress, yet, at the same time, impedes various ways of expressing it.

## **Disclosing fear of persecution**

Asylum applicants are 'expected to unveil themselves, to recount their histories, and to exhibit their wounds' (Fassin and d'Halluin, 2005: 606). They are supposed to disclose all relevant information regarding their claim early in the process in a one-off asylum interview with an immigration official they will have likely never met (Bögner et al., 2010:532). The screening interview provides a space where basic information is taken in order to establish the claimant's nationality and identity without probing for details of the claim. Nevertheless, applicants' silence at this stage has been used to undermine their credibility later on (Baillot et al., 2012: 276). It is at the asylum interview that applicants are expected to 'give a full account' of what happened to them (Home Office, 2014b: 11). Bögner et al. found that, in the UK, immigration officials expected applicants to have been briefed on the guidelines regarding these interviews and therefore understand when, where and what they should disclose, yet, for many applicants, this was not the case (2010: 528). However, Baillot et al. found that many of the immigration adjudicators, immigration officials, legal representatives, NGO workers and interpreters they interviewed thought that

applicants ‘often fail[ed] to appreciate the importance of full and early disclosure’ (2012: 287; see also Good, 2007).

In any context, disclosing sensitive information, especially regarding violence, is always complicated and the discloser may find many reasons not to tell (Baillot et al., 2012). For asylum applicants, disclosing intimate information brings numerous additional challenges, which have been attended to by many scholars (Kelly, 2012a, 2012b; Baillot et al., 2009, 2012, 2013; Bögner et al., 2010; Good, 2007; Herlihy and Turner, 2007; Shuman and Bohmer, 2004; Blommaert, 2001). The emphasis of much of this body of literature is around the procedural and/or legal aspects of disclosures within the asylum process such as Home Office interviews, roles of solicitors, and appeal hearings, which I detail some of below. The majority of this chapter, however, deals with asylum applicants’ ‘everyday’ disclosures, yet, similar barriers highlighted within the literature exist in these contexts too.

Even if applicants know to ‘give as much detail as possible’ (Home Office, 2014b: 11), at the asylum interview, it does not mean they are able to do so, due to other physical, cultural, temporal and emotional obstacles. For instance, the physical space of the interview room can impede disclosures; including the noise levels from adjoining rooms; delays and/or disruptions within the interview (Baillot et al., 2012: 278); in addition, the often small and bare rooms can be reminiscent of previous places of torture (Bögner et al., 2010: 521). I visited the Home Office Reporting Centre in Glasgow to conduct an interview with immigration official, Stacy; she chose what she described as ‘the more family-friendly’ interview room to host our conversation. The small room had bright yellow walls, each with a framed picture including a world map and a close-up photograph of clay pots. On the left as you walked in, there was a small round table surrounded by three plastic chairs and an audio-recording machine next to it. In the other corner of the room were two little blue sofas with a couple of cushions covered in what might be marketed as an ‘ethnic’ design. After our conversation, Stacy led me down a corridor marked by doors that lead to other interview rooms. She showed me an interview room that was used for

'enforcements'<sup>60</sup>. The room was painted bright blue, there were no pictures on the walls and it was lit with a harsh white bulb that was 'for biometrics'<sup>61</sup> Stacy said. She stated 'this is one of the least friendly rooms'; it was easy to imagine it not being conducive to feeling safe and able to disclose intimate details.

The individual immigration official interviewing applicants can also affect if and how one discloses. At the time of my fieldwork, asylum interviews in Glasgow were conducted by immigration officials whose selection was based on their availability. Applicants could request the gender of their interviewer in advance and 'where feasible' this was accommodated (Home Office, 2014b); however, claimants were not always aware of this option (Bögner et al., 2010: 527). Crucially, failure to access a specific gender of interviewer can impede certain disclosures (Baillot et al., 2012: 279; Good, 2007: 191). Nonetheless, it is significant to note that viewing gender-matching as a guaranteed method in which to support disclosures may further harm the credibility of those who do not disclose information when they have an interviewer of the same gender (Baillot et al., 2012: 279).<sup>62</sup> Similar issues exist when interpreters are present at interviews; their gender, social position, religion, dialect and so on can have an impact on how comfortable applicants feel in disclosing information via someone who is likely to be from the same country of origin as them. There is not the scope in this thesis to explore interpreting, however, it is important to mention that interpreters' roles entail 'far more than "mere" translation' (Good, 2007: 154) as they play an active role in interpreting words, meanings and cultures. But of course, this adds to the scope for mistranslation of words, meanings and cultures; considering women's disclosures of rape, Baillot et al. highlight that interpreters either interpret euphemisms or translate rape into less explicit terms so as not to have to use what may be viewed as an unpleasant term (2012: 285-6).

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<sup>60</sup> Immigration Enforcement, set up in 2012, deal with those who have committed immigration offences and enforce the removal of 'illegal' migrants.

<sup>61</sup> The Asylum Biometric System was introduced in 2010 to include biometric information in visas and residency permits.

<sup>62</sup> I do not fully explore gender within this thesis, for an overview on anthropological debates on gender and migration see Brettell, 2015.

The asylum process pays little attention to the building of trust that may be necessary for applicants to feel able to disclose sensitive and personal details to immigration officials. The Home Office conducts a screening interview as soon as a claim is made and the asylum interview 'soon after' (Home Office, 2017b); however, as we see in Chapter Nine 'soon after' does not describe how many people might interpret this phrase. Having had many years to reflect on her asylum interview, Matipa told me that when she first claimed she was 'too traumatised' to tell her story: 'I couldn't even speak, I was just crying all the time, just crying'. Matipa's experience is supported by Bögner et al.'s findings that applicants' traumatised state makes it difficult to disclose personal information at asylum interviews (2010: 525). Indeed, many applicants have experienced or witnessed torture before entering the UK (Bögner et al., 2010), and therefore may begin the asylum process with pre-existing trauma. Bögner et al. (2010) draw on interviews with asylum applicants, most of whom were recruited from a traumatic stress clinic in London, to explore how the interpersonal, situational and contextual factors of the asylum interview impede or facilitate disclosures. They discovered that most applicants found it difficult to disclose sensitive information at the asylum interview for reasons including: feeling too traumatised; fear of official figures; shame and wanting to avoid remembering painful events (2010: 525). Despite the wealth of evidence concerning the effect of trauma on disclosure, such as an inability to provide a clear and coherent narrative and its effect on memory (Herlihy and Turner, 2007), trauma is often given limited credence in decision-making (Baillot et al. 2012: 283; Herlihy and Turner, 2007). Indeed, the asylum interviewing process is designed for people who can disclose information in a coherent way and within the designated time and space, that is, at the screening and asylum interviews, which Baillot et al. argue is 'somewhat unrealistic' (2012: 227) when one considers the trauma that many applicants experience.

In addition to any pre-existing trauma applicants experience, they can find the asylum process itself difficult to deal with. Shuman and Bohmer (2004) highlight how applicants may lack an understanding regarding the complex workings of the asylum process, which has significant effects on their engagement and/or their ability to disclose. Furthermore, they argue this gap in cultural understanding is 'itself a source of suffering and trauma' for asylum applicants

(2004: 410). This is compounded by the distress involved in having their narratives disbelieved (Baillot et al., 2012: 284). In any situation, disclosures are subject to the recipient's reaction to what has been disclosed (Wolf-Meyer, 2014: 117; see also Goffman, 1959); applicants' disclosures, however, are open to cross-examination as they are judged by decision-makers for validity according to refugee convention criteria (Baillot et al., 2012: 280). In order to tell their stories, applicants must risk their intimate disclosures being trivialised, institutionally disbelieved (Kelly, 2012a), or simply ignored (Baillot et al. 2012, 2013). Das argues that denying another's pain is an act of violence (1997: 94). Furthermore, the context of suspicion and de-legitimisation that, today, surrounds asylum applicants, see Chapter One, impacts on how applicants disclose information and to whom in both formal and informal settings. Indeed, the risk, or at least perceived risk, of having one's disclosure being disbelieved may, in practice, result in applicants not telling.

Asylum claims are judged on applicants' credibility; importantly, credibility is synonymous with believability and trustworthiness, that is, something that cannot be *known* for certain (Kelly, 2012b). Despite UNHCR guidelines stating that applicants' concealment of parts of their story should not in itself result in incredibility (Bögner et al., 2010: 520), in practice, late or non-disclosures often raise questions around the believability of their narratives (Baillot et al., 2012). Notwithstanding the obstacles to applicants disclosing distressing information such as: a lack of knowledge of the asylum process; the interview room and way the interview is conducted; the gender of the interviewer and demographics of interpreter; the lack of time to build any trust; and any previous experiences of trauma, many respondents in Baillot et al.'s study believed that the screening and asylum interviews gave applicants sufficient space to disclose trauma (2012: 276). More worryingly, most of the immigration officials they interviewed worked on the premise that if an applicant's suffering is genuine it will be disclosed at the earliest opportunity available (2012: 279). At the most fundamental level, applicants' ways of understanding and portraying distress are not always compatible with the legal and bureaucratic culture of the immigration authorities and their manuals and guidelines regarding convention reasons for claiming asylum, for instance, defining experiences of rape in terms of political aggression or gender violence rather than a personal attack (Shuman

and Bohmer, 2004: 396). Indeed, Good argues that asylum applicants' narratives may simply not fit within the UK's legal framework of laying out the sequence of events (2007: 192-3). The next section widens this notion of compatibility to other actors that applicants come across when in the asylum process.

## **Where 'cultures' and expectations collide**

The Home Office provides guidance for decision-makers regarding the interpretation of applicants' emotions states:

Demeanour should never be used for the basis of a decision on plausibility, or otherwise to assess credibility. Whether a claimant appears tearful, nervous, stressed or calm and collected at interview is irrelevant (Home Office, 2015c: 18).

These guidelines aim to attend to different cultural understandings and presentations of distress particularly because the 'emotional condition [fear] is at the heart of the legal definition' (Herlihy and Turner, 2007: 268). However, the seemingly simple criterion on which asylum claims are based, 'a well-founded fear of persecution', is complicated by complex cultural understandings of both fear and persecution (Shuman and Bohmer, 2004: 394).<sup>63</sup> Shuman and Bohmer (2004) describe the asylum process as being a:

cultural performance in which applicants, [immigration] officials, lawyers, and others who assist in the process [...] renegotiate identities and reconfigure different conceptions of trauma, of suffering, and, especially, of what asylum means (2004: 410).

They argue that the communication difficulties between applicants and others are a result of the different 'cultures' that intersect the asylum process, for instance, that of immigration officials, lawyers, applicants and so on. I argue that these 'cultures' result in both conflicting expectations and discourses of distress.

Disclosing distress is always disclosing a particular knowledge of distress: 'pain is always part of a particular culture, the expression of a local world' (Das et al.,

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<sup>63</sup> An exploration of the emotional category 'fear' is beyond the scope of this thesis, see Lutz (1988), for an anthropological discussion of fear.

2001: 20). Nichter's (1981) concept of idioms of distress explains how people express distress based on the means of expression that are available to them dictated by the micropolitics of the context. Thus, for productive communication, it is important that audiences understand the disclosers' idioms of distress. Nonetheless, it is not only idioms of distress that is an issue here but multilingual communication in general. SCIN worker, Frankie, felt that some applicants could only really express their distress in their own language (highlighting a gap in this thesis). I only spoke to applicants in English, yet they talked about distress in various ways. I frequently heard applicants using the term 'depression': being 'depressed'; feeling 'depressed'; 'having depression'; Matipa told me 'I am depressed and distressed, I have both'. Matipa often described distress somatically, she explained 'there's this inside panic [...] I nearly thought I was going to have a heart attack, I just felt pain deep down in my heart'. 'Depression' however meant different things and was expressed in a variety of ways. Nichter highlights that the use and reframing of biomedical disease categories and terminology can serve as an idiom of distress; 'distress may be expressed by stating that one is experiencing an experiential state associated with a biomedical disease category that has or has not been diagnosed by a practitioner' (2010: 406). Indeed, it has been argued that framing distress in terms of a medical diagnosis portrays the discloser as deserving of support and/or assistance (Kokanovic and Philip, 2014).

Hassan separated the depression he felt, 'I have developed a lot of depression in the sense that what will happen to us', from the 'financial depression' he believed other Pakistani asylum applicants experienced. This was, however, interrelated with his feelings of suspicion towards other applicants' motives, as mentioned in Chapter One. Hassan also spoke about distress in spiritual terms; 'Muslims when they do have any problems, any tensions, they turn their attention towards God, they don't believe in medicines, but they believe in spiritual awakening'. Amir told me that '[In Iran] there is no depression only problem is Government', highlighting that in Iran distress for him was purely a political phenomenon. In addition, applicants spoke of distress in 'emotional terms', SCIN worker, Lucia, told me that she often heard applicants talk of: 'anger, or sadness, or loneliness, or fear, people will often express (*mental distress*) as being stressed out, or just express some form of frustration'. What is



of relevance here is that emotions ‘make sense against a background of cultural expectations and social possibilities, but they take shape within the unique circumstances of a life’ (Beatty, 2013: 419-20), therefore, are unable to be analysed out of context. Lucia went on to say that although applicants might not use biomedical terms such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorder or depression ‘they’re essentially saying those kind of things in more straightforward English terms for emotions’.

Many applicants come from countries in which mental distress is synonymous with abnormalities and/or madness. I asked some, how mental distress was thought of in their country of origin and even the question was, in some cases, a struggle to answer due to my use of the term: ‘mental distress’ rather than ‘madness’. Hassan told me that in Pakistan ‘if you are depressed people say he’s abnormal’; in Iran, Amir stated someone with mental health problems would be called ‘crazy’; Joseph alleged ‘Africans’ would simply not talk about mental health: ‘us Africans will die with depression, we won’t report it, you white people will be depressed and we’ll still be moving and smiling, laughing, but deep down we’re dying’. The stigma that surrounds mental health was cited by many of the service providers and friends I spoke to as a reason for applicants not disclosing distress; however, stigma might also be a factor in *how* applicants disclose. For instance, requesting help by proxy through letters or writing something down can be a way of sharing distress with someone without having to say it out loud (Martin, 2012: 13). One day, at Rise I was handed a scrap of paper with ‘LGBT’ written on it by an African man who wanted me to know that he was gay and therefore signpost him to the relevant services but whilst retaining some privacy within the busy office.

Terminology is crucial to disclosures. For instance, the way in which women disclose rape is affected by their understanding of the term, for example, in certain contexts, marital rape is unlikely to be described as such (Baillot et al., 2012: 282; Bögner et al., 2010). The use of specific terminology and the way disclosures are narrated by applicants is learnt over time by those working with them. However, if euphemisms and ways of using language are not known by the audience, it has the potential to obscure critical information (Baillot et al., 2012); disclosures may go unheard, unattended to or, from the discloser’s point

of view, ignored. Indeed, Kelly argues that the recognition of torture is not due to the survivors' ability to tell but the audiences' ability to listen, see, name and take responsibility (2012: 4). In practice, language can be used equally by the discloser and the recipient to conceal and/or silence information (Poland and Pederson, 1998), just as forms and reports can as discussed in the previous chapter. Whilst paying attention to terminology is vital, audiences also need to read the body language, emotional and facial expressions of the discloser and, like verbal communication, both parties play a role in embodied communication. As this chapter focuses on verbal communication, I simply note that most service providers and friends mentioned that it was easier to 'read' someone's body language or demeanour the more they knew them; building relationships between applicants and service providers and friends is discussed further in the next chapter.

In order to best understand their clients' situation and represent them, solicitors want to know as much 'relevant' information as they can, and as early as possible. However, solicitors' time with their clients is limited, mostly due to Legal Aid funding restrictions, resulting in many being unable to 'devote the time required to develop effective relationships of communication and trust with applicants' (Baillot et al., 2012: 277). Chapter Eight provides a longer discussion on time and building trust; here I want to illustrate that to gain the information that solicitors needed in limited periods of time, some told me, although uncomfortably, that they would often put pressure on their clients to disclose. I asked Rifat how he got the information he needed from his clients:

You try and be sensitive to it but you also have to, because you obviously do get clients that don't want to tell you things, you have to explain to them that their whole claim is assessed and if they don't answer things then they won't be believed, and you have to put it to them as bluntly as that ... you're effectively putting pressure on people that perhaps don't need it [...] I think there should be a nicer way or an easier way of doing it, engaging with someone for a longer period of time and getting to know them and effectively unlocking the door as opposed to ramming it in, which is effectively what lawyers have to do.

Rifat was aware that he was pressuring clients who might already be distressed. Indeed, this tendency of solicitors to pressure their clients to disclose relevant information is in line with previous research (Baillot et al., 2012, 2013).

Moreover, it may be a contributing factor to the fairly frequent changing of solicitors that many applicants I came across did.<sup>64</sup> Significantly, changing solicitor adds to the number of times applicants need to disclose.

Like solicitors, medical professionals may also put pressure on applicants to disclose information that they deem to be significant. GP, Juliette, believed that knowing about her patients' asylum claims was 'extremely helpful' in order to make therapeutic decisions; thus, sometimes she would 'really push them on it'. This resulted in one of her patients asking: 'Are you a doctor or a social worker?' Juliette believed that her patients rarely mentioned the asylum process due to their expectations of what is, and is not, suitable to disclose in a medical context. Just as some applicants deemed legal meetings an unsuitable space to discuss their health, GP appointments were not always seen as a space to discuss asylum claims. I do not wish to query the extent to which it is necessary for both solicitors and medical professionals to 'push' applicants for information; instead, I want to highlight the clashing of expectations between applicants and others of what, when and where to disclose.

Moreover, when expectations are not fulfilled they can be frustrating for interlocutors. Immigration solicitor, Paul, recounted an experience he had with an Ethiopian client who had been found to be not credible by the Home Office due to inconsistencies in her story. Paul explained how frustrating he had found working with her as she would only give very basic, sometimes one-word, answers to his questions; solicitors' frustrations regarding clients being unable to provide a clear and coherent narratives is echoed by Shuman and Bohmer (2004: 401). Once further details of Paul's client's case had been illuminated, he asked her why she had not initially provided, what he deemed to be, crucial information; she replied that he had not specifically asked her for these details. Paul told me that he had later found out that, within his client's culture, it is considered rude to disclose more information than is directly asked. Importantly, Paul illustrates a phenomenon arguably common among professionals in this field, that of ascribing culture to asylum applicants without thinking about how

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<sup>64</sup> Other reasons for this were individual solicitors telling applicants that they were unable to do any more for them and applicants getting frustrated with what they perceived to be a lack of action from their solicitor, also mentioned in Chapter Nine.

their own culture might limit their ability to 'hear' (Baillot et al., 2012; see also Ewing, 2005, regarding clinical encounters with migrants). Asylum Help worker, Jill, also provided an example of ascribing culture onto others through telling me about a Sri Lankan client. She stated he was able to tell her all about the physical injuries he had suffered yet when asked about his psychological experiences he continued to talk about his physical pain. Jill viewed his somatisation as being 'cultural'. She interpreted the lack of psychological suffering her Sri Lankan client presented to be due to the fact that 'people from certain cultures' do not 'understand the concept of being mentally ill and having mental distress [...] it's not in their vocabulary'.

Some of those who worked with applicants, however, were more attentive towards the fact that *all* interlocutors brought culture to disclosures. Oren described how applicants' emotions did not always correspond to his expectations or understandings of distress:

I see a lot of sorrow dealt with lots of laughs, I see sorrow and pain and distress expressed in so many different ways; some of them I find really beautiful and some of them I find really hard and some of them I recognise from my own life and some of them are so alien to me.

He mentioned this to illustrate how Euro-American culture tends to associate distress with certain emotional expressions; Lutz (1988) argues that emotions are complicated by value orientations such as 'positive' and 'negative' emotional expressions. Similarly, Shuman and Bohmer note that 'westerns' find it 'hard to imagine why so few traumatised persons cry when describing the trauma' (2004: 406). Nonetheless, whilst Oren recognised that some non-verbal expressions of distress are 'alien' to him he still translated them as such.

Like Oren, Rise member, Ellie, was also reflective as to how her habitus meant she interpreted applicants' emotions. I asked her how she would recognise distress in applicants and she replied:

I guess it's people who get very emotional, very easily, and kind of cry in front of you within thirty seconds of having met you, 'cos we're all trained not to do that, so in order to be doing that there must be something wrong.

Ellie translated tears into distress whilst illustrating her awareness that she was following normative interpretations; she told me that people would come into Rise's office proposing suicide, 'and our response is, as cultural Europeans, "Ah ha! You are depressed; we understand this. Let's talk about it"'.

The effective communication of distress is a learning process for all those involved in the asylum process. Jill had worked as a caseworker for over a year and believed that, having observed multiple disclosures, in addition to having received specific training, she had learnt to read 'signs of mental distress' in her clients. Indeed, all the service providers I spoke to at Asylum Help had (in previous jobs) undergone professional training regarding recognising trauma in refugee populations. However, witnessing many applicants presenting distress also resulted in audiences making generalisations around how people from certain regions or cultures did so. For instance, Jill described how she and her colleagues had noticed that, despite Eritrea having one of the 'most brutal regimes', Eritreans probably present distress 'the least' compared to applicants from other countries:

They have this demeanour that they're very laid back, they're very friendly they're very unassuming, they're very polite [...] sometimes very timid, they're very agreeable [...] if you say to them "Have you ever experienced torture?", a lot of the times they'll say "Yeah, but I'm fine".

The Eritreans that Jill and her colleagues had come across go against their expectations regarding how people who have suffered traumatic events would present distress; that is, they did not present as a 'victim'. In a similar vein to the concern over gender-matching in Home Office interviews mentioned above, cultural generalisations can be dangerous; when assumptions are made as to how applicants from certain areas or cultural backgrounds present distress, those, who do not disclose in the way that is expected and constructed by the audience, risk their disclosures being 'culturally unbelievable' (Gedalof, 2007: 90, in Baillot et al., 2012: 282). While many service providers and friends were aware of the dangers involved in making assumptions regarding cultural ways of disclosing distress, they still did.

Service providers and friends also tended to learn, either through formal training or experience, to pay attention to certain terminology, such as ‘snakeheads’ referring to Chinese people smugglers and different euphemisms used to describe rape: ‘falling unconscious’, ‘he hurt me’, ‘they destroyed my respect’ (Baillot et al., 2012: 285; Herlihy and Turner, 2007: 273). Moreover, many learnt to ask applicants questions in a specific manner to avoid using certain terminology that may be stigmatised. Asylum Help worker, Elizabeth, did not use the term ‘mental health’ with her clients as it is closely associated with madness by many applicants, as mentioned above. Similarly, Emilia did not explicitly ask applicants about their ‘mental health’ as she had learnt over time that asking in this manner often resulted in answers such as ‘No, I’m normal’. She would therefore enquire into applicants’ mental health in alternative ways such as asking about sleep in order to encourage them to disclose. Emilia explained:

For me sleeping is always a sign [...] I realise that asking this can be a good starting point, if you have sleeping problems it’s very, very closely connected to mental health problems, it’s one of the first signs of what you have when you have mental health issues.

Both Emilia and Elizabeth had been trained to associate sleeping problems with mental distress and, therefore, translated accounts of suffering into medical terminology that fit within the confines of the asylum process manifest in documents such as the ASF1, see Chapter Six.

## **Repetition and privacy**

The range of different organisations and individuals that applicants come into contact with throughout the often-lengthy asylum process illuminates the repetitive nature of their need to disclose. Oren explained:

One of the things that’s repeatedly iterated by people (*in the process*) is that they’re forced to trot their story out, all the time, at the drop of the hat, to be able to share their story [...] they’re forced into just repeatedly going through some of the most traumatic events in their lives, like *all the time*, to strangers, often to men.

Good proposes that many applicants ‘want to tell their stories to as wide an audience as possible as a therapeutic catharsis’ (2007: 190). I am not convinced by this and in this section I suggest that applicants get used to having to tell

their story to so many different people that it becomes almost second nature; they cease intimately observing and evaluating audiences before disclosing sensitive things (Squire, 2014: 146), in the way that others might. A further point I wish to make here is that there is often little choice as to how many times and to how many people applicants tell their story.

During my fieldwork, I was surprised at how fast some applicants told me intimate information. According to Oren, having to repeat one's story numerous times resulted in applicants tending to disclose intimate information relatively quickly and sometimes on first meetings. The first time I went to SCIN's drop-in I met Seema who within ten minutes had told me, in a very matter of fact way, why she and her husband Hassan had claimed asylum and how they believed their families would kill them if they were to return to Pakistan. Later that afternoon, I was introduced by Tony, as a researcher interested in distress in the asylum system, to Olamide.<sup>65</sup> Olamide immediately launched into the problems she was having as a result of being in the asylum process, especially due to the cashless system and the Azure card. Olamide laughed and cried in that first meeting; she told me that the government was 'killing them' and that maybe they would 'start shooting asylum seekers next'. I was also introduced to Amir that day. We stood in the back corner of the large hall and he told me about being beaten up in Newcastle and about his experience of going to Accident and Emergency in Glasgow for severe diarrhoea.

In order to access specific support services, it is almost unavoidable for anyone to circumvent disclosing any personal information. However, for those going through the asylum process the frequency of their disclosures may be compounded by their dependency on others to explain complex correspondence in addition to the unstable field of asylum support manifest in short-term contracts; volunteers being only financially able to offer their services for a limited period; organisations not able to dedicate time to service providers and friends' self-care resulting in a fairly high turnover of workers. It was perhaps not a coincidence that the most extreme example of this was at Rise the

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<sup>65</sup> Having previously spoken to Tony about my research, he introduced me to the people at the drop-in that he deemed were the most distressed. I found his approach hugely problematic and actively avoided these situations from then on.

organisation with the least funds. As mentioned in Chapter Six, Matipa, like others, frequently visited Rise due to the complexity and difficulty in navigating the asylum system (Baillot et al., 2012), which resulted in her needing help to understand letters she received from various sources (as well as to have a cup of tea and a chat before or after she went to report). Indeed, immigration official, Stacy, informed me that the Home Office were aware that applicants may not understand the content of many letters and therefore would often send them directly to their legal representative for explanation. However, as mentioned in Chapter Six, she suggested that there was no fixed procedure for this and thus Matipa did receive correspondence from the Home Office, and elsewhere, that she had not had explained. During the years she visited Rise, Matipa had seen many people pass through the organisation and has had to explain her story 'so many times' to different individuals there.

Furthermore, on many occasions, I witnessed Rise members enquiring among themselves, often in their busy office, as to the details of applicants' letters because they did not have the specific knowledge needed to interpret them. Thus, applicants' personal information was often disseminated to more individuals than the teller had necessarily planned for, illuminating the social lives of disclosures (Manderson, 2014). This relates to the political economy of service provision, discussed in Chapter Four, as untrained volunteers were rapidly picking up the work resulting from the governmental cuts to service provision at the SRC and, therefore, applicants were left with nowhere else to go for assistance. Furthermore, being dependent on others to interpret their documents, applicants may unintentionally disclose information if, for instance, they did not read English and therefore did not know the exact detail of the documents.

Forced disclosures due to applicants being dependent on others for help is also, I suggest, a consequence of governmental asylum support. The introduction of NASS through the 1999 Immigration Act saw the separation of asylum support from the UK's mainstream benefit system. This resulted in the creation of a visible group (of asylum applicants) and developed an explicit distinction between 'deserving' refugees, who are entitled to mainstream benefits, and 'undeserving' asylum applicants (Mulvey, 2010: 441; Hynes, 2011: 43). As



applicants are not allowed to work, they are limited to the money provided by Section 4 or Section 98, see Chapter Four. Section 4 is a cashless system in which £35.39 a week is uploaded onto the Azure payment card. This form of support has been criticised as causing ‘unnecessary emotional and physical difficulties for asylum seekers’ (Home Affairs Select Committee, 2013; see also Carnet, Blanchard and Ellis, 2014; Reynolds, 2010), and as a mechanism of control (Mulvey, 2011; Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Morris, 2002). Morris argues that the whole asylum support system is ‘a form of provision whose function is to give effect to the right to seek asylum, but whose very nature has raised a set of other human rights concerns’ such as the stigma associated with it in addition to its failure to respect private lives (2002: 419). I suggest that this support also results in applicants not being able to choose when, how and to whom they disclose their suffering.

Olamide and her two daughters spent six years in the asylum system; the majority of which they lived on Section 4 support. For Olamide, the hardest part of living on Section 4 was the lack of access to cash, which is also discussed by Carnet, Blanchard and Ellis (2014). During our first conversation at SCIN’s drop-in, she told me how Section 4 meant that she was unable to give her children pocket money in order for them ‘to be like the other kids at school’, and how, as a family, they struggled to move across the city; the Azure card cannot be used for any form of transport. I later found out that every fortnight Olamide and her children attended a family therapy session at Freedom from Torture which was situated miles from where they were living. For Olamide and her daughters to travel to these appointments, she relied on others to provide them with transport. She would present documentary evidence of the appointment either to Orchard and Shipman, her housing provider, or SCIN, her local integration network, and they would arrange a taxi or provide her with a one-day public transport travel pass. Therefore, living on Section 4 support meant that Olamide had no choice but to disclose her psychotherapy appointments to third parties that otherwise had no need to know. Moreover, by presenting evidence of her appointment, Olamide disclosed not only that she went to therapy sessions at particular times and place but also that she had led a (particular) life, that is, she had experienced torture (Squire, 2014: 148); like many support services, Freedom from Torture’s work is implied in its name.

Section 4 support exemplifies a ‘technology of disclosure’<sup>66</sup> (Manderson, 2014), leaving applicants in socio-economic situations in which they have little choice but to disclose personal information to others. Section 4 support removed Olamide’s opportunity for privacy, an experience which Goffman (1961) claims breaks down the self and therefore illuminating the ‘assaults on personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value’ (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 1), inherent in the support system. Nonetheless, Olamide, and many others I met who received Section 4 support, did their best to resist this structural control using small acts of deviance and disruption (Scott, 1985). Nevertheless, to do so they endangered themselves through other forms of exploitation such as working illegally and by risking the consequences for one’s asylum claim if they are caught. Moreover, Olamide depended on people outwith the asylum process and, therefore, had to disclose to them the fact that she was an asylum applicant, furthermore, an applicant whose claim had been refused (disclosed by the fact that she was living on Section 4). These examples further illuminate the structural violence at play by highlighting the danger in the spaces of resistance.

It is important to mention that, in addition to the service provision for asylum applicants forcing disclosures in certain contexts, there are also technologies which silence applicants’ disclosures of distress seen, in Chapter Six, through the use of the ASF1 and medical evidence. Another stark example of this is the government-funded asylum advice helpline that replaced the SRC’s face-to-face service in 2014. The switch in service provision changed the way in which asylum applicants outwith initial accommodation accessed the support service. Over the telephone, tears, facial expressions and other embodiments of distress cannot be conveyed and therefore may go unnoticed. Thus, this advice service could be argued to be a technology which prevents, rather than enables applicants to communicate distress. Nevertheless, some service providers spoke about the benefits of using telephones during the communication of distress. Jill told me that she thought some of her clients felt more comfortable disclosing

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<sup>66</sup> Manderson uses this phrase in relation to passports, birth and marriage certificates and so on: ‘official documents [that] are presumed to tell certain personal truths as much as demographic facts about the bearer’ (2014: 1).

information to an interpreter over the telephone rather than face-to-face as it reduces feelings of shame and stigma.

In addition to contexts in which applicants are forced to disclose intimate information, some people working with asylum applicants actively avoided, due to a variety of motivations, probing for information. This may happen in official contexts, such as immigration officials not probing for information they deem irrelevant. Baillot et al. also highlight a tendency in official spaces for professionals to ‘marginalise, trivialise or ignore [applicants’] accounts of rape’ (2012: 270), for a variety of reasons including not asking the ‘right’ questions or deliberately not asking at all (2012: 278). Moreover, they found that some immigration officials do not ask specific questions because they do not *like* to hear the answers (2012: 278). The effect of this, in a legal context, can be catastrophic for applicants as not including certain details in their claims can be grounds for refusal; thus, potentially beginning the process of appeals and having to repeat their stories to many different audiences all over again.

The dialogic nature of disclosures and the capacity for both interlocutors to silence information was also highlighted through some participants’ coping strategies. Asylum Help worker, Jill, told me what she did in an effort to protect herself emotionally from clients’ distress:

I do try and detach, like I’ll ask a question and I’ll hear the answer but I’ll not really, really listen to it. I’ll hear it, I’ll write it down but I’m somehow able to not really listen and think about what they’re really saying.

For Jill, not ‘listening’ was a use of ‘affect management’ deemed necessary for her to do her job in a sustainable fashion. I heard similar accounts from other service providers. Malkki claims that some particularly horrific situations seem to produce in aid workers ‘a need *not* to know, *not* to understand’, as they use affective strategies to curb their affective memory and imagination (2015: 67). The, relatively frequent, extreme content of applicants’ disclosures generates affect in their audiences; importantly, disclosures cannot be retracted and therefore create a watershed moment in the relationship of both parties (Davis and Manderson, 2014: 161). Affective relationships are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

In addition to 'not listening', some service providers/friends did not ask certain information that they believed they simply did not need to know. Lucia determinedly worked to an ethos that valued the privacy of SCIN's service users:

There's so much that people don't disclose but also because I pointedly don't ask [...] I'm never comfortable myself asking even someone's country of origin unless it's particularly crucial to their circumstance. There's people that I've known for years and that I'm quite close to but I still don't know their reasons for seeking asylum and I take it as, well, it's a need to know basis and I don't need to know.

As mentioned above, cuts in the service provision for applicants meant smaller organisations took on some of the workload, for instance, assisting applicants to fill out forms such as Section 4 applications. Lucia was very aware that in doing so it compromised applicants' privacy and therefore, she attempted to create a space in which applicants felt in control of their personal information, as a contrast to how she viewed most of their lives being structured. She did her utmost to empower applicants and respect their privacy by clearly informing them that she does not need to know what they record on the form; she would offer them the chance to fill out forms at home and return them to her. However, this required applicants to have a certain level of English literacy, cultural knowledge regarding what is being asked of them, and specific knowledge regarding what is, or is not, possible from the service (see Navaro-Yashin (2007) for a similar example). On one hand, Lucia's practice allowed applicants space for privacy but on the other, refraining from asking questions has the potential for negative outcomes. Drawing on Baillot et al. (2012), NGO workers and solicitors may be the most likely people applicants disclose information to and therefore, by Lucia not asking it could result in either applicants having to disclose to people that they feel less safe with or not disclosing at all. There were, however, times when Lucia would probe further regarding a person's wellbeing. Yet, this was carefully balanced with her concern that applicants may 'become wary' of her and therefore stop coming to SCIN altogether. This illustrates the powerful perceived effect of fear and suspicion among applicants but also that some settings, such as solicitors and GP offices discussed above, enable the audience to push applicants to disclose, yet, others carry a greater risk.

## The suffering narrative

Many applicants I spoke to were aware of suspicion and stigma that exists around the term ‘asylum seeker’: Tendai believed that people were ‘embarrassed’ about being an ‘asylum seeker’ and Matipa thought that ‘once you tell people you’re an asylum seeker they start looking at you differently’. Thus, some applicants went to great lengths to present themselves in opposition to how they thought others viewed them. Joseph explained:

People have something like a stigma of asylum seekers, they are beggars, they are poor, they are people who are homeless, something like that, so if somebody seen me dressed like this, I dress well, I eat well, my body look good, they won’t think of me being somebody without status, even when we go out they don’t know that before we go out my wife gives me the money and I put it in my pocket so I start spending, they’ll be like oh that guy’s doing well.

Joseph’s impression management (Goffman, 1959) was done in a similar manner to the way in which Howe describes unemployed men in Belfast: ‘much of their daily behaviour is impression management intended to get themselves classified as deserving’ (1998: 536). When Joseph went out for the evening, he presented himself as someone who has access to money to buy nice clothes and spend at the bar, a legitimate person deserving of enjoying a social life. However, the concept of ‘deserving’ shifts for applicants as they negotiate different contexts.

Within multiple spaces that constitute the asylum process, applicants come across obstacles in portraying the type of persona Joseph did when he was socialising since a deserving applicant is often viewed synonymously with being a victim. As mentioned above, applicants must present ‘fear’, in an idiom compatible with the decision-making process, in order for them to be deemed credible. Therefore, solicitors may guide applicants in framing their distress (Greenberger, in Shuman and Bohmer, 2004: 407). Immigration solicitor, Paul, told me:

It’s awful to say, you hear yourself speaking to the psychiatrist who’s saying “Oh no I don’t think (*the applicant will*) be able to cope with giving evidence”, and (*from*) a horrible cynical perspective you think “Great!” Show him not coping with giving evidence to the judge and the judge will see that and they will see how ill he is and he’s clearly not faking it [...] so it’s awful, so you’re kind of almost not

deliberately harming their mental health but you're doing something that will not help their mental health to try in the long term to help them.

Paul, although with certain trepidation, used his client's performance of emotional distress (to the potential detriment of his wellbeing) to bolster his credibility in front of the adjudicator. Paul's practice was informed by his experience of adjudicators deeming applicants more credible if they break down rather than calmly provide an account of their history, which is supported by Baillot et al. (2010: 281). Indeed, Grey and Wegner (2010) state that, in general, people perceive others to be less guilty when they know they have suffered pain. Nonetheless, immigration solicitor, Maria, and various scholars (Kelly, 2012b; Baillot et al., 2009; Shuman and Bohmer, 2004) recognised how applicants find themselves in a paradoxical situation when presenting suffering; if one comes across as articulate, intelligent and resourceful they run the risk of being viewed by adjudicators as exactly the type of person who might fabricate their claim, yet portraying 'too much' suffering might be seen as a blatant exaggeration of one's situation. In addition to this, Paul's extract above illuminates the 'mutually constructed' (Baillot et al., 2012: 287), nature of narratives.

Applicants often do not have the possibility to remain silent, however when they are it may be translated by others as suffering trauma rather than an effort to exert some control over their lives (Baillot et al., 2012: 288). Oren told me that, when people were reluctant to offer information, he would start making assumptions and questioning, 'Is this person a sex-worker? Was this person trafficked? Is this person presenting stuff that they're not telling me?' While applicants' silence shifts the power within relationships to be more favourable towards them (see Butler, 2005), for instance, if Paul suspected there was something legally relevant that his client was withholding, he was powerless to do anything about it unless his client explicitly tells; applicants' silence can also become the mark of victimhood rather than being seen as a form of resistance. More seriously, in official settings, applicants' silence may result in the questioning of the credibility of their narratives if information that has been kept 'secret' is later revealed (Baillot et al., 2012: 287).

As Paul's quote above highlights, applicants' suffering, if it is presented in a way that is accepted by the specific audience, can become a resource with which to bolster their credibility or potentially protect applicants from certain aspects of the asylum system as Ellie's comment below also begins to hint at (see also Fassin and Rechtman, 2009; Ticktin, 2006). However, conceptions of suffering as a resource spread, becoming exaggerated and/or misinformed along the way, among actors involved in the asylum process. Chapter Six also provided an example both of the productive element of suffering manifest in medical certificates and when the value of these documents become confused. Ellie told me:

*(Distress is) kind of something that people who work with (asylum applicants) want to encourage talking about because sometimes there are these things where if you are in too bad a mental state you can't be detained [...] so it can really work for you to get diagnosed with something, depression's not good enough but if you can get diagnosed with something else, 'cos yeah everyone's depressed, so people would sort of push (applicants to disclose).*

Ellie was referring to the Home Office guidance regarding the detention of vulnerable people which states: 'those suffering from serious mental illness which cannot be satisfactorily managed within detention' are considered unsuitable for immigration detention (Home Office, 2015f: 55,10). Nevertheless, the Home Office has been criticised for not following its own procedure regarding detaining vulnerable people (Tsangarides, 2012). What is of interest here is the notion that certain health statuses can, or are perceived to be able to, act as a form of currency (see Squire (2014) regarding the currency HIV status can hold in certain contexts). Ellie's comment suggests that in order for suffering to carry weight it needs to be a particular type of suffering, and, in addition, be translated into a medical diagnosis. Indeed, Baillot et al. suggest that narratives are afforded greater significance if they are medicalised; if a female applicant had been raped, many of the decision-makers they interviewed expected that she would have undergone some form of therapeutic support, thus, not doing so invited questions as to her credibility. Moreover, they argue, expectations such as this apply a westernised medical lens to the process of healing (2012: 283-4). However, Immigration solicitor, Rifat, saw the notion of suffering as a resource being a source of major conflict for applicants: he believed that many of his clients wanted to present themselves to him 'in a light

that is favourable' (Goffman, 1959: 18), that is, of a capable and coping person, yet, he argued, the asylum process requires them to portray themselves as victims 'with your lawyer, with the judge, with the Home Office' in order to be believed. Indeed, much of the literature supports Rifat's comment (Fassin, 2012; Hynes, 2011; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009).

The equation of 'victimhood' with deservingness is not lost on those going through the asylum process. In early 2014, I accompanied Joseph to his judicial review hearing at the Court of Session in Edinburgh. I was surprised that he turned up wearing his usual NorthFace hooded jacket, black woolly beanie hat, waterproof trousers and Nikes; an outfit I had seen him wearing when cycling through the rain in Glasgow. His hair was longer than usual, and I had never before seen him with facial hair. On our way home, a good eight hours later, Joseph told me that he needed a shave and a haircut but had purposefully delayed it until after the court hearing so that he would appear to the adjudicator as 'mad and crazy'. He had thus presented himself as what he perceived to be someone in distress, a victim and therefore needing or deserving of protection; the antithesis of how he presented himself in social occasions as described above. Despite Joseph's efforts, it was unclear what effect his presentation had. Firstly, at a judicial review, the applicant is not actively involved (which he was not aware of) and secondly, it seemed to annoy his solicitor who hissed at him to take his hat off when we entered the court room. Whether his appearance was accepted by the adjudicator in the way in which Joseph had hoped, or as a lack of respect, or went completely unnoticed remained unknown. The judicial review, however, was granted.

To further illustrate the notion that applicants feel the need to portray themselves as victims, I turn to story that Health Bridging Team worker, Ian, told me. He described a female applicant who appeared 'out of the blue' at their surgery carrying a three-month old baby. Ian reiterated the complicated narrative she had told him regarding her arrival from Nigeria; her husband had left her at Manchester Piccadilly train station never to be seen again. However, there happened to be a man standing close by who was speaking Urubu on his phone. Hearing her own language, the woman approached him, and he offered to help her. He took her to his home, where she ended up staying for the next



nine to ten months. (Ian indicated she was never part of any asylum system at this point and it appeared to be some sort of servitude.) She got pregnant by this man and was gang-raped by other men who were brought to the house as an attempt to abort the pregnancy. She later managed to escape; a woman helped her, and she lived with her for a while. However, the man found her and beat her up. She managed to get away from him again and she had the baby. Yet again he found her and threatened her by saying he was going to kill her and the baby. She managed to escape once more but in doing so ran out into the middle of the road and was knocked over by an oncoming car. She explained her situation to the driver who told her he was going to Glasgow and he could help her. She went with him and turned up at the Health Bridging Team.

In trying to make sense of the woman's story, Ian told me:

She has obviously been traumatised, she's obviously been trafficked in some way but it's really difficult for people to, because there are obviously elements of that story (*that*) aren't true, you know quite blatantly aren't true, and it's almost trying to say to people, you know, the actual story is probably ten times worse but they've been sort of conditioned or whatever to tell this story.

Ian could not fathom the series of events that led the woman to Glasgow and thus viewed some of the details to be 'blatantly untrue'. If we follow Ian's analysis, the woman had been 'conditioned' to tell a certain story and adapted her narrative to fit with this, an idea supported by Shuman and Bohmer (2004). The editing of her narrative may have been a result of conversations with people who were in a similar situation to herself or as a result of her expectations as to what a specific audience wanted or needed to hear in order to deem her eligible for asylum. She may have adapted some of details, such as any illegal activity, to avoid presenting herself in a bad light. Due to the repetition, remoulding and re-narrating of applicants' disclosures (by various interlocutors such as solicitors as mentioned above), a 'travelogue' (Blommaert, 2001) is created. This consists of multiple narratives which generate 'a text trajectory that is beyond the control - and often beyond the understanding - of its central character' (Baillot et al., 2009: 209). Particularly concerning about this example is Shuman and Bohmer's argument that when applicants' stories are too similar to ones heard before or so extreme that they are incomprehensible, immigration officials tended not to believe them (2004: 409), juxtaposed with Ian's interpretation of

the women's narrative: 'the actual story is probably ten times worse'. This relates back to the Beneduce's (2015) argument, made in Chapter Five, that applicants' narratives should be viewed through the moral economy of the situation they find themselves in; disclosures are made in a particular context and, for asylum applicants, often in a way that will best afford them protection from that which they flee.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have added to the body of literature regarding disclosure in the asylum system by widening the focus to consider asylum applicants' experiences of disclosure in their everyday lives. Scholars have identified barriers to applicants' official disclosures, however, most of these also exist when applicants disclose in other contexts. This chapter has highlighted the multiple intersections involved in disclosures. It has shown how expectations regarding what and where to disclose information and 'cultures' of the audiences and applicants can clash and, therefore, obscure or prevent important disclosures in many different contexts. It has also emphasised how applicants find themselves having to repeat their stories to numerous different actors involved in the asylum process. This is due to the structure and complexity of the asylum system in addition to the political economy that support services exist within. I use an example of privacy to illuminate how structural violence is enacted within the mechanisms of support in the asylum process resulting in applicants often unnecessarily disclosing distress. This chapter also illuminates the complexity involved in applicants disclosing victimhood by suggesting that applicants are often encouraged into portraying themselves as 'victims' in order to be believed which simultaneously leaves them in situations in which resisting this persona is difficult.

This chapter has focused on the experiences of asylum applicants in regard to disclosing distress. Yet, as disclosures are dialogic, their affective dimensions reach all interlocutors. The next chapter therefore considers the effect for others involved in the asylum process of being part of distressed networks. It explores how hearing about applicants' distress affects others and questions who else is vulnerable.

## Chapter 8 : 'A time issue' - Overwork and Emotional Labour.

### Introduction

Sitting around a table in SCIN's community flat in late November, eight female SCIN and Rise service providers, friends and I listened as the trainer from *Rape Crisis* explained the day's plan. She began the session by asking us about the challenges we faced in our work. No one paused to think; the volume in the room quickly amplified as everyone had something to say. SCIN worker, Lucia, without hesitating, stated, 'time and space'; Frieda, also at SCIN, added, 'there's such a time issue, you never have enough time'. Everybody nodded in agreement. A member of Rise told the group that because volunteers spend most of their time 'crisis managing' they do not have the time to stand back and reflect, and rarely get to engage with people who bring positive news or stories.

The training day, in addition to teaching us how to respond to survivors of sexual violence, aimed to explain the concepts of secondary and vicarious trauma and how to recognise it in ourselves or our colleagues. The day provided time and a safe space for service providers and friends to reflect on their own practice, the challenges they encounter, and to practise self-care: the kind of time that is not often afforded within their daily work. The group was made up of people with varied experiences, but everyone had been working or volunteering with asylum applicants for at least a few months, most for many years. We spoke openly with each other; most of the group shared stories of times when they had become emotionally affected by the lives of the people they worked with. The trainer also told us of her experiences: she had had recurring dreams in which she was lying in a bed and one of her clients was lying on top of her and being sick. She explained that dreams like hers are a common sign of secondary or vicarious trauma. The trainer had allocated time to practise self-care at the end of the day, however, as is often the case in the everyday experiences of the service providers and friends, it was rushed through due to pressures on time.

This vignette acts as a point of entry for this chapter's discussion around emotional labour over both the micro-aspects of time, of minutes and hours service providers, friends and immigration officials spend with applicants; and

the macro-aspects, longer-lasting timeframes of years and careers. All of the participants who worked with asylum applicants undertook emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979; 2003).<sup>67</sup> In this chapter, I explore the affective lives of those who work with asylum applicants in various capacities and the consequences of doing emotional labour. I argue that the idea of time is crucial to a discussion around emotional labour within the asylum process, as the amount of time workers spend with applicants impacts their relationships and affect develops and adapts over years and careers. Time and space are inextricably linked as we act in both; indeed, relationships, movements and rhythm connect the body to time and space (Bourdieu, 1980, in Munn, 1992: 107). Unfortunately, there is not the scope for this chapter to fully explore the spaces of encounters between applicants and others.

The chapter begins with a brief explanation of emotional labour; it is then divided into four sections. The first considers the structuring of workplace time, that is, when work tasks are confined to an office and when they are not and how workers negotiate this. Time is organised differently among the organisations involved in this research and I argue that it affects the emotional labour conducted and, relating to this, the type of relationships that are built. The next section draws on this discussion to explore how workers who spend different types of time with applicants build trust and contends that notions of professionalism affect this. The third section is a brief one but highlights an important phenomenon that was recognised by many workers. That is, there is generally an inverse relationship between the length of time applicants spend going through the asylum process and their wellbeing. This is important to illustrate here as different workers encounter applicants at different stages of the process and the wellbeing of applicants affects the emotional labour that is undertaken. This section illuminates what Scanlon and Adlam (2012) argue to be the case for those working in homelessness, an area in which systems of care are being restricted. That is, workers are stuck between the behavioural violence of their clients and the structural violence of the wider establishment. The final section looks at the costs of emotional labour for workers and how the manifestation of these costs ultimately harm asylum applicants.

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<sup>67</sup> When I use the term 'work' I do not distinguish between volunteers and paid employees.

## Emotional labour

‘Trying to feel what one wants, expects, or thinks one ought to feel is probably no newer than emotion itself’ (1983: 19-20) argues sociologist, A.R. Hochschild. Hochschild (1979, 1983) uses the term emotional labour to refer to the processes by which workers manage their emotions in order to conduct the tasks involved in their jobs. She defines emotional labour as the ‘management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display’ (1983: 7). Hochschild’s (1983) concept of emotional labour is contextualised within the marketplace, thus emotional labour is bought and sold. Although not all of those who ‘work’ with applicants did so in a paid capacity, and therefore are not strictly doing what Hochschild (1983) defines as emotional labour, I employ the term in this chapter to draw comparisons between the different groups. Emotional labour involves emotional work: the act of trying to change an emotion or feeling. This is broadly delineated into two different cognitive types (although emotional work is also somatic and expressive)<sup>68</sup>: evocation, in which the focus is on a desired feeling which is absent; and suppression, in which the focus is on an undesired feeling that is present (Hochschild, 1979: 561). I argue that much of the time most of those working with asylum applicants are doing the latter.

Drawing on Goffman (1959), Hochschild develops surface acting whereby ‘the action is in the body language, the put-on sneer, the posed shrug, the controlled sigh’ (1983: 35). Surface acting is distinguished from what she terms deep acting in which ‘display is a natural result of working on feeling; the actor does not try to *seem* happy or sad but rather expresses spontaneously [...] a real feeling that has been self-induced’ (1983: 35, original emphasis). For Hochschild, emotional labour involves both *displaying* particular emotions (in line with the feeling rules of the particular context/role) and also striving to actually *feel* the emotions in order to present them. Hochschild (1983) draws on flight attendants and workers in the billing department of an airline to illustrate her argument. Flight attendants are trained in friendliness, their role is to ‘enhance the status of the customer and entice further sales’ (1983: 16). Whilst employers emphasise that

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<sup>68</sup> The Rape Crisis trainer illustrated the relationship between body and mind as she described how occasionally she pinched her hand or leg in order to keep ‘hold’ of her own emotions when hearing service users’ particularly distressing stories.

their smile is their biggest asset (1983: 4), they also want employees to engage in deep acting, to manage feeling so that it goes well beyond the smile (1983: 33). Those involved in the airline's billing department, however, may deflate the customer's status, by calling them liars and cheats, in an attempt to wear them down in the hope that they will then pay. Bill collectors were told to 'create alarm' in their customers and therefore would commonly withhold empathy and act with aggression (1983: 146).<sup>69</sup> Using these two examples, Hochschild concludes that the same principles of emotional labour apply to different jobs and diverse feelings (1983: 16): this is evident throughout this chapter.

Emotional labour is based upon feeling rules, the social guidelines that direct us to how we should want to feel (Hochschild, 1979: 536). These feeling rules correspond to contexts. I refer to Fuglerud (2004), discussed in Chapter Five, who argues that the micro-cultures of specific immigration offices act as space in which bureaucrats learn to follow the patterns and culture of their particular organisational surroundings, that is, the feeling rules. The appropriateness of the display of emotion comes down to the varying feeling rules of a particular organisational culture (see Westaby, 2010: 156). Hochschild (1979, 1983), however, does not explore the varying feeling rules that different interlocutors may bring to any given context which were partially illustrated in the previous chapter whereby cultures and emotional expressions collide in the disclosing of distress.

The concept of emotional labour has been applied to the asylum context in relation to the practice of immigration solicitors (Farrell, 2012; Westaby, 2010). Westaby (2010) argues that 'intense' emotional displays of empathy are expected of solicitors in order to gain trust from their clients. However, due to the need for solicitors to be perceived as professional these emotional displays must be managed. Therefore, she contends, solicitors concentrate on the legal aspects of their interaction in order to portray what she terms as a 'detached concern'. Yet this position requires a difficult balancing act between detachment (becoming cold, no longer being affected by human suffering) and concern (taking applicants' problems home, suffering vicarious trauma). Thus, as

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<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, Hochschild notes that individuals are probably attracted to the specific role because they already have the personal qualities required (1983: 146).

Westaby shows, it can result in emotional dissonance, especially for less experienced solicitors (2010: 153). What is of interest for the discussion in this chapter is that solicitors expressed that their experiences of stress tended to diminish over time as they became more experienced; which, Westaby interpreted as being perhaps not due to lessened feelings of stress but rather that emotional displays are learnt leading to fewer admissions of feeling stressed (2010: 169).

## **Workplace time**

This section considers how workers negotiate their work time. I suggest that the way organisations plan their time with applicants, for instance solicitor's time-limited appointments and Rise's open office, affects the emotional labour that this is done and relationships that are built. I explore how work confined to the workplace is dictated by organisational structures, yet disrupted through new technologies, organisational culture, personal motivations, the context of the asylum process and the political economy of services. Organisationally imposed timeframes did not necessarily reflect the reality of working life for those working with asylum applicants. Indeed, for many workers what constituted the end of the working day was fluid.

The time that service providers, friends and immigration officials spend with asylum applicants is structured differently across organisations due to the purpose of the meetings and the nature of the work. Types of emotional labour are both expected and employed in these various contexts. Legal and medical practitioners, immigration officials, and to a large extent, Asylum Help staff, engage with asylum applicants in formal, pre-arranged and often time-limited appointments. These meetings are conducted within professionalised spaces and often have specific goals. For solicitors, the length of appointments with clients varies depending on what task(s) needs to be completed. The first meeting is often lengthy, as they want to establish the client's awareness of asylum process and legal aid; deal with their individual claim; and explain the approach the Home Office will take towards their claim (Westaby, 2010: 159). Many of the solicitors I interviewed also used this first meeting to 'manage expectations'. This involved informing applicants that the asylum process would not be a quick one, that the Home Office is an 'unpredictable department' (Maria), and that

their narratives will be interrogated throughout the process. This was made harder as they would find themselves in situations in which they had to inform clients that they simply did not know why the Home Office was operating in a certain way, as exemplified in Chapter Five.

Time-limited meetings also meant that solicitors needed to obtain what may be very upsetting information from their clients in relatively short timeframes. Indeed, it is organisational funding that dictates, to a large extent, how those working with applicants are able to manage and negotiate their time. The solicitors involved in this research, for instance, were often reliant on Legal Aid which allocates a certain amount of time for each client. In Chapter Seven, I discussed the impact of these short timeframes for the applicants; here, we see how it affects the solicitors. It frustrated and saddened Rifat (as it did many others) that he had to put pressure on his clients, 'to ram the door in' as he put it, to disclose information in the short time he had with them. He stated:

You only get so long with (*applicants*) and if I spend five or six hours with a client my boss is going to go crazy. A firm won't get paid for that and Legal Aid won't cover all of these meetings so it's sadly, it's just not possible.

Rifat understood the time pressure he was under and, thus, saw no other way than to pressurise his clients to disclose (see also Baillot et al., 2012:277; Farrell, 2010: 132). He saw this practice as an inherent problem in asylum law, as it meant working with clients who were potentially vulnerable, and it acted as a contributing factor to him wanting to leave this area of law.

It was not only solicitors who experienced inflexible timeframes in their work with applicants. Health Bridging Team member, Rosa, explained how limited time resulted in her needing to create a hierarchy of suffering in order to prioritise her workload:

As harsh as it seems you have got to prioritise the worst, and give the worst more time [...] we will put the most vulnerable first, we'll put women first, we'll put trafficked women at the top of that list, pregnant women, so people who we see in the most vulnerable categories they will be seen at the top of the list and unfortunately your single men will be bottom of the line.



Rosa did not like having to categorise the deservingness of her patients, yet she did so as she felt there was no other option. In a different context, Malkki (2015) discusses the hardship aid workers undergo when they are forced, due to a lack of resources, to prioritise individuals. The greatest effect of prioritising is on the individuals needing support. However, these ‘impossible situations’, Malkki argues, led to feelings of guilt and frustration among workers (2015: 53), and were feelings many participants relayed to me.

Overwhelmingly, the time SCIN and Rise workers spent with applicants was less formal or restricted than those mentioned above and, therefore, they had more time to listen and slowly build relationships of trust. Whilst certain activities at SCIN had official start and end times such as their drop-in and Women’s Group, in practice these tended to be fairly fluid. Again, funding played a large role in the organising of time for both services. SCIN’s funders saw the value in relaxed, informal communication and therefore, financially supported drop-ins and group-based activities. This allowed SCIN worker, Frieda, to provide ‘time and space’ as a healing mechanism for the women that she worked with. She explained:

Just to listen, I think that’s the main important thing [...] I think that’s often what they’re so grateful for, that you spend time with them and just listen to them ... to just offer proper time and proper space.

However, as a sessional worker, Frieda did not always have time to give to these women within her paid hours or, when she did, it often resulted in her having to sacrifice another task. Unlike those working in more formal organisations, Frieda would continue conversations outwith the allocated time of the women’s group.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Rise chose not to apply for formal funding so that they had more freedom to pursue the activities in the manner they wished. Rise’s office opened Monday to Friday between approximately 9am and 6pm, depending on the individual opening and closing it. They had an open-door policy, welcoming anyone who came in, and visitors would very rarely make appointments. Whilst the flexibility of Rise’s office was a great benefit to those like Matipa who visited regularly, one of its drawbacks for those working there was the little emotional protection it afforded them. This was partly due to the active resistance of friends at Rise to the boundaries often created between

workers and applicants. Oren explained that other organisations ‘know we’ll pick up the work because we’re not doing it as a job, because we don’t clock off at five’ (this is also related to ideas around professionalism that is explored in the next section). Oren’s claim contrasts with Farrell’s findings that solicitors do not get emotionally involved with clients, making it easier to say ‘No’ to all the non-legal tasks they are asked to perform, such as sorting out clients’ housing or healthcare needs (2012: 149).

The working patterns at Rise and SCIN diverge from Asylum Help and the Health Bridging Team whose offices had strict designated opening hours not only for service users but for their staff (managers, however, would stay in the office after the rest of the staff were made to leave). Nevertheless, these strict boundaries were not necessarily welcomed by staff: Rosa found having to be out of her office at 5pm ‘quite a nightmare’ as she struggled to finish her work in time. I suggest, however, that stricter opening and closing hours afforded some workers some protection against their often-infinite workload.

Most workers however could, and did, continue work outwith their workplace. Indeed, Rise’s work was rarely confined to a single office space due to its size, which meant that it often became full and, therefore, impossible to have a private conversation. Thus, sometimes conversations would spill out on to the street in the summer or into people’s cars or nearby homes in the winter to maintain some privacy. New technologies, specifically online mobile devices, also complicated working structures and spaces due to their facilitation of remote working. Glennie and Thrift (1996) argue that new forms of communication are an example of the intimate relationship between time and space. Smartphones allowed workers, whose organisations permitted remote access (Asylum Help and the Health Bridging Team did not), to check their work emails outside of ‘office’ time and space. Furthermore, social networking sites, such as Facebook, meant that different types of relationships could develop between applicants and those who work with them, as they can view details of each other’s personal lives. It was only workers at Rise and SCIN who were Facebook ‘friends’ with some of the applicants with whom they worked.

Nonetheless, all the organisations involved in this research had policies or unwritten rules on the use of technology, aimed both at creating some kind of

division between the time and space in which one is doing ‘work’ and in which one is not, and at emotionally protecting workers. The rule of thumb for solicitors was to never give a client their personal contact details. At SCIN and Rise, staff and volunteers were made aware of the potential consequences of giving out personal details. Rise had a ‘Personal Safety’ policy which advised of circumstances in which one should not give out personal contact details to people who came into the office. However, the extent to which workers followed rules depended on the culture of the organisation (and individual will). Sarah explained:

I do try and make it clear when we have volunteer meetings when (*Tony is*) there I would say “You know you have to have boundaries; you shouldn’t give people your phone numbers.” I would say all of this even though knowing that he’s the chair and he would do the opposite. And he would agree with me I think, he would see it as a personal exception.

SCIN’s organisational culture, broadcast from the very top, undermined their policies and procedures regarding boundaries. However, the access to resources that SCIN had also impacted their technological boundaries. When Sarah started working at SCIN they did not have a mobile telephone, so she would use her personal mobile telephone when texting applicants<sup>70</sup>. This resulted in service users having her personal number and telephoning her outwith her official working hours, thus adding to her workload and reducing her ability to protect it.

The ‘culture’ of working environments also created a moral economy which dictated how much workers felt they *should* be working. This is exemplified in how overtime was viewed within different organisations. For some, such as immigration officials and Asylum Help employees, overtime was offered and remunerated. Immigration official, Stacy, explained: ‘I have never wished to do (*overtime*), I have never worked a weekend in here since the day I started, it’s just personal choice’. However, for most of service providers and friends, working over one’s paid hours was, to a certain extent, assumed or expected by the organisation. For SRC worker, Tom, being a ‘good’ and ‘dedicated’ worker in

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<sup>70</sup> Texting was found to be the most effective way of communicating with many of their service users.

his field meant working over one's allotted hours. He described his work at the SRC:

I'm probably getting in 9 to 9.15 and leave most days about 6, 5.45, never really take a lunch (*break*), but it's like most people who are good or dedicated to their job at the SRC will work the same hours [...] it's kind of just a necessity if you work in the charity sector [...] you almost have an ethical responsibility to put in extra work so it's not organisational pressure really it's more out of my own personal choice.

Tom slightly contradicts himself stating that working overtime is both a 'necessity' (relating it to the political economy) and 'personal choice' (just as Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani (2011) interpret staff taking on additional work due to their 'passion' and 'interest'). I suggest that there is a certain amount of organisational/peer pressure implicit in Tom's decision not to take a lunch break, just as there is for long working days in legal fields (see also Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani, 2011: 214), but that the line between need and want can become blurred. To a certain extent, working overtime was a 'necessity' for some workers; many could not have done the work that they did, or to the standard they deemed appropriate, if constrained by their paid/designated hours. Indeed, the asylum system relies on the many workers who are willing to go above and beyond their job description, to house destitute asylum applicants, to answer the phone at any time of the day or night, and to collapse those often-trained professional boundaries between self and other (Malkki, 2015: 19).

Both Stacy and Tom talked of their negotiation of work time in terms of 'personal choice'; Stacy chose not to work any overtime and Tom chose to work overtime due to what he deemed his ethical responsibility. Describing working overtime as an 'ethical responsibility' brings it into dialogue with the moral economy of self-sacrifice and complicates the notion of personal choice. The idea of 'choice' is further problematised in relation to the effect on those individuals who do not follow the temporal norms of an organisation. Sarah had small children who needed to be picked up from childcare which meant that the end of her working day was non-negotiable. Whilst she viewed this as a valid 'reason' to leave work it did not stop her feeling guilty in the knowledge that every day she left her colleagues at SCIN as they continued to work. Moreover, it

illuminates the negotiations workers not having a 'reason' to leave may need to undertake.

When thinking about the affective dimension of working long hours it is important to take workers' motivation into consideration. Ellie described the predominant feeling of Rise members as being, 'Everything is completely fucked and we need to change everything, and we need to get very upset and very angry about the whole situation'. Indeed, Ellie and many others at Rise viewed their involvement as contributing to a wider political movement and, therefore, many did not theoretically divide work and life, believing that standing in solidarity with migrants required a holistic approach. This is also notable through Rise's choice of terminology for service users and providers ('friend') and their organisational management of time, discussed above. In addition, Rise was run by volunteers which, Ellie explained, was, firstly, due to there being no money to pay people (as they did not formally fundraise) but, secondly, because 'None of us feel the need for it'. This highlights the difference between those who have a vocation and those who have a job; Tom focused on someone who is good and dedicated to their job whereas Oren stated that they will pick up a multitude of work because they are not 'doing it as a job'. In addition, some paid service providers undertook some 'work' tasks on a voluntary basis due to a passion or interest (see Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani, 2011). For instance, Sarah's personal interest in migration grew alongside her job; she wanted to know more and do more. Thus, when she was asked to attend events in the evenings or weekends she did not claim back her hours: her personal interest blurring the boundaries of what is valued as professional 'work'.

The asylum process itself provides a context which results in many service providers and friends working 'extra' hours. Although a culture of working long hours can be found across legal specialities, Maria describes how working with the asylum system creates extra pressure to work longer hours:

There's usually a lot of work reading when you get home, and the difficulty in this area is that we don't get to charge for reading any case law, reading anything, we're just meant to know everything, and that's quite frustrating because it's so fast moving, everything's changing [...] on a daily basis there can be six, seven very lengthy cases that you have to try and take in, you're under an obligation to

your client to make sure that you know all this [...] I don't want to miss anything, I don't want it to be on my head that somebody's getting returned, and essentially that's the pressure that you put yourself under.

The fast tempo of legislative and procedural changes within the asylum process and the uncertainty it brings affects applicants, as mentioned throughout this thesis, but here we see how it also affects those who work with applicants. As a conscientious immigration solicitor, Maria felt an 'obligation' to have all the relevant information to best protect her clients (of course, 'winning' a case also involved a personal reward for the solicitor.) Yet needing to do so frustrated her as is evident in her emphasising not being remunerated for her 'extra' work (see also Farrell, 2012: 135). Immigration official, Mark, also directed his frustrations at the asylum system: 'We have a system that dehumanises people and I think the border agency, well the Home Office, or whatever the hell it's called this week [...] the institution is broken'. In addition to this frustration, the quickly evolving context in which workers existed intensified the stress experienced.

Immigration solicitor, David, disclosed that he had suffered 'periods of severe stress' due to his role; '(work) can just keep piling up and piling up and you feel you are, or could be, on the verge of just completely sort of losing it'. David worked long days; he was usually in his office from 9am to 7.30-8pm, sometimes with back-to-back meetings all day. If he had court the next day, he would generally take work home and sometimes worked past midnight preparing a case. In addition, he often went into his office on Sunday for a few hours as he lived close by; his legal partner was regularly in their office seven days a week (recreating a culture and expectation that other solicitors would do the same). David told me that, in practice, he 'wouldn't even know' what his working hours were due in part to the 24-hour emergency phone line his firm operated. David also mentioned other challenging aspect of his role that he needed to negotiate, including the Home Office-imposed short timeframes such as appeal deadlines; clients having multiple needs; and cuts to Legal Aid. The latter meant that his firm had had to take on more clients in order to pay him and his employees which added to David's stress.

David and Maria were not anomalies: all the solicitors I spoke to worked long hours and articulated that the area of asylum law was particularly challenging. It

was not just the solicitors who emphasised their frustrations towards the asylum system, many other workers held similar attitudes. This is supported by Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani who found support staff working at a refugee centre perceived 'the "system" as limiting their ability to make a positive difference to their clients' lives' (2011: 215). Nonetheless, in a clinical context, Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois argue that recognising these external structures /structural vulnerabilities could help to counteract service providers' burnout and negative interactions with service users (2011: 351).

## **'Professionalism' and building trust**

Hochschild contends that the closer the bond between individuals the more crucial emotional work is because the more emotional obligations matter. Using the example of a parent and child, Hochschild illustrates that, although parental feeling is viewed to be natural, in fact it requires an enormous amount of emotional work because it is so important whilst at the same time it is conducted more unconsciously. Within relationships that are less close, such as that between a flight attendant and a customer, emotional work is more conscious and is therefore easier to identify (1983: 68-9). This section considers how workers' positionality affects their relationships with applicants. It explores the types of relationships that are created when workers construct themselves as professional or not, and the emotional labour involved in building trust within relationships of varying degrees of professionalism.

Conceptualisations of professionalism tend to involve 'not letting your emotions get in the way' (Solicitor A in Westaby, 2010: 162). Solicitors, argue Westaby, manage their emotions in order to maintain this perceived professionalism (2010: 153). The professionalism within the world of solicitors is maintained by a legal pedagogy (Good, 2007: 27), and the emotional labour they undertake is done so within the legal professional norms and client expectations (Hochschild, 1983: 153). It has been argued that solicitors detach from applicants' narratives in order to remain 'objective' and 'professional' (Baillot et al., 2013; Farrell, 2012). Objectivity was also highly regarded in the world of immigration officials: Stacy and Mark both emphasised the importance of remaining 'objective' in their roles. Indeed, Mark viewed objectivity as key to being a HOPO: 'I'm having to sit (*in court*) and not react 'cos that's my position, I can't let this person get an

emotional effect on me because I won't make an objective decision'. Hochschild argues that there exists an irony in the striving for objectivity as 'we need feeling in order to reflect on the external or 'objective' world' (1983:31). Mark found that spending much of his working time consciously attempting to suppress his emotional reactions was extremely difficult.

In the extract below Jill supports the idea that to be professional one must suppress their own emotions in front of clients. Jill and I were discussing the possibility of crying in a meeting with an applicant, she explained that she had never 'felt the need' to cry:

I'm really aware of my role and also ... that I have to be professional [...] what's probably more important is that I'm really aware that I can't let them see that I'm upset by this because if they think "Oh I'm upsetting her" then they're not going to disclose things or they're going to feel doubly bad that they're upsetting themselves and me.

Others may argue, however, that disclosing emotion facilitates interlocutors opening up. Indeed, SCIN worker, Sarah, believed that upholding strict boundaries between service providers and service users was inherently problematic as 'You can help people so much more when you get to know them and to get to know them you kind of have to have that blurred line thing', an idea supported by Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani (2011). Furthermore, in my role as ethnographer I often approached building relationships with participants precisely by being emotionally open (to a certain extent and depending on the context) as I thought that it was more genuine to do so and therefore worked towards a more equal relationship. Thus, while Jill highlighted a practical reason why she would not show her emotions, that is, she did not want to dissuade applicants from disclosing certain information, it could be viewed as a discourse used to justify suppressing emotions by framing it as beneficial to the client rather than herself.

Those who worked with applicants positioned themselves in relation to them in a variety of manners, illustrated by the terminology different groups of people used to refer to applicants, such as 'clients', 'patients', 'service users', or 'friends'. There were varying degrees to which those who worked with applicants wanted to maintain 'professionalism'. I argue that these practices



affect how relationships are made and developed, the emotional labour involved and the affective dimensions of these relationships. As mentioned above, Rise members worked towards breaking down the service provider/user dichotomy. Related to this, friends at Rise did not have ‘rules’ about building personal relationships or becoming friends with asylum applicants. Ellie’s approach to sharing contact details with applicants, choosing to ignore Rise’s ‘Personal Safety’ policy, illustrated this:

I give some people my phone number, I don’t have a blanket rule, but I don’t just hand it out to just anyone. I give people my phone number who I feel like I like, you know, people who you feel like you’re becoming friendly with basically [...] I don’t have hard and fast rules that are set in stone because I don’t see it as a professional thing I just see it as part of my life and there’s a lot of people who I really like.

Ellie’s approach was an active attempt to go against what she viewed as professional relationships due to, I suggest, her political motivations and being unpaid (and, therefore, ‘choosing’ to give her time to these relationships). By not upholding clear boundaries between herself and applicants, Ellie did not maintain the emotional and physical distance that she believed ‘professionals’ did. Indeed, her practice stood in sharp opposition to other relationships I came across, such as that of solicitor-client.

Many participants, occupying various roles, mentioned that building some degree of trust between themselves and applicants was beneficial in order to do their jobs. Immigration solicitor, Paul, stated: ‘There’s not enough time to build up a sufficient relationship of trust for (*applicants*) to just disclose random things to you’. However, all the solicitors I interviewed made a concerted attempt to build some trust or, as David put it, get their clients ‘on side’ despite the short timeframes in which they worked. David explained, ‘I can sometimes try to lighten things, have some jokes or maybe try and talk about the football or cricket if it’s a Tamil <laughs> even though I know nothing about it <laughs>’. Many solicitors believed that without a ‘sufficient relationship of trust’ clients would still disclose relevant information: however, (as mentioned in the previous chapter) they were working on the assumption that clients knew what was relevant, which the literature suggests is rarely the case (Baillot et al., 2012; Good, 2007). David wanted to build trust to get the information he needed from

his clients; other workers build up trust in a slower manner and for different reasons.

The SCIN Women's Group, a weekly three-hour session that took place in their community flat, allowed Frieda and refugee Aliya to build up a relationship of mutual trust through years of shared embodied experiences. Frieda had been working there for two years and believed, in that time, she had got to know a 'core' group of the women who attend well enough for them to tell her their worries:

Maybe (*two years*) doesn't seem a lot but because it's a very intense space and time you do then get to know people's situation and get to know them and how they are[...] with Aliya I could tell immediately if she's not feeling well or if something's up.

Although Frieda did not view two years as a particularly long period of time to build a trusting relationship with applicants, it puts in sharp contrast the three to four hours that Home Office interviewers saw as ample to build relationships of trust strong enough to ensure disclosure (Baillot et al., 2012: 280). The intensity of the space and time that Frieda mentioned was due to the length of the sessions and their busy, noisy and unpredictable nature; both heart-breaking and hilarious incidents occurred in the space simultaneously, and the mood of the group could shift from moment to moment within the different rooms in the flat. When Aliya first began attending the Women's Group, she had little English and Frieda had no Urdu; language barriers made verbal communication difficult. Due to a lack of funding, SCIN did not have official interpreters (applicants often interpreted for one another) and, therefore, in lieu of shared languages they specifically designed activities such as cooking and art classes. In these situations, where there was no official interpreter, embodied communication took on a new significance. Frieda and Aliya's relationship developed through spending regular, informal time with each other: making and eating food; playing with children; taking part in various art projects; planting seeds; dressing up; laughing; crying; and so on. This range of shared, embodied experiences allowed for a more holistic trust to be built between workers and applicants which contributed to a deeper, more emotional knowledge of each other.

Moreover, Frieda and the women who attended the Women's Group developed a multi-directional knowing; both parties learnt about each other through taking part in the various activities described above. During school holidays both Aliya's and Frieda's children came to the women's group which allowed both a glimpse into each other's family life.<sup>71</sup> Issues of power, however, are omnipresent and complicate all these relationships. Frieda had a choice as to whom and when she disclosed personal information, whereas Aliya's choice was limited as Frieda may have been one of the only people Aliya knew to approach for help. For Frieda and Aliya it was *being with* each other, sharing embodied activities in the safe space of the Women's group, that built their bond, allowing them to *know* each other in a more personal or informal way.

Whilst these relationships involved potentially more emotional management, workers who were able to spend time *being with* applicants were also able to more readily experience the joyful moments of affective relationships that solicitors, for example, did not. Lucia described what she found to be the most rewarding elements of her job:

I love that contact with people, those kind of moments of warmth and those moments of human connection, something that I've always almost been addicted to is those moments when you connect with another human being, no matter how culturally different they might be.

Crucially, however, building the moments of intimacy that Lucia describes increases her emotional work and the affective nature of her relationships.

### **'They don't know yet that life is going to be hell'**

Asylum applicants engage with different services at different stages of the process for various reasons, including the restricted remit of some services, their knowledge and perceptions of existing services, or simply due to need or desperation. Throughout my fieldwork, it became apparent from either directly witnessing or hearing from others that there was an inverse relationship

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<sup>71</sup> Gender played a key role in the relationships developed at the Women's Group, however, this is beyond the scope of this thesis. In addition, it is notable that Hochschild argues that 'women more than men have put emotional labour on the market, and they know more about its personal costs' (1983: 11).

between applicants' length of time in the asylum process and their wellbeing. This is explored further in Chapter Nine. Many workers spoke about the difference they saw in applicants who were at the beginning of the process and had hope, compared to those at the end who were frustrated and disappointed, which at times manifested in aggression and violence (see also Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani, 2011: 214). I suggest that applicants' wellbeing and behaviour also affects those who work with them: those who work with applicants at the end of the process may have more to deal with emotionally than those who work with them at the beginning. Furthermore, at the beginning of the process applicants are entitled to government service and support that they may lose once they become appeals-rights-exhausted. Thus, it is possible for service providers to *provide* a service to those at the start of the process. To illustrate this inverse relationship, I turn to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth worked as a caseworker at the SRC before moving to a similar job at Asylum Help, where she worked with applicants in initial accommodation who were at the beginning of their asylum claim. The SRC service, terminated in April 2014, was available to applicants at all stages of the process, although in practice it tended to be used by people towards the end of the process, due to the increasingly complicated nature of the process, such as making appeals or support being cut. Elizabeth explicitly reflected on how meeting people at different stages of the process affected her as a worker. She found her work at Asylum Help 'less stressful' than at SRC because it involved working with people at the beginning of the process who, according to her, are in relative bliss as 'they don't know yet that life is going to be hell'. She laughed and went on to say:

At the beginning (*applicants'*) attitude is still okay, although they're shattered, they've got that little hope that okay maybe now things are going to go better and okay I will start again, but then when they've finished this here [...] when they've been through the system, they've been disappointed and frustrated, *oh so you can imagine*, so everybody you see is so stressed out it's kind of, it's a battle, it's a fight.

Elizabeth sat next to me in the back room of the Asylum Help office, and impersonated applicants talking to SRC staff, "You're all the same, you are the Home Office anyway, you are making our life a misery, you don't give us this,

you don't give us that", she laughed again. Indeed, Elizabeth laughed throughout our conversation which, I suggest, was a strategy she used to cope with her role. Elizabeth seemed relieved that she no longer had the kind of dialogues with applicants that she used to at the SRC. However, because Asylum Help would see people at the beginning of their claims, she told me they tended to tell their stories more frequently than applicants she met through the SRC, which she found emotionally quite difficult to hear.

Elizabeth mentioned that one of the hardest types of clients to work with were applicants who had become appeals-rights-exhausted and/or destitute; having previously 'thought their life was going to be good (*it ends up a*) complete disaster' she told me. Applicants' hopelessness and frustration was often translated into stress in workers as these situations left Elizabeth, and others, to inform them that there was nothing more they could do. Receiving bad news, such as a negative decision, was devastating for asylum applicants, their dependents and loved ones, but it was also difficult for those who worked with them (especially for those who knew the individual well) as it represented the start of a potentially very long, frustrating and emotionally exhausting journey. I remember my heart dropping when Seema revealed her claim had been refused, then becoming incredibly angry (which I managed to mostly temper when I was with her) as I found out the reasons for it. I suggest that predicting and waiting for the 'hell' that most likely came<sup>72</sup>, in addition to continually hearing bad news (interspersed with occasional happy pieces), takes an emotional toll on workers over months and years in the job and negatively affects their wellbeing, motivation and coping strategies.

### **Affective time: 'At first, I thought "What the hell is happening to me?"'**

Asylum Help worker, Jill, explained when she first noticed how her role affected her:

I was the least emotional person before [...] I would never cry at movies, all this sappy shit I would never, ever do and as soon as I

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<sup>72</sup> Home Office data for the years 2011-13 shows that 57% of initial decisions were refused, 32% granted and 11% withdrawn (Home Office, 2015a).

started working (*at the SRC*<sup>73</sup>), I think it's like it has to come out at some point, I would be listening to (*applicants' stories*) and someone would be crying and then I'd go home and watch an advert about like a dog home and I would be bawling my eyes out. At first I thought "What the hell is happening to me?" and then I realised talking to my colleagues they're like "Oh we're exactly the same" [...] it's misplaced emotion and sure enough it happened to me.

Jill's 'misplaced' or displaced emotions initially worried her as being something abnormal, 'the ugly absence of emotion' (Malkki, 2015: 70). Yet, she soon discovered that it was a common phenomenon among her colleagues and, therefore, began to accept it as part of the job.

Hochschild argues that there is a cost to emotion work: 'it affects the degree to which we listen to feeling and sometimes our very own capacity to feel' (1983: 21, see also Westaby, 2010). Indeed, all the workers involved in this study were aware of the potential for 'burnout' in their roles and almost all of them could name at least one person in their specific field who had either 'burnt out' or was in danger of doing so. I use the term burnout as it was predominantly the way in which participants spoke about emotional overload or, as Malkki (2015) describes, the excesses of the role that manifest in emotional coldness. This section examines how these costs were manifested among workers and how the seemingly high cost of emotional labour within the area of asylum was explained. It also explores various coping strategies workers employed.

'Burnout', or its potential, was explained by workers as being due to a variety of factors, although rarely explicitly the emotional labour they undertook. As mentioned above, the context of the asylum process, including the fast-changing legislation and working with people who are in vulnerable situations were reasons given that increases the emotionally challenging nature of many workers' roles. Feelings of guilt were commonplace among those who worked with asylum applicants. Jill described how she felt when she first started her job, 'when I'd go home from work and I'd feel guilty that I had a nice house, nice parents, a nice boyfriend and a nice life, [that] I'd never experienced anything traumatic.' Malkki argues that guilt is a feeling that is perhaps not

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<sup>73</sup> Jill began working as a caseworker at the SRC but had moved to Asylum Help by the time I met her.

expected when one first starts working at something ‘ethical and useful’, yet many workers are often left feeling ‘equivocal and even guilty’ (Malkki, 2015: 75). Frieda spoke about her guilt in terms of believing that she could be doing more for SCIN’s service users: ‘I think this is the thing, we’re not just talking about a bit of paper or some case, but the case is a person with feelings, with a story’. This is key to the work involved in the asylum process: it involves individuals who are in vulnerable situations, some of whom (certain) workers know well.

Another aspect of the context of the asylum process is the political economy in which organisations exist. Emilia, and many others, believed that often the ‘charity sector’ did not allow time for workers to look after themselves sufficiently, resulting in feelings of intense pressure and stress. Emilia criticised the lack of training and conversations around self-care at work, whilst dismissively expressing: ‘That’s the charity sector, there’s not much time for that’. Lack of training and organisational support was also highlighted by others as being a reason for the accumulation of stress. Mark believed that there was a significant absence of organisational support within the Home Office, and therefore saw detaching emotionally from ‘the pictures of injuries, the stories you’re constantly hearing’ as being the only option available to him to protect himself from burning out. An anonymous asylum caseworker writing for *The Guardian* supports what Mark told me:

New recruits routinely deal with claims involving murder and torture, with little or no emotional training, preparation or support. Decision makers are now less prepared for this type of work than they were a decade ago because the initial training is about half as long as it should be...You are exposed to some of the most traumatic human experiences imaginable and it is a job that has marked me forever (Anonymous, 2017).

Immigration official, Stacy, however, stated that there was support for Home Office staff if they wanted it but that, in practice, employees tended to debrief with colleagues after particularly difficult interviews.

In addition, I suggest, in some organisations the commonly held notion that their own wellbeing came secondary to the asylum applicants’ affected workers’ potential for burnout. Ellie told me:

*(Rise volunteers are)* famously shit at boundaries and at not burning ourselves out and not working ourselves into the ground, we're really terrible at it and we're all trying to get better [...] I mean also it's not the end of the world, we're still the most privileged people in the situation and if we can't quite look after our own mental health all the time we are still a lot better off than everyone else <laughs> coming out of Rise.

This extract emphasises Ellie's perception that helpers should not be helped (see Malkki, 2015: 57). Ellie suggests that however workers care for themselves they will always be 'better off' than the people going through the process; the implicit assumption being they should work harder and longer and not take time to practise self-care. This attitude also existed as motivating factors for working in this area, that is, helping the 'needy' or 'vulnerable' (see Rainbird, 2011). Both Asylum Help worker, Jill, and immigration solicitor, Claire, spoke of wanting and having the power to 'help' people they deemed vulnerable. For Claire, this was 'asylum seekers': those who 'really need to be protected and someone has to stand up for them'. For Jill, it was more specifically women and children seeking asylum whom she understood to be the most vulnerable to exploitation. Malkki states that 'we are now accustomed to think of humanitarianism as having an asymmetrical relationship with the "suffering stranger" and we call it *compassion* - not *attachment*' (2015: 164). However, exploring the practices of 'non-professional domestic humanitarians' (people who knitted soft toys for children in war zones) revealed a 'coeval, co-present neediness on the side of the volunteers or "the helpers"' (2015: 8). Volunteers gain a sense of doing something useful, helping 'the truly needy' whilst caring for themselves by alleviating boredom, isolation and loneliness. In practice, Malkki argues, need and vulnerability are multi-directional; 'need is everywhere, and it takes many different (sometimes radically different) forms' (2015: 164).

Nonetheless, Mark was explicit in his view that immigration officials need to be cared for:

Everybody worries about the asylum seekers, no one worries about *(Home Office employees)* [...] it's a bit different when you're fighting for these people but when your job is potentially to tell someone "You're a liar", you're trying to weed out the people that are lying.



Here, Mark illustrates the amount and type of emotional labour he is doing in his role, he went on to say:

the Home Office doesn't want people that empathise too much because they might get too over sympathetic [...] there's a very fixed idea of how to do things, you do your job, come out, deal with it however you deal with it and I think most people their way of dealing with it is to not care, they don't feel empathy for it 'cos if you do feel empathy you're seen as weak.

Mark's comments are again supported by the anonymous immigration caseworker writing in *The Guardian* (Anonymous, 2017). Moreover, the emotional labour that immigration officials do is similar to that of Hochschild's (1983) bill collectors, that is, Mark's role demands a certain amount of aggression and hostility in an attempt to get applicants to tell 'the truth'. Maintaining this attitude alongside what he saw as a lack of support began to affect Mark negatively, as we see below.

Unlike Mark, some workers I spoke to were slightly embarrassed by their own need. Lucia uttered, 'I guess, in a deeply shamedly [sic] psychological sense, I'm probably one of these people that needs to be needed'. For Oren, it was a close friend that pointed this out to him, accusing him of choosing to work at Rise because he knew that people would need him which would make him feel good. Oren is very self-reflexive, he continually thought and worried about his position at Rise and in the wider world; indeed, his work at Rise often made him feel not 'good at all' (Malkki, 2015: 53).

Workers were, overall, fairly aware of the negative impact their roles could have on their wellbeing and some consciously practiced self-care strategies. This included going to the gym; creating spatial distance between themselves and their work, for instance, getting out of the city or not taking work home; employing a life-coach; drinking; gallows humour (see also Farrell, 2012: 140); avoiding violent films or work-related news articles; and practicing religion: GP, Juliette, would often reminded herself that God is greater than the asylum system. In addition to individual self-care strategies, colleagues often supported each other emotionally and some organisations specifically attended to their workers' wellbeing. For example, towards the end of my fieldwork period SCIN set up a practitioner reflection session; this offered a safe and confidential

space and time for people working, mostly on a voluntary basis, with refugees and asylum applicants, to discuss their worries and personal stories of distress.

Rise member, Ellie, believed that in order to maintain, what she termed, 'organising' (being part of a wider network of resistance) within migrant struggles, practising self-care was crucial:

Letting something completely take over your life often means that you won't be able to do it forever [...] the long term and the long haul is what in my view is important so you have to be able to do something long term rather than spending seven days working 25 hours a day on this thing and then just crashing and not being able to do it.

Ellie compared herself to others at Rise whom she deemed took on too much. She felt that she attended to her own wellbeing fairly well; when she felt she was 'getting too sucked in' to the emotional lives at Rise (volunteers as well as applicants) she would give herself time and space away from the office and the people it involved. Oren also took time away from Rise when he felt it was getting too difficult. He went on to say, however, that because 'everyone' has his mobile number he could never completely separate himself; indeed, he believed, 'the more you see, the less you can escape it'.

Other workers, such as Emilia at Asylum Help, simply did not see their practice as sustainable and spoke explicitly about future plans which included a change in role or career, sometimes outwith the asylum process altogether. Farrell (2012) found that solicitors also leave asylum law to go into a different area of law that they assume will have less of an emotional toll, which was exactly what Rifat planned to do. After working as a caseworker for eight months, Emilia became very conscious of her own potential 'burnout'; indeed, she viewed it as almost inevitable when working in this area for a prolonged period. She envisaged leaving her job before she 'burnt out':

I see myself changing before burning out [...] so yeah, I have in my plan to do the best I can until I can but when I won't like people or when they become an object or numbers then I will change, because then all the problems comes, when you don't want to help, or when you don't help people anymore.

Emilia told me that she was 'not willing' to stay at Asylum Help forever. The precarious and uncertain third sector job market, however, may mean that some workers cannot simply change jobs at the point at which they think they need to, so workers stay in roles that ultimately harm them and the people they work with.

Many workers stated that the affective dimension of their work just got easier over time. Stacy explained her role as a Home Office interviewer:

You hear lots and lots of accounts of things that you can't begin to imagine that must be horrific. But I think over time you don't, you never get *used to it* and you don't harden to it or anything but you just seem to be able to deal with it better it's just like anything, the first few times you hear it.

Stacy rebuffed the notion that she was getting used to hearing applicants' accounts or becoming hardened to their narratives. She did acknowledge, however, that *something* made the affective nature of her work lessen over time. Similarly, when Claire first began working as an immigration solicitor, she noticed herself getting quite upset about certain clients' cases and found having to give applicants bad news particularly distressing. However, like Stacy, she mentioned that over time she was better able to deal with the tasks and emotional labour involved in her role:

I think, because you deal with (clients who have suffered trauma) on a more regular basis, like at the beginning it was something completely new to me whereas I think it is just more sort of getting used to it, it doesn't change the way you think of what's happened to that person or what they're telling me about but I suppose it's your reaction to it.

Farrell too found that solicitors emphasised how their clients' stories of suffering gradually become less affecting (2010: 144). Both Stacy and Claire were conscious that by stating they got used to their work might imply diminished care; Stacy quickly corrected herself to explain that it was not about getting used to it but learning how to 'deal with it', and Claire declared immediately after the extract above, 'It doesn't change the way you think'. Yet it does change something. Indeed, I noticed this reflecting on my experiences doing fieldwork. The more time I spent with asylum applicants, the less shocked and appalled I was when I heard of administrative mistakes made by the Home

Office; and I felt less upset when I saw someone sitting alone in a corner of the SCIN's drop-in, head in their hands, tears in their eyes. And therefore, as time passes, I write about individuals with increasing emotional flatness.

Getting used to the stories and experiences of applicants can result in compassion fatigue in workers. During a lunch break at a conference I attended, an embarrassed Red Cross worker revealed that because she was so busy at work, she had no time to take a step back and reflect on the seriousness of people's situations. She found herself comparing applicants with one another, for example, thinking during meetings with some of them, 'Well, at least you *have* a house'. While this may not seem that dramatic, the everyday examples of compassion fatigue add to the cumulative effect on those who work with asylum applicants and, importantly, on the applicants themselves.

Emotionally detaching from applicants and situations was another strategy used by workers to cope with the affective dimensions of their roles and is one that has been recorded within various groups involved in the asylum process such as tribunal members (Wilson-Shaw et al., 2012) and solicitors (Baillot et al., 2013; Farrell, 2012; Westaby, 2010). As mentioned above, Hochschild argues that flight attendants must 'mentally detach themselves' from their own feelings and emotional labour in order to survive their job (2003: 17). For workers involved in the asylum process, however, the consequences of doing so are far more concerning. Detachment appears to operate on a sliding scale. In Chapter Seven, Jill explained how she hears but rarely *listens* to applicants' stories in order to cope with the tasks at hand. Immigration official, Mark, explicitly stated that detaching from individual applicants and their stories became an essential strategy in order for him to continue doing his job. Although Mark had thoroughly enjoyed his job and the intense nature of the work in the past, he had found it emotionally draining over time. He admitted that he began to detach from the asylum applicants to the extent that he 'stopped caring':

(I) started dehumanising the people that I was dealing with. I didn't think of them as people, I was going in (*to court*) and I wasn't treating people with any sympathy, I was getting quite irate (*with applicants*).

Mark mentioned that he began to think of asylum applicants as 'stereotypes', that they were all liars; an attitude that was easy to maintain as, he admitted,

the same thinking was prevalent among his colleagues. This example gives weight to the notion that feeling rules are adopted as a result of an organisation's 'emotional culture' (Martin et al., 2008 in Baillot et al., 2013: 538; Hochschild, 1983) and, thus, become validated.

## Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated the affective dimensions of the relationships between workers and applicants as they spend time with each other in meetings or drop-ins and how relationships form and adapt over more sustained periods of workers' careers. It emphasised that the closer the bond between those who work with applicants and the applicants themselves, the more emotional labour is done. Those who work with asylum applicants in different roles undertake different types of emotional labour, for instance, SCIN workers attempt to make applicants feel welcome and at ease, while immigration officials want to demonstrate their position of power, instilling fear in applicants to get to the 'truth' of their narratives.

The political economy of services and organisational cultures impact on how service providers manage their 'work' time, whilst there exists a common rhetoric of 'personal choice' which also speaks to a moral economy that puts pressure on people to work harder and longer hours. This chapter has illustrated some of the costs of doing emotional labour over sustained periods of time: distress, burnout, detachment and dehumanisation. Indeed, there is a fine line between detachment and dehumanisation: Mark found himself dehumanising applicants as an affect management strategy to protect himself from the brutality of individual stories. In practice, it is difficult for workers to achieve a balance between looking after their own wellbeing and being able to work sustainably and not falling into compassion fatigue or indifference towards asylum applicants. To find this balance is challenging and becomes 'a regulating ideal and a constant struggle' (Malkki, 2015: 55). The production of affect cannot be separated from the political economy of services and the context of the asylum process. This chapter has demonstrated that over time workers may travel towards burn-out and compassion fatigue. What is crucial is that these negative consequences for the workers, of doing emotional labour in the specific context of the asylum process, is ultimately also harmful to asylum applicants.

Writing in 1983, Hochschild stated that the emotional labour that makes up a significant proportion of many jobs was 'seldom recognised, rarely honoured and almost never taken into account by employers as a source of on-the-job stress' (1983: 153). This attitude has changed in many sectors, for example, one firm of solicitors attended to workers' wellbeing by insisting on colleagues taking an hour-long lunch break together and away from their desks. Many of those who worked with applicants, however, thought that their organisations did not go far enough, for whatever reasons (usually a lack of resources and therefore time), in attending to workers' wellbeing. Self-care, if practised, was often squeezed into working life as demonstrated in the opening vignette. The framing theme of time continues into the next chapter which focuses on the time applicants spend waiting.

## Chapter 9 : 'Just Waiting'

### Introduction

In the grey, concrete square between the underground station and the bus station, I often waited for Olamide, sometimes for a couple of minutes and sometimes for up to half an hour. I would wait leaning against a wall or a railing watching the buses come and go, moving my body into a different position when I felt uncomfortable or self-conscious. I would check my emails on my smartphone, never having any new ones since the last time I checked. I would wander around the square looking down the different streets that led from it; I never knew which direction Olamide was coming from so I did not want to stray far. I was always conscious of my waiting, as the minutes felt like they dragged on. On occasion, if it was raining or cold, I would start to feel a little irritated with Olamide for being late. Other times, if the sun was shining and there was space to sit on one of the concrete benches that are scattered around the small square, I would rest and reflect on the act of waiting. I would think about my waiting and my sense of time in relation to the waiting that engulfs the lives of Olamide and others in the asylum process.

Short-term waiting is part of the everyday, corporeal experience (Rotter, 2016: 81), chronic waiting, however, is an intrinsic characteristic of the asylum process for those going through it. Indeed, the multiple field diaries that I produced highlight the 'recurring, almost modal' (Auyero, 2012: 24) experience of waiting that asylum applicants endure. Almost every time I met with Olamide, Joseph, Seema, Hassan, Matipa, and others in the asylum process, I would come away from our meetings and record similar observations and updates that I had done the previous time; they are still waiting. Their long-term waiting for decisions and appeals is punctuated with shorter-term waits for letters and appointments.

In this chapter, I explore waiting and its relationship with experiences of distress among those connected to the asylum system. Bissell states that waiting:

should be conceptualised not solely as an active achievement or passive acquiescence but as a variegated affective complex where experience folds through and emerges from a multitude of different planes (2007: 277).

Waiting is affective as applicants' anticipation of the future is heightened; they wait with both desire and dread. Like Rotter (2016), I focus on applicants' experiences of the bureaucratically and legally induced waiting *in between* the main events that make up the asylum process, including interviews, court appearances, and decisions; I understand these waits as sources of distress. The actors involved in the asylum process are inextricably connected to one another and therefore the system and its procedures make everyone wait (for something). The relational character of waiting results in feelings that waiting produces transcending the personal and diffusing throughout bodies and objects (Bissell, 2007: 291) and, therefore, I also comment on the experiences of other actors.

This chapter begins with a literature review that highlights the uncertainty that can surround waiting. It then provides an extended, ethnographic account of asylum applicants, Seema and Hassan's, experience of waiting. This offers a basis for the rest of the chapter, which is divided into three sections. The first describes how the condition of waiting varies significantly for different groups of people, and that for asylum applicants it is the 'order of things' (Auyero, 2012). It also shows how waiting produces cycles of blame among actors involved in the process. The second section looks at the practices of waiting and compares empty and busy waiting practices. The final section explores the effects of waiting on applicants including feelings of powerlessness, worthlessness and lack of mobility. It goes on to explore how these feelings can result in applicants' demotivation and harm their wellbeing. It ends by emphasising how hope is inextricably linked to experiences of waiting. Throughout this chapter the uncertainty that surrounds waiting is illuminated.

## **The condition of waiting**

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into the philosophy of the anthropology of time (see Gell (1993) for a comprehensive discussion on this), however, it is important to note that waiting is inextricably linked to concepts of time and experiences of the past, present and future. For Crapanzano, waiting is 'directed towards the future - not an expansive future, however, but a constricted one that closes in on the present...[yet] the present is always secondary to the future' (1986: 45). Waiting involves waiting *for* something; it is



an anticipation of a future something to come. Yet, anticipation imposes a constraint on the waiters' attention which results in a focus on time itself, thus passing more slowly precisely because of the attention paid to it (Schwartz, 1975: 168). Moreover, this anticipation wrapped up in desire or dread highlights the affective nature of waiting (Rotter, 2016).

Waiting is always directed at something. Crapanzano (1986) distinguishes between two types of waiting: waiting for something known, tangible (a train for example) and waiting for something more abstract, unknown or even unknowable. He uses the example of white South Africans waiting for the end of apartheid to illustrate the latter.<sup>74</sup> He locates his research in a small village in South Africa in the early 1980s, an environment in which, he argues, everybody was waiting. For white South Africans, waiting was compounded by a fear of what the country was to become; for black South Africans, waiting was illuminated by hope and for others there was mix of both fear and hope. Indeed, hope that the desired object will one day arrive is crucial to the waiting process; 'hope is the field of desire in waiting, it is where desire is given free play' (Crapanzano, 1986: 46). Crapanzano argues, however, that due to the uncertainty around what the end of apartheid would bring, people were '*waiting for something, anything to happen*' (1986: 42, original emphasis). Nonetheless, waiting involves waiting for something to come from someone or something else (Schwartz, 1975; Bourdieu, 2000; Auyero, 2012).

Crapanzano describes waiting as a 'passive activity':

We can never actively seek the object of waiting. We can, to be sure, do what we can to ensure its arrival if we desire it or to prevent its arrival if we do not desire it, but ultimately its arrival or non-arrival is beyond our control (1986: 45).

Thus, for Crapanzano (1986) the condition of waiting entails activity yet also subordination. Indeed, the notion of waiting as passive and inactive is problematised in the literature (Rotter, 2016; Armstrong, 2015; Auyero, 2012; Hage, 2009; Kohn, 2009; Bissell, 2007). Within the context of the asylum process, Rotter (2016) explores asylum applicants' accounts of waiting within

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<sup>74</sup> Crapanzano uses the 'native categories' that the white South Africans he was studying did. He explains that this does not mean that he endorses or accepts them (1986: xi).

the process. She argues that during conversations, applicants would highlight the passive, empty nature of waiting, yet, their daily lives tended to be active and filled with regular activities such as ‘socialising, praying, immersing themselves in daily routines, gathering information about the asylum process and eliciting support from others’ (2016: 82). While waiting was often viewed by applicants and others as a negative, Rotter (2016) illustrates the (occasional) productive aspect of applicants waiting in the asylum process. In these instances, waiting can be transformed into social capital; time allows applicants to prepare their cases into stronger bodies of evidence, build important supportive social networks, and the duration of residence in the UK can, in some cases, help qualify individuals for Leave to Remain based on Human Rights’ grounds (see Yeo, 2013).

Waiting can also be a productive force for those people and/or institutions that make others wait as Auyero (2012) illustrates. In the context of Buenos Aires, Auyero argues that the state dominates its citizens through the practice of delay and waiting:

Domination works, we contend, through yielding to the power of others; and it is experienced as a waiting time: waiting hopefully and then frustratedly for others to make decisions, and in effect surrendering to the authority of others (2012: 4).

Importantly it is the uncertain and arbitrary aspects of waiting that create compliance in waiters. Auyero describes how shanty town residents living on the outskirts of Buenos Aires queue for state benefits; waiting amidst ever-changing opening times of municipal offices and seemingly arbitrary rules regarding where they can wait and how many people will be dealt with in a day. Significantly, they wait compliantly in these uncertain conditions due to the fact that they rely on the state to survive. Auyero describes these residents as ‘patients of the state’; being unable to afford to resist, they comply. Political subordination is reproduced through these temporal processes (Auyero, 2012: 2) as practices of delay, or ‘governing techniques’ (Foucault) create docility among the poor. Similarly, in the context of the asylum process, Schuster argues that applicants are expected to wait patiently for a decision and ‘present themselves as passive victims, grateful for being granted whatever minimal tolerance they are shown’ (2011: 402). Applicants wait for the Home Office to decide on their cases whilst

simultaneously being reliant on them for subsistence support. Thus, argue Anderson et al., '*the state* is deeply implicated in constructing vulnerability through immigration controls and practices [...] they produce and reinforce relations of dependency and power' (2009: 8).

Auyero highlights that the uncertainty and arbitrariness of waiting are due to three practices which he defines as follows: a) 'veiling', the fact that human actions are masked behind non-human operations, that is, computer systems and waiting technologies (see also Hage, 2009a: 3), such as automated holding systems for phone lines. b) 'confusing' which is enacted through contradictory messages given to waiters by officials. This may result in waiters turning to people who do not necessarily know the system for information about it and creates a dependency on others. c) 'delaying or rushing', that is, waiting periods that are either cancelled or postponed, or, the object of waiting is granted unexpectedly (Auyero, 2012: 73-4). Each of these practices exists within the asylum process in numerous manifestations, detailed throughout this thesis. Chapter Six details the non-human actants that are able to hide human actions, Chapter Five provided numerous examples of the confusing messages applicants received from the Home Office, and illustrates how waiting periods are cancelled unexpectedly: for instance, Joseph's letter from the Home Office that changed his reporting requirements without an explanation. What this thesis emphasises is that in addition to the compliance these practices create in waiters they also create distress.

To summarise, I have highlighted that waiting is a temporal experience and involves anticipation. Although it always involves waiting for something the object of waiting may not always be known or knowable. Uncertainty, therefore, plays a role in waiting, which Auyero (2012) argues is key to the compliance that waiting can foster. Significantly, Auyero (2012) emphasises that the condition of waiting brings forth questions of power regarding who waits and who does not. Indeed, in the context of Buenos Aires, and I suggest the asylum process, waiting is 'the order of things' for the poor or disposed, that is, those who rely on the state (Auyero, 2012: 14-5).

## Seema and Hassan

During my first time at SCIN's drop-in, I met Seema; it was also her first day as a volunteer. There were around twenty other people in the room, some of whom were sitting or standing and chatting, others making tea or reading leaflets. It was a space where 'waiting communities' (see Bourdieu, 2000) came together. I was introduced to Seema by Tony and I remember being surprised at how open the seemingly shy, young woman sitting next to me was. While we ate generous slices of carrot cake that had been donated to the drop-in, Seema told me about her experience of the asylum process and I told her about my research. At this point, Seema was waiting for her asylum interview.<sup>75</sup> Between January and August 2014, I saw Seema almost every week at the drop-in and we developed a friendly relationship.

Through Seema I met her husband, Hassan; he did not like attending the drop-in, but I would occasionally meet up with them at their fourth-floor flat where we would often discuss waiting. We would sit in their living room, the furniture comprised two sofas, a television and a small coffee table. Underneath the coffee table was a long, red and orange patterned curtain folded in half to create a rug. One of the sofas was covered with another curtain; the small flowery patterned material was roughly cut into pieces to create arm protectors, seat protectors and a small panel draped over the back. Cut from the same curtain was a small table cloth that covered the coffee table. The walls of the room were bare bar five pink, paper hearts that Seema had made in an art class. There was a musty smell of Indian cooking which added to the warmth from the radiators and the glow the sunshine brought penetrating the orange sheet hung over the window. I got the impression through their articulation of their dislike for the neighbourhood that the sheet hung up over the window permanently blocking out the outside world. I first recorded one of our conversations in February 2014, seven months after Seema had had her screening interview.

Whilst sipping chai, I asked them what life in Glasgow was like. Seema responded quickly, 'It's really good because if you are safe, if you are in safe hands then you obviously feel very good, very, very fresh so I'm really happy in

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<sup>75</sup> Seema was the named person on the asylum claim, Hassan and her son were her dependants.

Glasgow'. Hassan however pointed out that there were also problems, 'I'm very happy in the sense that, currently we haven't got any problems, so we are very happy you can say, but, all the time sitting here it leads to depression, anxieties, you know'. Seema nodded in agreement; they both discussed the effects of having little to do with their time while they were waiting for Seema's interview. Hassan mentioned that his blood pressure had starting rising; he had been to the doctor who suggested he get some exercise and watch what he eats. Seema interrupted to say, 'But you know when we are just sitting home you can't stop [eating]' and she admitted that she spent a lot of her time cooking. I asked them if they thought their health had changed since claiming asylum, Hassan answered:

*(It has) changed after claiming asylum, it's not due to the Home Office, its due just I'm sitting here all the time, I'm idle doing nothing, my weight before claiming asylum was 66Kg and now I'm 90Kg ... 66 to 90 Kg you can well assess in just five to six months I just got 24 Kg. So, I mean to say we are confined in (our flat) and we don't have any useful activity to do because we are not allowed (to work), you know according to the Home Office rules and regulations.*

In February 2014, at the time of this interview, Seema and Hassan described themselves as being 'very happy' despite how being 'idle' while waiting for their interview was affecting their mental and physical health. I suggest this was due to various reasons including them feeling a sense of safety after moving from the South of England to Glasgow; their faith in the state to grant them asylum; but also, as Kirkwood et al. (2016: 184) argue, by applicants testifying that they are happy it reinstates their desire to be in the UK and not appear ungrateful.

One afternoon in April, Seema had persuaded Hassan to join her at SCIN's drop-in. We sat together on one of the seven long tables, drinking tea and eating biscuits. They had still not heard anything from the Home Office regarding Seema's interview; Hassan explained that he thought the Home Office had forgotten about them but at least it gave him time to study. Hassan has a Degree in Pharmacy and had completed a master's Degree in public health in the UK before claiming asylum. According to Seema he studied *all* the time. He would borrow large, weighty pharmacy text books from the local library and read through them at home. Indeed, he was very concerned that during the asylum

process he would lose his previous knowledge, leaving him unable to practise pharmacy in the future.

At the drop-in in June, I sat down next to Seema who was sitting by herself at a table; we greeted each other with a hug. I asked after Hassan who had not returned to the drop-in since his first visit; Seema told me 'He is depressed'. It was now almost one year after Seema's screening interview and they had still heard nothing from the Home Office; the uncertain waiting appeared to be wearing them both down. I no longer heard either of them talk about the positive aspects of waiting: the time to study, the support they received, and so on. They had explored ways in which to pass the time, one of which was to apply for a work permit that applicants are eligible for if their claim has been outstanding for a year (and if they are qualified to do the *very specific* list of jobs that the Home Office identify) (Home Office, 2015d: para 360). Yet, Seema said that she did not think that they would apply because they did not want the Home Office to get the impression that they were in the UK just to work. This is in line with Kirkwood et al. who found that asylum applicants often perceived that emphasising a desire to work puts them at risk of being seen as economic migrants (2016: 185). That day, we talked about a friend of Seema's who had been in the asylum process for eight years with no resolution. In contrast to our conversation in February, Seema now believed that their situation was the Home Office's fault.

In the same month, I recorded another interview with Seema and Hassan in their living room. Hassan told me that before applying for asylum they had been warned not to by friends and acquaintances. They were told that because it is such a lengthy process with limited money and no right to work, they would be in 'constant worry, constant fear and constant depression'. Nonetheless, they claimed despite this advice. We spoke again about waiting, Hassan told me:

We are waiting, all our friends they say let it go, even don't say to your solicitor that you are waiting for your interview, don't ask from Home Office [...] after two or three years it would be better for you if they ask you for substantive interview after two or three years ... but we are worried.

Seema joined in to say their solicitor had told them that she was powerless to do anything and that they would just have to wait for the Home Office to invite her for an interview. While their friends regarded their time as positive - they were getting accommodation and financial support from the government, so they should enjoy their free time in the UK - Hassan and Seema found it hard to live in the present and instead worried about what the future would hold (see Crapanzano, 1986). Hassan said:

I assume that if these conditions will continue after three or four years I will be useless, just like Seema was telling about Parveen's husband, he's (*bedridden*) now and they've (*been*) waiting for the Home Office to see them for eight years [...] If (*asylum applicants*) are working there is no problem because when you sit idle, make tea, make some different dishes and all the time eating and when you go out for work you get little time for eating and even you burn your calories outside.

Four months after our first recorded interview, Hassan repeated the same problems he was experiencing as a result of being idle.

From August onwards, Seema's attendance at the drop-in became more sporadic and I saw less and less of her and Hassan. After many text messages back and forth, sometimes waiting weeks for Seema to reply, we arranged that I would visit them. On a cold October afternoon, I sat in their living room and was given the usual thick mango juice followed by a cup of hot, sweet, milky chai. Hassan had stopped taking sugar in his tea in an attempt to lose weight. We chatted; catching up on what each of us had been doing. Seema had begun volunteering for an asylum housing project; she showed me the worksheets she had been given telling me how 'proud' she had felt sitting in the SRC's training room with the director of the project. Hassan had stopped attempting to study; instead he talked about their one-year-old son and how he had learnt to copy Bollywood dances from the television. They had not received any news from the Home Office regarding Seema's asylum claim.

I did not see Seema or Hassan between November 2014 and April 2015. Seema and I exchanged occasional text messages and I continued to ask after them among staff and other attendees at the drop-in. In April, I visited them again at their flat. Seema was seven months pregnant with her second child and they had

been waiting for over a year to be moved into a flat with more than one bedroom. Seema had her substantive interview at the beginning of March, almost exactly twenty months after her screening interview. Her claim was refused one week later on the grounds of credibility (as is discussed in Chapter Five). They had previously been warned by friends and staff at SCIN that their initial claim would most likely be refused, so they had prepared themselves to some extent.<sup>76</sup>

Seema and Hassan spent twenty months waiting for Seema's interview; yet, this interview was only the first stage in their far longer wait to be granted protection. An interview that they had been warned (by friends, people at SCIN and their solicitor) was unlikely to be successful. Waiting for the interview, however, was a safer waiting than waiting for the outcome of an interview in which one could be, and indeed Seema was, refused protection. Moreover, focusing their waiting on the interview potentially offered them a more concrete and thus accessible thing to wait for than the somewhat abstract notion of protection and the uncertain future it brings.

## **Waiting as the 'order of things'**

As mentioned in Chapter Four, successive governments have introduced many different initiatives that aimed to speed up the asylum process such as the 'fast track' process and the New Asylum Model;<sup>77</sup> however, none of these have been particularly successful. Indeed, the Home Affairs Committee recognising that there were significant delays within the asylum process stated:

The human cost of delays in decision-making is significant [...] We consider it wholly unacceptable that anyone should have to wait longer than six months for an initial decision [...] Ministers must not allow people who claim to be fleeing persecution to be left in limbo for so long ever again (2013: 9).

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<sup>76</sup> In the year ending March 2015, 60 % of asylum cases were refused at the initial decision. Furthermore, out of the top five countries of applicants (Eritrea, Pakistan, Syria, Iran, Sudan), cases from Pakistan have by far the lowest success rate, 22% compared to 85% from Eritrea and Syria (Home Office, 2015e: 8.2 and 8.3).

<sup>77</sup> Such initiatives are still being brought out, in April 2017 a new fast track system was proposed to replace the 'detained fast track' system that was ruled unlawful by the Court of Appeal (Travis, 2017).



Moreover, there is an inherent uncertainty concerning time within the structure of the asylum process as temporal language such as ‘imminent’, ‘as soon as possible’, ‘as soon as reasonably practicable’ peppers Home Office policy and procedure. For instance, Immigration Rules simply state that initial decisions should be taken ‘as soon as possible’ and applicants must be informed if there is a delay longer than six months (Home Office, 2015d: para. 333A). Applicants wait with an open-ended uncertainty described by Schwartz (1975) as being the punitive nature of waiting; the UK’s practice of indefinite immigration detention is an obvious example of this. These vague timescales contrast with Home Office policies directed at applicants such as: delaying applying for asylum after entering the UK can damage credibility and access to support (Home Office, 2014c: 27), and the 14-day window in which applicants are able to appeal a decision (Tribunal Procedure, 2014: rule 19). Immigration solicitor, David, highlighted these contradictions and the effects of this for applicants:

There’s like these huge delays and then somebody will get a refusal and go to court and then you want an adjournment and its refused because they say it’s in the best interest in justice that it proceeds quickly so it’s full of contradictions, I think people probably feel that they’re just a number in this sea of contradictions ... I think they can sometimes feel quite lost.

These procedural aspects also highlight the inequality regarding who waits (Auyero, 2012; Schwartz, 1975).

Whilst everyone involved in the asylum process waits, the dispossessed or least (strategically) powerful, that is, asylum applicants, wait more than others (see Auyero, 2012; Schwartz, 1975). Indeed, waiting is the ‘order of things’ (Auyero, 2012) for applicants as they are habitually exposed to long periods of waiting during the determination process. Despite the Home Office stating that an asylum interview will take place ‘soon after’ the screening interview (Home Office, 2017), Seema and Hassan waited for almost exactly twenty months for Seema’s asylum interview. This was not exceptional; during my fieldwork, I came across many applicants who had been waiting for over a year for asylum interviews. Schwartz argues that:

to be kept waiting - especially to be kept waiting for an unusually long while - is to be the subject of an assertion that one’s own time (and,

therefore social worth) is less valuable than the time and worth of the one who imposes the wait (Schwartz, 1975: 30).

Thus, the nature of the asylum process, such as the lack of procedural timescales, creates an expectation that applicants will (and should) wait for interviews, decisions, appeals, support and so on if they wish to be considered for protection. Indeed, at a legal workshop for applicants that SCIN arranged, one woman spoke about her waiting and stated that she did not ask her solicitor about the lengthy timeframes because she did not want to pressurise her. This example illuminates how waiting is interlinked with notions of deservingness. And significantly, these notions of deservingness spread subtly amongst other people involved in the asylum process. SCIN worker, Frankie, described the task of giving out food parcels to applicants. She told me that sometimes she had to tell applicants that they just had to wait: 'You don't need to turn it into a like Home Office kind of attitude, you can do it as simple as saying you are getting this for free you will need to wait a little bit longer.' Although not consciously doing so and potentially having no other option, Frankie was contributing to the normalisation of applicants' waiting and the expectation that they should be grateful for what little they get.

Matipa had been in the asylum process for eight years at the time of my fieldwork. Along with Amir, she had been waiting the longest out of all the participants in this research. She would often talk about waiting, yet, sometimes, I got the impression that she did not know what exactly she was waiting for; she told me, 'We are just waiting, we really don't know what will happen'. (I observed similar feelings from many other applicants who had been in the system for years and undergone various appeals and court hearings.) These outlooks support Auyero's (2012) assertion that the exact object of waiting becomes more abstract as daily waiting becomes normalised. I suggest that the object of waiting also become obscured through (mis)information and rumours. Applicants tend to come to UK with an (often incorrect) expectation of what life is going to be like (as Elizabeth suggests in Chapter Eight and Lucia does below). Yet, as time passes, and they wait to be given refugee status they acquire information (from others in the process, service providers, and so on) regarding the asylum system. Whilst learning from those around them can be a huge support and valuable source of information, the complexity of the system

means that there is also a lot of misinformation that circulates which can obscure the process further. Matipa had heard from others in the process that once her son had been in the UK for seven years he would automatically be eligible for some form of protection. A change in Immigration Rules in 2012 meant that children who have been living in the UK for seven years *might* qualify for leave to remain. However, the Rules did not contain a similar qualification for parents and therefore the child's case will only succeed if it can be argued that it is reasonable not to leave the UK with their parent(s) (see Yeo (2016) for an excellent summary). Thus, Matipa was potentially waiting for the impossible to arrive.

The delays and waiting involved in state practices are often inextricably linked to bureaucratic procedures (Rotter, 2016; Auyero, 2012). Indeed, the waiting that participants in the asylum process did was often explained as being due to lengthy bureaucratic processes and delays in the system due to understaffing at the Home Office (see also Rotter, 2016). The fact that asylum applicants were waiting for many months and up to a year for their asylum interview was reported to be a 'new source of delay' in 2013 and 2014 (Asylum Information Database, 2015: 18). I discussed these delays with immigration official, Stacy, who stated:

I think certainly there were (*delays to asylum interviews*), there have been staffing issues, I mean right across the Civil Service over the last couple of years [...] certainly asylum was hit quite hard with just a very rapid turnover of staff, we lost a lot of decision makers in a very short period of time [...] I think it was just an area of uncertainty, there was talk of cuts [...] and when everyone faces periods of uncertainty they all start to look elsewhere (for jobs) and it's no secret that Civil Service recruitment is slow <laughs> so we did have a period of being very short staffed<sup>78</sup> [...] there have been periods in the past where for whatever reason things have certainly slowed down and that's why this six month period<sup>79</sup> is very much the focus just now so ideally we don't have anybody waiting that length of time [...] it's definitely another element that frustrates and upsets everybody,

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<sup>78</sup> There was a decrease in staff numbers after a restructuring of the UK Border Agency in 2013 (Home Office, 2015e: 8.4).

<sup>79</sup> Stacy was referring to the Home Office's aim to make a *decision* on an asylum claim within six months (Home Office, 2017d), I, however, was asking why there were often delays longer than that even to the interviews.

nobody wants anybody to be waiting that length of time but if you're just totally pushed to what you can do then that's all you can do.

Stacy admitted that there had been delays that were caused by the internal management of the Home Office, a phenomenon well known among many involved in the asylum process. Rise volunteer, Oren, told me, 'I think the Home Office have been struggling a lot more to handle their caseload; we've seen people going from weekly reporting to six monthly reporting, they're stretching everything out'. In addition to the distress caused by waiting for an asylum interview that Seema and Hassan's story begins to illuminate, applicants may also, over time, start to forget important details of their asylum story which can have grave consequences for them later on if they were to add or change details. Herlihy et al. found that for those applicants who experience high levels of post-traumatic stress 'the length of the application process may also affect the number of discrepancies' (2002: 324).

Delays to asylum interviews also frustrated immigration officials; Mark emphasised that if an applicant's claim had been refused but they had not been removed from the country for years then they gradually had more right to be here; he said scornfully 'We're crap at our job, (*if*) we haven't removed them therefore they should be allowed to stay'. Among actors within the asylum process there was a cyclical attribution of blame for the waiting involved in asylum claims. Although Stacy acknowledged that internal staffing issues did cause hold-ups, the Home Office has been known to locate the source of delay with applicants themselves as exemplified in policy instigated to 'significantly reduce the scope for claimants to string out the appeals system solely to delay removal' (Home Office, 2006a, in Rotter, 2010), and the Immigration Act 2014 restriction on the criteria for which one can make an appeal. Blame, however, was not only passed between applicants and the Home Office, Immigration solicitor, Naomi, who herself blamed the Home Office (and the tribunal) for delays, felt that applicants tended to believe their solicitors to be responsible:

The solicitor, I think, definitely gets the flak for that, 100% if there's a delay from whomever it be, the Home Office, the tribunal, it's your fault, it's your fault that there's not an answer by now, you could say, "I phone every day", it's still your fault until they get an answer ... it always comes back to the solicitor in this area.

This is perhaps a case of shooting the messenger or of misunderstanding the power that solicitors have in those situations. However, what I want to highlight here is Naomi's powerlessness in the situation and the frustration it caused. She told me that the most challenging aspect of her job was 'not being able to give a client an answer about how long it's going to take, knowing that that's going to have a huge impact on them the longer that that goes on'. It saddened Naomi to see clients waiting, during which time their mental wellbeing would often deteriorate, this combined with her irritation regarding the delays in the asylum process effected how she viewed and interacted with the Home Office (see Schwartz, 1975: 176). Due to solicitors not being able to provide their clients with answers regarding timescales, applicants would frequently change solicitors in the hope that another could do a 'better job'. Seema and Hassan did just this.

Procedurally, the Home Office treats time differently between practices that cause applicants to wait and practices that cause themselves to wait. For instance, the vague timescales they have in which to make a decision on a claim and the strict 14-day window applicants have to appeal it. This exemplifies the power involved within waiting practices and highlights how waiting is the 'order to things' for some (Auyero, 2010). Moreover, waiting and delay affects those involved in the asylum process differently. Waiting can cause feelings of worthlessness in applicants in addition to creating a dependency on others to bring about the object of their waiting, for others delays cause frustration and irritation. Blame becomes cyclical: generally, applicants blame the Home Office and sometimes their solicitors; solicitors, service providers and friends tend to blame the Home Office and the Home Office blames applicants (and the legal system for the number of avenues in which applicants can appeal). Significantly, the cyclical attribution of blame can obscure accountability (also a feature of the bureaucratic process as discussed in Chapter Five), cause informal and professional relationships to become strained and provoke feelings of cynicism from various actors towards the whole process.

### **Managing the forever temporary (practices of waiting)**

As I have laid out above, for asylum applicants, daily waiting is a perpetual state of being. Yet, waiting is also a process (Auyero, 2012: 72), and waiting practices change over time. In this section, I consider how applicants wait when waiting is

indefinite. My findings support Rotter (2016) in her assertion that although many applicants described their waiting as passive (sitting idle, wasting time, and so on) they often filled their time with various regular activities. However, I want to emphasise that the type of activities that applicants do are severely limited and usually not how they would choose to fill their time if they were able to. For instance, many applicants volunteered, yet what they really wanted to do was undertake paid employment. Therefore, when applicants like Hassan described an empty kind of waiting, I believe it felt empty to him and therefore should be considered as such.

Those that hold positions of power tend to have resources which enable them to refuse, to a certain extent, to wait (Schwartz, 1975: 19). When Asylum Help first took over the asylum advice service from the SRC, service users regularly had to wait for lengthy periods of time before they answered the helpline (Goodwin, 2015)<sup>80</sup>. This was a bugbear for almost all of the service providers and friends that I came across and I too experienced lengthy waits on the Asylum Help phonenumber when helping out at Rise. The first-time trainee solicitor, Naomi, rang Asylum Help for a client, she was put on hold for 41 minutes, which significantly affected the time she had to manage other tasks that day. However, over time, she learnt to expect these long periods of waiting and factored them into her workload: 'I'm leaving (*the telephone*) on loud speaker and I'm doing work in the background 'cos obviously I can't afford that time.' Whilst Naomi had to wait on the end of the phonenumber, like applicants did, she was able to continue waiting whilst being busy with other work-related tasks. Nevertheless, other service providers and friends such as those at Rise and SCIN, who shared offices and therefore did not have any private space to make a telephone call, did not have the means to do this and therefore were subjected to a more 'empty' waiting whilst on hold. Waiting, therefore, creates a hiatus for some and for others an opportunity to progress with other things.

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<sup>80</sup> This was due to Asylum Help underestimating how many staff it would need, however, the length of time one had to wait gradually improved. At the time of my fieldwork, there were other issues with Asylum Help's telephone service including it not being free from the two mobile phone providers used by the majority of asylum applicants (Goodwin, 2015) and not to mention the difficulty in communicating complex situations over the telephone.

The endurance involved in long-term waiting implies an ‘ability to snatch agency in the very midst of its lack’ (Hage, 2009: 101), and can be a source of creativity (Kohn, 2009). I came across applicants who were exceptionally active and creative in their waiting practices; Tendai was one of these people. Tendai is in his late 30s, from Southern Africa and had been living in the UK for almost ten years before he claimed asylum. I first met him in 2012 at a university conference. During my fieldwork period, we regularly met up to film together or have a chat over a coffee or a beer which often involved much laughter and joking. Tendai is a very self-aware, self-reflective and motivated man. He had a relaxed attitude towards the asylum process; when with him, I would often find myself almost forgetting that he was going through it. Although he had suffered periods of depression in the years before I met him, his attention to his mental and physical wellbeing was remarkable given the situation he found himself in. He did not receive government asylum support (instead he used his social capital to access housing and support) and he attempted to eat well and keep fit; he cycled everywhere (primarily because it was free transport, but he also acknowledged the health benefits of doing so). In addition, he attended fortnightly counselling sessions and free meditation classes when he felt the need. He was active in the city; he volunteered at various charities exchanging labour for lunches and regularly attended comedy nights, music performances, conferences related to migration, activist events and so on. Tendai is overwhelmingly chipper and upbeat and has social capital that he can translate into food, accommodation and activities. This contrasts with other applicants I met for whom waiting produced negative feelings such as anxiety and powerlessness which often resulted in them not wanting to go out and socialise in the way Tendai did and therefore not creating the same social capital.

One task that punctuates all asylum applicants’ waiting is the regular reporting to the Home Office. All of the participants in the asylum process, bar Tendai, complied with these conditions and went to report every time they were summoned. Auyero (2012) argues that most of the poor, shanty-town residents wait in a state of compliance, rarely challenging state bureaucrats, because they are desperate; they rely on the government in order to survive. I suggest that there is something more happening in the context of asylum; applicants obey rules due to fear. Immigration detention acts as a threat throughout the asylum

process (Bloch and Schuster, 2005) as applicants may be detained at any stage. Moreover, asylum claims can be refused on non-compliance grounds (Home Office, 2014c: 12). Joseph explained:

In my own situation (*the Home Office*) have done almost everything to me and I have never absconded, I have never stopped signing, I've always been going (*to report at the Local Enforcement Office*) and every time I put in appeal, appeal after appeal they refuse, refuse, refuse, refuse, refuse, so it's like, I'm looking at it as it's like a war between us and the Home Office. So, somebody along the way is going to give up and I know it will be the Home Office who's going to give up because I know I'm on the right track and there's no way I'm going to give up when I know what I'm saying and what I have been saying is true.

Joseph's perseverance was remarkable but what this extract illustrates is how he waited compliantly; he did not want to break any of the rules and risk giving the Home Office a reason to refuse his claim.

Tendai, however, did not always comply. Occasionally, when we met up, Tendai would tell me, usually with a smile, that he had not gone to report at all; on one occasion this was because he went to a comedy gig in Edinburgh instead. After this, he received a letter from the Home Office which stated that a failure to report can involve a 'six-month prison sentence, £5 000 fine or both'. He sent me a text message to say, 'I have no money this week to pay them. I told my solicitor he laughs so loud I'm not allowed to work first of all'. More frequently, Tendai told me stories about how he had been 'cheeky' to the officers at the Reporting Centre when he went to report. Over a coffee one day, he told me 'I nearly got taken [to detention]' when he went to report. The immigration official that dealt with him when he went to report had asked him if he still lived at the address that they had for him on his casefile, he replied, "Of course not, you threw me out"<sup>81</sup>. She warned him about his attitude and requested that he tell her the date and time he was next to report. This appeared to worry Tendai as he explained that he would make an excuse to his lawyer so that he

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<sup>81</sup> Tendai had returned to his flat one day and the locks to his front door had been changed by Orchard and Shipman who had been trying to evict him. The same phenomenon is mentioned in Chapter Six regarding Matipa carrying around all of her 'important' paperwork.



did not have to go and therefore would avoid being detained from the Reporting Centre.

Tendai's response to the waiting involved in the asylum process offers a sharp comparison to Seema and Hassan's; indeed, Tendai and I rarely even discussed waiting which was quite remarkable when comparing it to conversations I had with other applicants. His attention to the present contrasts with the reactions of Seema, Hassan, Joseph and Matipa, all of whom spent much of their waiting time thinking and anticipating their (uncertain) future. Tendai's waiting was active and busy, whereas, Hassan's became increasingly inactive and 'empty' over time. I suggest there are two main reasons for this: firstly, Tendai was fairly confident that the Home Office would not be able to remove him from the UK due to his specific case (whether this was correct or not remains to be seen). This meant that Tendai was not, or appeared not to be waiting in the same state of fear that Seema and Hassan were waiting in. Nevertheless, he always felt a sense of relief when his reporting was over for another month. Secondly, Tendai had little desire to be part of what he saw to be 'the system', for instance, he maintained that he would not apply for Section 4 support even if he was eligible because he felt it was 'too controlling'. Morris (2002) also found that some applicants opted out of the support due to the stigma it held. Tendai exhibited an unwillingness to be part of a waiting community (Bourdieu, 2000) or a community of stuckedness (Hage, 2009b: 101). However, it was sometimes hard to know to what extent he was feigning an indifference to waiting (Crapanzano, 1986), as the extract below exemplifies. Without discussing waiting, Tendai stated:

*(Waiting is) the pain thing ... because you don't plan anything, you can't plan anything until that decision's made, negative or positive it doesn't matter [...] and you know that you are not allowed to do anything.*

Tendai could not escape entirely from the affective dimension of waiting whilst in the asylum process. Indeed, the way he phrased the above suggests that it was waiting (whilst not being allowed to 'do anything' - he meant work, for which he had many plans) that was harder to manage than having a decision refused.

## **‘We really had hope that time’**

Rotter (2016) highlights how waiting in the asylum determination process can be ‘in a more limited sense, productive’ (2016: 80). Some participants also showed signs of productivity whilst waiting: Hassan had time to study; Matipa’s extremely lengthy wait gave her hope that it would make it procedurally more difficult to remove her son, and therefore her, from the country and Tendai constantly came up with new plans and volunteering opportunities. Whilst waiting can be ‘in a limited sense, productive’, it must be productive towards something and ultimately, as Hassan illustrates, motivation is hard to maintain when waiting thus resulting in feelings of powerlessness. Indeed, Crapanzano (1986) and Schwartz (1975) highlight the regressive quality of waiting: ‘waiting produces in us feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability - infantile feelings - and all the rage that these and feelings evoke’ (Crapanzano, 1986: 45-6). Among the applicants that I worked with, the negative effects of waiting were much more apparent and immediate than its productivity. When asked about the relationship between mental distress and the asylum process, most participants (not just applicants) quoted waiting and delay as being one of the most difficult elements of the process for applicants to deal with. Naomi told me:

A huge proportion of asylum seekers have mental health problems be that from what they’ve experienced [...] or from the delay, I suppose for me the most prevalent one is always the delay, because people have been sitting waiting and they’re caught, stuck in limbo.

Being ‘stuck’ or ‘in limbo’ was a frequently heard protest from asylum applicants that talked of time standing still for them while the rest of the world moved on. Joseph described his own waiting as being a ‘waste of time’:

I’ve wasted how many years, almost five years of my life, without doing anything, so I would have upgraded myself, five years if I had of been back home, I would have had more kids <laughs> I would have had a better life, yeah!

Yet Joseph also talked of waiting in relation to the lack of mobility; something the literature on waiting also emphasises (see Armstrong, 2015):

It's very, very, very, *very stressful*, mostly when I sit down alone tears will be running because I'm just frustrated [...] sometimes you feel depressed because you are just sitting down thinking what is going to come this time, after six weeks I don't even know my fate, I don't even know what is going to come, and we are still like waiting and the more you wait, even the, the wife I have, she's also a human being, she can't go for holiday, she can't do anything out of the UK because she want me to be there and I can't because of this situation I find myself, so it's very, very, *very stressful*, very, *very depressing*.

This extract highlights how waiting brings about feelings of suspension of movement in time. Yet, significantly, not just for Joseph but also for his wife, Dawn. His use of the language 'we are still waiting' indicates that he saw how they were both affected by the lengthy asylum process and that his claim impacted on Dawn's movements: 'she can't go for holiday, she can't do anything out of the UK because she want me to be there'. While Dawn could have gone abroad if she had wanted to, she did not want to leave Joseph behind thus his waiting restricted her desire for movement. These feelings of 'stuckedness' (Hage, 2009b: 99) highlight the feelings of powerlessness that waiting often brings.

Feelings of powerlessness are interrelated with feelings of worthlessness that many applicants mentioned in relation to not being allowed to work. Joseph found not being able to financially contribute to his and Dawn's rent, bills, and other living costs really demoralising and seriously affected his sense of self-worth, particularly, I would argue, as a male partner in a relationship. Naomi also mentioned the sense of worthlessness that she saw in some of her clients:

A lot of parents of children that are here as a family find it awful because they can't support their children and its quite horrible to hear parents say I don't even take my child into town because they're going to ask to buy something and I can't buy anything, a lot of people, of fathers (*say*) that not being able to provide for my family just makes me feel worthless.

Although some applicants had built up social networks that supported them financially as well as emotionally, it did not necessarily eliminate these feelings. Living on Section 4 support meant that Matipa was unable to pay for a television licence so, after receiving 'threatening' letters from the licensing board, she decided to disconnect her small television and put it away in the cupboard. She told a friend about this and how she planned to sit and read her Bible and novels

borrowed from the library in order to pass the time without a television. Her friend could not bear the thought of her sitting for hours upon hours in the house every day with only books for company so paid for a TV licence for her. While Matipa told me this story, her eyes welled up behind her tortoiseshell glasses; she quietly voiced how she never expected anyone to do something like that for her. Yet, what she also told me was how acts of kindness like these made her feel worthless, as she knew that she could not repay the favour.

Applicants' feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness tended to increase over the time that they were waiting for a resolution to the asylum process as 'agency oozes out of waiting' (Hage, 2009a: 2). When I first met Seema and Hassan, Hassan spent a lot of his time reading pharmaceutical text books in order to keep up to date with his practice. However, as the asylum process dragged on indefinitely with no deadlines as to when Seema would initially get an interview and without being able to work, the benefits of being up to date with pharmacy were not immediate or even knowable and therefore Hassan's motivation to study waned. Whilst they continued to follow some routines: Hassan went to the mosque every Friday; they reported once a month to the Home Office; they attended occasional appointments with their solicitor; they looked after their son, cooked and cleaned; they kept up to date with the news and watched television, their social interactions lessened. When I first met Seema and Hassan, they would talk about friends they had made and whom they would visit regularly (most of whom were also in the asylum process), yet, over time, they slowly dissociated themselves from them.

The deterioration of applicants' motivation and wellbeing over the period of the asylum process was noticed by many actors. SCIN staff member, Lucia, told me:

I see individuals for whom ... have basically been driven mad by the length of time and then the kind of utter limbo that people are flung in [...] I know people that have got to the stage where they are hopeless and where they are suicidal and people who you quite quickly see the difference in, and I sometimes feel so sad and I almost want to warn people but you know warning them it's not going to do any good, but people who've newly arrived and then within a period of six months you can see how their general state of mind is deteriorating because they've come here with expectations and with hopes and at the beginning there's almost this like okay, it's okay because I've got a roof and I'm safe and all this sort of things, and

then they're waiting still for their substantive interview in this horrific housing and completely isolated and all these things, and especially at this time of year I think, cos winter is just that much harder, so yeah you do see the impact as time goes on, on people's mental state.

Interestingly, in this excerpt, Lucia describes almost exactly the experiences of Seema and Hassan (Lucia knew Seema but not very well and had never met Hassan): their friends warning them about the lengthy process; the initial hope and comfort in the process and then the isolation that comes with the stuckedness (Hage, 2009b) of the situation. The extract can also be likened to the way Elizabeth described the journey through the asylum process in Chapter Eight, that is, applicants not knowing that 'life is going to be hell'. Lucia was audibly sad and angry as she spoke. She had been working at SCIN for two years and had seen many applicants', some of whom she regards as friends, wellbeing deteriorate. She went on to talk about Amir:

Amir is another clear example, he's really losing his mind ... but it's changed, he's gone from being extremely sad and down and worried to now just being like really quite all over the place and just desperate and extremely angry and volatile and sort of quite disturbing behaviour sometimes because he's just losing the plot, no wonder you know.

I also witnessed Amir's wellbeing deteriorate over the time that I knew him. His decision not to be involved in the photography project I conducted, see Chapter Two, drew my attention to his explicit suffering for the first time.

Although, as a solicitor, Maria had a very different relationship with asylum applicants than Lucia, she told a similar story regarding the effect of long-term waiting:

It's really disheartening to see very educated or very motivated people come, want to get on, actually be of some benefit to the UK and when they're told they can't work that just really demoralises them and you can see them going into their shell and you then maybe see them a couple of years later, they've still not got a decision on their case or there's still not, nothing's been resolved and they've moved from being very motivated, you know clear approach and focused and they've now drifted into this benefits culture of just that's how things are and it seems as though we're ruining people [...] they're the people that get very frustrated, angry.

The 'benefit culture' that Maria mentions illuminates the infantilization that Crapanzano (1986) and Schwartz (1975) associate with waiting. Furthermore, Maria's description of applicants becoming demotivated over time supports Hassan's story. This section has so far illustrated the negative affects waiting has on applicants' mental wellbeing, which may make the process of waiting *feel* empty. Nonetheless, applicants had hope.

Indeed, waiting, argues Bourdieu, is *premised* on the ability to delay without destroying hope (2000: 228). In fact, I suggest, having hope is integral to cope with the asylum process for both applicants and others. Hope has surfaced at various points throughout this thesis, not only in relation to waiting but in connection with the opaque, complex, confusing, and at times contradictory bureaucratic process and, related to this, the paperwork that is produced. Importantly, for many participants, especially asylum applicants, hope is inextricably linked to religion and a belief in god. Finding solace in waiting through prayer has also been illuminated by Crapanzano (1986). In Chapter Two, we saw how Ray viewed his church as a source of hope whilst he was going through the asylum process. Matipa also found hope, that she will be granted refugee status, through religion:

I ask God every day ... I know God says don't doubt me I will do it, you have to believe [...] if you ask Him he's going to give you (*status*) but, *ah*, you got to keep on hoping, don't lose hope ... hoping that things will be okay.

In Chapter Six, it was argued that applicants, and others, project hope onto various documents which resulted in them being seen to contain a talismanic power. SCIN worker, Sarah, viewed this hope and the manifestation of it (applicants clinging on to various documents) as illustrative of the desperation that many experience.

Paradoxically, procedurally-induced uncertainty also created hope. Matipa told me of times in which she had thought her or her son were going to be granted status:

There have been times when I've been signing, three months, two months, now it's every one month again, its tiring [...] there was one time I (*did not report for*) almost four months, my friend said oh

maybe they will give me papers, but I've heard some people that were told to come and sign after six months [...] Last December (*my son*) was told to go and get this biometric information whatever, pictures from the Home Office and then after that (*the Home Office*) kept quiet [...] the lawyer wrote a letter to ask them why they haven't made a decision up till now and they stopped his support just like that, so even that (*Biometric Residence Permit*), people say "Oh people who get biometric they are given papers", so we didn't even know what it was, usually they give papers but (*Home Office*) was not giving papers, we don't know how it works, someone with that biometric can get papers someone cannot get it. Why do they pay for you to get that if you're not going to get papers? I don't know how it works really, we really had hope that time.

This extract highlights how the complexity of the asylum process, in addition to the lack of correspondence and information from the Home Office (see Image 5-1) *and* the stories and rumours that are passed among those in the process (and others), creates a confusing and messy context. Yet, the point I wish to emphasise here is that this uncertain context sustains applicants' hope, and motivation to wait, that one day, somehow, they will be granted status.

Matipa was resigned to the notion that getting status will be a miracle from God. Although her faith was not as strong as it was before she entered the asylum process (she was the only person who voiced this), she still went to church most Sundays. Over coffee one afternoon, Matipa told me various Biblical stories in which God had performed miracles interspersed with stories of people she knew getting their papers 'by the grace of God'. Whilst for many applicants, some form of hope remained, relying on miracles emphasises the powerlessness felt towards the asylum process.

## Conclusion

This chapter was about the condition of waiting in the asylum process. I follow Auyero (2012) to suggest that waiting is the 'order of things' for the least (strategically) powerful actors involved in the asylum process, that is, asylum applicants. The waiting that applicants do is inextricably linked to bureaucratic and legal processes and practices. The uncertainty that surrounds the bureaucracy involved in the asylum process, highlighted in Chapter Five, is interrelated to actors' experiences of waiting. Through the production of uncertainty and arbitrariness, waiting creates compliance in its waiters (Auyero,

2012; Schwartz, 1975), and a dependency on others that is fostered by the bureaucracy that makes up the asylum process. I argue that it is the uncertainty involved in waiting that causes applicants significant distress; for many, uncertain waiting led to the impression 'stuckedness' (Hage, 2009b) and created feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness.

I have shown that people experience waiting in various ways. I argue that waiting dominates the lives of applicants. My findings lend (some) support to Rotter (2016), as I found that, although applicants tended to describe their waiting as empty and passive, many undertook regular activities. Nevertheless, I have highlighted that, firstly, these activities are not those that applicants would necessarily have chosen to undertake and, secondly, as the example of Hassan illustrates, the motivation for certain activities wanes as the hope of the end to the process moves further and further away. I have also illustrated that waiting often resulted in applicants' wellbeing deteriorate over time. For others involved in the asylum process, waiting produced feelings of powerlessness, frustration, sadness and cynicism leading to strained relationships between them and those that work with them. I ended this chapter by highlighting the integral relationship between hope and waiting.



## Chapter 10 : Conclusion

### Introduction

This thesis presents data that was gathered from a twelve-month, anthropological study of people connected to the asylum process and their lived experiences of mental distress. It is, and can only ever be, a collection of participants' voices and stories collected and analysed through my own ethnographic gaze. It has been argued that 'neutrality' in researchers 'most often serves, wittingly or unwittingly, as smokescreen or apology for the structural violence' (Farmer, 2005: 26). Having laid out my position in Chapter One of this thesis, I accept that I am not a 'neutral' party to my area of study. Indeed, my motivation to begin the project had roots in my already existing emotional involvement in the field. In addition, I built fond relationships with some participants which contributed to the emotion which, I suggest, is inextricably linked to the creation of this thesis, despite the fact that emotions are made more distant as the social is tidied into theory (Sanford and Angel-Ajani, 2008: 7).

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first restates the aims of the research and revisits and reflects upon the previous chapters. It begins with a reflection on methodology in relation to uncertainty, a key theme throughout this thesis. Blommaert and Jie argue that ethnographic analysis 'attempts to "mirror" the events and processes it describes [...] if these are complex, the analysis is complex; if they contained paradoxes, such paradoxes will also emerge in the analysis' (2010: 85). Thus, I highlight the messy, partial nature of anthropological knowing (Law, 2004), and compare it with the uncertainty experienced by actors connected to the asylum process. The second section continues to reflect on the processes of anthropological research, this time by focusing on ethical dilemmas specific to this thesis (however, similar issues could be found in any ethnographic research project that deals with structural violence). Ethnographic research is a mutual learning process (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 28), and highly personal. I discuss how having to censor data encapsulates the structural violence which is at the heart of this thesis. The third section of this chapter details the contribution this thesis has made to

anthropological knowledge, and the final section suggests areas for further research.

## **Restating the research aims and revisiting the chapters**

The aims of this research were to critically explore mental distress in the context of the UK asylum process. Below, I revisit the chapters in order to summarise the findings of this project.

The methodology I present in Chapter Two has itself gone through the research process and come out troubled. Here, I wish to reflect on a few methodological issues relating to uncertainty. Ethnography produces an account, yet, these accounts are always partial (Farmer, 2005: 26). Like all anthropologists, I was involved in relationships in which participants talked to me as a researcher, a white woman, a non-legal professional, a friend, a nuisance; I could go on. In doing so, they presented themselves in specific ways; I heard half-stories, I heard contradictions, I sensed smoke screens and mirrors. Moreover, these partial stories that I was privy to were further edited during my writing up, as discussed below. Indeed, the final thesis is only a glimpse of what I actually learnt.

In this research, the partial nature of anthropological knowledge is juxtaposed against the messy and opaque nature of the UK asylum process characterised by ever-changing legislation. As this thesis has shown, uncertainty is the lived experience for many asylum applicants at all stages of the process and indeed, uncertainty exists within anthropological research. To illustrate the opposing ways both areas deal with uncertainty, I turn towards conceptions of 'truth'. "Truth" is a metadiscursive concept' established by interlocutors (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 71). An ethnographic approach allowed me to view 'reality' and 'truth' as subjective and socially constructed: this research was not concerned with searching for a 'true' reality but instead with exploring individual participants' lived experiences. Indeed, I follow Ingold in his assertion that 'we should resist the temptation to assume that since stories are stories they are, in some sense, unreal or untrue' (2000: 190). The asylum decision-making process, however, is the antithesis of this. It involves, in essence, individuals who hold positions of power (such as immigration officials, adjudicators, medical

professionals) deciding whether asylum applicants are telling the truth or lying. Indeed, legitimacy is sought in applicants' presentation of fear of persecution in their asylum claims. As discussed in Chapter Seven, applicants' narratives need to be told in a particular way in order for it to be deemed 'true'. What Blommaert and Jie show in relation to different understandings of truth is that narrative differences 'go hand in hand with narrative inequalities in which one set of narrative conventions is a source and instrument of power and another is not' (2010: 72). In the context of the asylum decision-making process, uncertainty is synonymous with lack of credibility as narratives are interpreted through the dichotomy of genuine/bogus, as discussed in Chapter Five. Unlike the asylum decision-making process, ethnographic research does not regard contradictions, imprecise narratives, erratic events, and the lack of 'evidence' for cross-referencing as unresolvable obstacles to anthropological knowledge. During ethnographic fieldwork, discovering different narrative patterns allows alternative stories to be heard and 'uncovers hidden modes of oppression and exclusion, based not on truth or falsity per se but on truth and falsity as embedded in socioculturally anchored storytelling and interactional practices' (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 72). In both contexts, the ethnographic and the asylum process, asylum applicants' lives and their narratives are uncertain, but uncertainty is dealt with in very different ways.

The ethnographic chapters (Five to Nine) detail the affective experiences of asylum legislation and policy: what policy does. These chapters act as a contrast to the dry, un-emotive detailing laid out in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, I focus on bureaucracy within the asylum process and argue that bureaucratic structures and practices cause mental distress. Asylum applicants were primarily affected by this, but it also created distress for other actors connected to the process. The Home Office, the main bureaucracy dealt with in this thesis, is inextricably linked to 'the state' and the exclusionary practice of bordering. Immigration officials, therefore, act as gatekeepers to applicants' status, rights, security and others' perceptions of their deservingness. My findings supported Jubany (2017) in her assertion that immigration officials' worlds are embodied by the tenants of the Home Office and the wider discourses of the crisis of immigration; immigration official, Stacy, highlighted 'we have borders to protect and that's

what it comes down to [...] we can't let everybody come to the UK that wants to come here'.

The uncertainty fostered by bureaucracies played a central role in actors' experiences of distress. For applicants, the complexity and, sometimes, the cultural unfamiliarity of the bureaucratic systems they were forced to deal with often resulted in stress and frustration. This was accentuated by the Home Office's control over knowledge which led to applicants relying on help from others to navigate and engage in the often-opaque process. Nonetheless, the rapidly changing regulations and a lack of filtering down of those changes created uncertainty for bureaucrats too. Chapter Five also highlights how the division of labour, a characteristic of bureaucracy, allowed individual tasks to become obscured, thus aiding bureaucrats' non-responsibility. The idea of 'safety nets' facilitated this further; immigration official, Stacy, reported there to be 'safety nets' in place throughout the asylum process to correct any wrong decisions that were made in claims. This understanding protected immigration officials from taking (sole) responsibility for decision on applicants' claims in addition to providing them with an emotional barrier when they refused them. This 'safety net', however, has been shown to have holes in it, as the ICIBI have stated 'the Home Office does not get the basics right' (2014; see also Baillot et al., 2012), resulting in violent consequences for asylum applicants.

Chapter Five highlights the structural violence within the asylum system with regard to 'errors'. For immigration officials (and others in positions of power), the consequences of making mistakes in official contexts such as interview transcripts were little to none; yet, for applicants 'errors' are viewed by the Home Office as strategic lies and often result in the credibility of the whole claim being called into question. I have applied Gupta's (2012) argument that it is at the very scenes of care that violence exists to the asylum context. Whilst acknowledging that support<sup>82</sup> and healthcare are provided by the government for those eligible, I present two ethnographic examples of bureaucratic inefficiency regarding support which resulted in harmful and/or potentially harmful outcomes for applicants. These were: the losing of a letter detailing an applicant's accommodation leaving him homeless, and the many people who did

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<sup>82</sup> As I have shown, it is not without its own problems.

not receive an initial health-screening due to a lack of attention from the housing provider. Indeed, in the context that I describe, the ‘overt goal of helping the poor [was often] subverted by the very procedures of bureaucracy’ (Gupta, 2012: 23), which leads me to question what the goal of the UK’s asylum policy actually is.

Bureaucracy is intimately linked with paperwork, indeed, documents can be seen as the material manifestation of bureaucracy. In Chapter Six, I utilise Actor Network Theory to illuminate how paperwork carried, contained and concealed distress in varying contexts; crucially, distress is manifest in paperwork and paperwork affects. I discuss how paperwork transformed asylum applicants into grids of documents, as forms enabled applicants to be labelled and categorised, while neglecting the subtleties and nuances of their lived experiences. Gupta suggests that by deliberately excluding what is unique about the circumstance of applicants, forms end up doing violence to individuals (2012: 145). Dehumanising applicants in this way also afforded others involved in the asylum system better protection from the affective dimensions of their work. For instance, Home Office guidance comforted immigration official, Stacy, in her decisions on asylum claims as it distanced her from the individual applicant. Importantly, different actors were able to engage with paperwork in various ways that affected the extent to which the work caused distress. Letters detailing the refusal of asylum claims invade applicants’ homes, whereas adjudicators have been accused of not engaging with medical evidence that detailed torture. Uncertainty remains a theme in this chapter as a plethora of paperwork was created for each asylum application. Some applicants (and others) got lost in this mass, which, at times, resulted in the misplacement of status, weight and legitimacy of certain documents. To illustrate this, I focus on the confusion around the value and power of written medical evidence. Whilst rumours and (mis)information was rife, what is of note, is that medical certificates hold more value in determining credibility than applicants’ own narratives (Fassin and d’Halluin, 2005).

This brings us to a vital component of the asylum process, that of applicants’ disclosures of distress that I discuss in Chapter Seven. Drawing on literature that evidences a multitude of impediments to the processes of disclosure in official

contexts (Kelly, 2012a, 2012b; Baillot et al., 2012, 2009; Bögner et al. 2010; Good, 2007; Herlihy and Turner, 2007; Shuman and Bohmer, 2004; Blommaert, 2001) this chapter explores applicants' everyday disclosures of distress to multiple audiences, to find similar obstacles. This chapter highlights barriers to the disclosure of distress including: applicants not knowing when and where to disclose certain information; not having enough time to build trust between the interlocutors (this, I suggested, was due both to the way the asylum system is set up and the political economy of services); notions of stigma and shame (including the equation of mental distress with 'madness'). Due to the dialogical nature of disclosures this chapter emphasises how successful communication of distress depended on the audiences' ability to hear, not solely the applicants' ability to tell (Kelly, 2012b). This was more challenging as different interlocutors held different expectations of when, how and what applicants disclose and idioms of distress. Over time, service providers 'learnt' idioms that applicants utilised such as specific terminology or a way of telling a narrative. However, this can lead to dangerous generalisations resulting in those who do not disclose in the way that is expected and constructed by the audience risking their disclosures being 'culturally unbelievable' (Gedalof, 2007: 90, in Baillot et al., 2012: 282).

I discuss how applicants' disclosures of distress were further complicated by the need to portray 'the victim' in order to be heard by (some) audiences. This role was learnt from other applicants as well as applicants' solicitors who encouraged them to portray their suffering in a particular way, that is, in ways compatible with the refugee convention. Malkki argues that we must consider that asylum applicants are 'de facto being forced to convert the psychic trauma of impoverishment and hopelessness into a performed psychic trauma of formulaic political violence' (2007: 341). Nonetheless, this can lead to a travelogue (Blommaert, 2001) being created by multiple actors that goes beyond the applicant's control. Chapter Seven highlights the structural violence, the 'assaults on personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 1), as elements of the asylum process, such as Section 4, compromise applicants' privacy. They are forced, in many situations, not only to tell various audiences intimate information (in official context, if they do not tell, they are deemed not credible), but they continually risked their disclosures

being interrogated and disbelieved. Fundamentally, the asylum system necessitates applicants' disclosures of distress whilst simultaneously impeding ways of expressing it.

Chapter Seven is dedicated to asylum applicants' disclosures of distress. In considering this as an anthropological topic it would be an oversight not to reflect on it methodologically. Anthropological encounters set up particular types of spaces in which knowledge is exchanged. Interview situations, research questions, and recruitment procedures all preface particular 'positions, discourses, regimes of truth and forms of authority' (Kokanovic and Philip, 2014: 60). These 'scenes of address' impact on how one's narratives are produced (Buchbinder, 2009, drawing on Butler, 2005). Initial conversations I had with participants to explain my research, supplemented by my plain language statement, created particular scenes of address. For instance, I may have led participants to foreground their lived experiences though distress, specifically situating distress within the mechanics of the asylum system over and above anything else. Moreover, my being there as a researcher could be argued to further compromise applicants' privacy.

Chapter Eight focuses on the experiences of those working with asylum applicants. I argue that all of those working with asylum applicants undertook, to varying degrees, emotional labour and none of them were impervious to the affective dimensions of the asylum process. Distress dissipated over time betwixt and between people, paperwork and bureaucracy. Related to some applicants' need for time in which to build relationships of trust before disclosing intimate information, in this chapter I highlight that those individuals who were able to, and did, spend longer periods of time *being with* applicants tended to build trust and stronger emotional connections with them and therefore did more emotional work (Hochschild, 1983). The structure and purpose of time that workers spent with applicants varied between organisations and, to a certain extent, dictated the emotional labour that was conducted. While immigration officials were, according to Mark, expected not to empathise with applicants as that would obscure an objective decision, SCIN workers actively created a safe, trusting atmosphere at their drop-in and women's group.

This chapter explores some of the consequences of doing emotional labour over sustained periods of time. Many service providers and friends saw ‘burnout’ as a very real potential when working in this area. Most undertook practices of self-care such as regular exercise, taking holidays or day trips out of the city (in itself, illuminating the inequalities among those connected to the asylum process in strategies for managing distress) in order to try and avoid this outcome. Others saw burnout as inevitable and therefore planned or actively pursued an exit strategy, often in the form of changing career. Detaching from applicants was also a strategy (conscious and subconscious) of self-care practised by some. Indeed, for immigration official, Mark, detaching from applicants’ particularly traumatic narratives was a necessary process in order to continue to do his job. For Mark, however, detachment led to dehumanising applicants. He explained how he began thinking of applicants as stereotypes and liars, highlighting how wider political and media discourses can influence bureaucrats (Jubany, 2017; Mountz, 2010; Fuglerud, 2004), as discussed in Chapter Five. This chapter demonstrates that the affective dimension of the asylum process can create distress in those working with applicants as they experience burn-out and compassion fatigue. This was epitomised by the comment of a Red Cross worker who found herself comparing applicants, and thinking during meetings with some of them, ‘Well, at least you have a house’. Ultimately, however, the negative consequences of doing emotional labour in the specific context of the asylum process harms asylum applicants.

Ruth Behar (1996) advocates that anthropologists include their vulnerabilities. Following Devereux she states, ‘*what happens within the observer* must be made known [...] if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood’ (1996: 6, emphasis in original). As Chapter Eight deals explicitly with the spread of distress, it is important to mention that I, as researcher, was not immune to this. I too found myself being affected by what I was directly witnessing and hearing during my fieldwork. I found myself angry much of the time: an anger that seeped into my home life and my relationships outwith the field. I found myself not being able to support my partner with decisions that he found stressful because I did not deem them ‘real’ problems like the problems I saw participants dealing with every day in the field.



Moving from the effects of working with applicants over time, Chapter Nine discusses asylum applicants' experiences of bureaucratic and legally produced waiting. Many participants, not just applicants, emphasised waiting as being a key source of distress for those in the asylum process. Waiting is something that we all do; indeed, the asylum process necessarily requires applicants to wait as decisions on claims should be carefully considered. In this chapter, I show that the *uncertainty* involved in waiting increased feelings of distress. Waiting is 'the order of things' (Auyero, 2012) for asylum applicants who are habitually exposed to long periods of waiting during the determination process. The timescales for these periods were, in practice, often indefinite despite the Home Office's guidelines. I argue that the lengthy timescales, along with the complexity of the asylum process, often resulted in a murky haze of waiting *for something* (Crapanzano, 1986). All participants were aware of the delays within the asylum process. These delays caused a cyclical pattern of blame (and thus harming relations) among those connected to the asylum process, which I suggest, is fostered by the division of labour inherent in bureaucratic working.

Waiting affects: this chapter illustrates how waiting and delays frustrated and angered many of those working with asylum applicants. For applicants, affect manifested in feelings of worthlessness, 'stuckedness' (Hage, 2012b), demotivation, and for some more serious mental distress, due in part to the creation of dependency and subordination that waiting on the state can bring (Auyero, 2012). I demonstrate that some participants were able to manage waiting, and therefore the distress that was caused by it, better than others. For service providers, friends and immigration officials the bureaucratic and legally produced waiting was an element of their working day and something that meant they could often get on with other tasks. For applicants, waiting often took over their everyday lives and while, for some, waiting was 'busy', others experienced it as an empty waste of time. I end this chapter by illuminating the hope that applicants often held; indeed, waiting is premised on the ability to delay without destroying hope (Bourdieu 2000: 228). In fact, I suggest, having hope is integral in order to cope with the asylum process for both applicants and others.

The ethnographic examples of everyday structural violence throughout this thesis might not convince all audiences. However, if we consider the cumulative effect of every small assault on asylum applicants' dignity, the inequality regarding actors' agency and the pseudospeciation (Erik Erikson in Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 21) directed towards applicants and written into government legislation, policies and funding decisions (made with the explicit aim of deterrence) (Hynes, 2011), structural violence is somewhat illuminated. Structural violence is everyday bordering, the division between the deserving refugee and the bogus asylum seeker, between us and them. It is also manifested in the 'thick skin', another border, that those working with applicants need to develop in order to limit their emotional work and protect themselves from harm. Exploring distress across five themes: bureaucracy, paperwork, disclosures, emotional labour over time, and waiting, this thesis highlights the structural violence embodied in uncertainty, dependency, discourses of suspicion and deservingness, dehumanisation, stigma and shame. Using structural violence as a lens through which to analyse distress explains how distress spreads and stays with some people connected to the asylum process more than others. It contends that the asylum process is built on, creates and recreates structural violence for which asylum applicants are its victims.

Although this thesis deals with structural violence, physical violence was also present in the context I write about. Many participants gave me examples of actual bodily harm caused by issues I have explored. Immigration solicitor, Maria, told me:

An (*asylum applicant*) had actually tried to stab himself in (*the Local Enforcement Office*) in the stomach and there was another lady who tried to hang herself ... and that was just because she wanted a decision, she was fed up.

This extract illustrates the acts of self-harm and suicide and the human cost of desperation and frustration that is so often felt among the people going through the system, but rarely or never makes it into public knowledge. The more 'shocking' examples of this violence may find media attention for a short while, such as the Russian family of three, Serge Serykh, his wife Tatiana and step-son, who jumped to their death from the 15th floor of the Red Road flats in 2010 on the day that the Home Office had told them they must vacate their

accommodation as their support had been terminated (Scott et al., 2010). Yet, attention always dissipates, and lives are forgotten.

## Representation and what cannot be written (a reflection on ethics)



**Image 10-1: An asylum applicant protesting outside the Home Office Reporting Centre. Glasgow, 2014**

It has been argued that avoiding studying ‘the poor and powerless’ is the safest way to protect them from harm ‘because everything you say about them will be used against them’ (Bourgois, 1995: 18, paraphrasing Nader, 1972). Whilst I respect this warning, I did work with individuals who could be described as occupying positions of ‘powerlessness’. I addressed this issue in two ways. Firstly, in conceiving power as fluid, and participants as more powerful and less powerful in different contexts, I studied not only the group commonly conceptualised as ‘the powerless’, that is, asylum applicants, but also those connected to them through the asylum process who were also powerless in certain situations. Secondly, as I explain below, I have chosen to omit some data from this thesis. Censoring data is always an exceptionally messy and unsatisfactory process, not only because ‘the boundary between bearing witness

and disrespectful (or self-interested) rooting is not always evident, even to those seeking to be discerning' (Farmer, 2005: 26), but also because it contributes to what Farmer (2005) terms the 'second silencing'. This is when anthropologists hardly scratch the surface of another's suffering or when they do not write about certain events. Farmer acknowledges, however, that this may be necessary (2005: 27).

The people involved in this research represented a spectrum of individuals. Some I shared views with and liked, others I had less tolerance for. I spent varying amounts of time with participants during my fieldwork. For instance, I spent a considerable amount of time 'hanging out' with many individuals who were in the asylum process, as well as with Rise members and SCIN staff and volunteers. I therefore established very different relationships and levels of acceptance among them compared to the solicitors, immigration officials and others whom I interviewed once. Over time, participants and I built trust (to varying extents), shared embodied experiences and emotions (such as pushing supermarket trollies around ASDA, running for the bus together, and getting angry), and sometimes formed what I would call 'friendships'. As these friendships developed, we mutually disclosed personal information and shared our vulnerabilities with each other. Indeed, it has been argued that 'the success of ethnographic fieldwork is in large measure determined by the ability to establish good rapport and develop meaningful relations with research participants' usually through 'the development of strong bonds of friendship with particular individuals' (Sluka, 2007: 121). However, as these relationships grew stronger, more ethical dilemmas arose. My increased presence in participants' lives meant that they became more comfortable or used to me being around and, therefore, my position as a 'friend' or 'co-worker' potentially overshadowed my role as a researcher. It must be noted that this obscuring of roles was not unidirectional: there were times when I too would subconsciously slip into the comfort of a new relationship and forget my position as researcher and theirs as participant. As roles blurred, I began to be treated, by some, as someone other than (or as well as) a researcher. For instance, I got requests from applicants to write letters of support to the Home Office as evidence that they were building a life in the UK. And, on a number of occasions, I wrote those letters. Actions like this contribute to ongoing debates about how much

anthropologists should intervene in the lives of their participants and how such interventions affect the field (see Scheper-Hughes, 1995).

The premise of good participant observation is to break boundaries between insider and outsider, to build rapport with participants so that they allow you to glimpse their lives as they experience them, yet, Bourgois asks, 'is rapport building a covert way of saying "encourage people to forget that you are constantly observing them and registering everything they are saying and doing"?' (2007: 297). Behar goes further, calling participant observation an oxymoron as we are taught, 'act as a participant, but don't forget to keep your eyes open' (1996: 5). The blurring of relationship boundaries, crucial to participant observation, has therefore led to questions regarding its ethical credentials as a method of inquiry (Bourgois, 1999; Behar, 1996).

Ethical dilemmas involving 'friendships' are, of course, not new to ethnographic research (Sluka, 2007). However common such dilemmas are, each decision the researcher makes has the potential to be enormously important to their participants and the context in which they study. The close relationships I made with some participants resulted in them confiding in me and telling me stories that I have had to omit entirely, or key elements of them, from this thesis. I have had to exclude them in order to protect the people I researched with from potential harm.

An aim of this research was to provide an anthropologically-based social critique through the exploration of distress within the UK asylum process. There is a tension, however, between ethnographic verisimilitude and facticity that Wolf-Meyer argues is at the heart of ethnographic writing aiming to act as a form of social critique:

a tension exists between participants' disclosures and the researcher's capacity to discuss, write and represent their accounts to a wider audience. Due to the researchers' ethical duty to protect participants, the 'shadow of possibility' of a participant being recognised limits the researchers' ability to make ethnographic disclosures (2014: 105).

This tension is evident throughout this thesis; while it illuminates the structural violence inherent within the asylum process, I have had to exclude many

ethnographic examples of this. I chose to omit certain data for the following reasons: firstly, the highly politicised area of asylum and immigration means that asylum applicants are often discriminated against through media coverage and by the general public; consequently, ethnographic research with applicants may be read through an 'unforgiving lens' (Bourgois, 2003: 15). I was hyper-aware of this as the effects on participants of my representation of them is compounded when published in their own country (see Okely, 1987). Like Bourgois (2003), I have tried to strike a balance between safeguarding participants from potential negative readings and providing an honest account of the lived experiences I encountered. I will not risk contributing to the culture of disbelief that all too often surrounds asylum applicants, therefore I omit certain information.

Secondly, due to the well-established networks among asylum applicants and those working with them in Glasgow, special consideration has been required to safeguard the anonymity of actors within the field who remain living and working with each other. Many participants have identifiable characteristics that would immediately be recognisable to others in the field, or they disclosed things to me that they did not wish others, or certain others, to know. Whilst these characteristics are inextricably linked to their lived experiences of mental distress, I have had to omit them, where appropriate. Thirdly, the overriding suspicion and distrust of the Home Office that numerous participants felt provided me with enough impetus to be wary of what I included in this thesis in case it is read by government personnel. As I mention in the introduction, I have anonymised participants' age, gender, and country of origin. As there is always a chance, however small, that the identities of the people I write about may be uncovered, I have also omitted other details. One participant was HIV positive and, after being made destitute due to no longer being eligible for asylum support, discussed with me the futility of taking antiretroviral medication as, with nowhere to live, it was impossible for them to keep themselves well. To protect participants from harm, I was not able to write about this, or other similar stories, in any detail. For participants with socially stigmatising health statuses, being identified in a research project such as this may result in being shunned by their community. At the same time, if the Home Office identified asylum applicants working illegally, for example, it could lead to them being deported to their country of origin to face further violence. Finally, I followed participants' instructions when they did not want certain information included.

For instance, during interviews, numerous solicitors and a few others gave me information that was “off the record”. In these situations, I followed their clear instructions and did not include what they shared with me in my write-up. This exemplifies the power inequality among participants: asking me to exclude information was reserved for those who felt able, and were knowledgeable about anthropological research, to explicitly tell me what they did and did not want to be included (see Bourgois, 1999).

I censored data both at the planning stage, for instance, choosing not to ask certain questions in order not to hear certain answers, and the writing stage. Like Lucia not asking asylum applicants certain questions (see Chapter Seven), bringing other potential ethical complications around silencing (see Poland and Pederson, 1998), I did not ask certain questions. Nevertheless, some participants still gave me information that, if published, had the potential to harm them or others. I therefore, did most of editing data whilst writing up; this was done on a case-by-case basis. This process becomes more complicated, however, when researching with the range of actors involved in the asylum system, including the ‘powerful’ and the ‘underdogs’<sup>83</sup> (Lumsden, 2012). Should one censor data equally despite power denying people the luxury of equality? On the other hand, can one ethically censor data differently depending on the participant? In response to similar questions, Bourgois argues that anthropological ethics are too narrowly drawn and ‘that ethics can be subject to rigid, righteous interpretations which place them at loggerheads with over-arching human rights concerns’ (2007: 290). Indeed, he argues, it is problematic to research marginalisation and oppression whilst satisfying the discipline’s anthropological/methodological code of ethics (Bourgois, 1999: 290). I anonymised all participants using the same standards; but my representation of them, such as through my choice and editing of quotations, will always be affected by my own positionality, and therefore never ‘neutral’ or ‘complete’ (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 68). I took the lead from Bourgois, who dealt with censorship and potentially harmful information by widening the focus from the individuals he researched with to the complexity of the research field, attempting to build an

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<sup>83</sup> It is important to note that these are ambiguous categories.

alternative and critical understanding by ‘emphasising the interface between structural oppression and individual action’ (2003: 11).

Editing participants’ stories is never a comfortable process; indeed, Malkki states ‘deciding what to include and what not to reveal was a continual ethical and affective uncertainty about the “need to know” and the ethical uses of evidence’ (2015: 70). Crucially, I, as researcher, held the power to decide. Fundamentally, knowing participants’ secrets or vulnerabilities allowed me to better grasp the complexity of the context in which I was researching. Whilst I have written about the everyday structural violence that (mostly) applicants experience, I cannot, however, fully portray their stories which are often much worse. Here I mirror Health Bridging Team member, Ian’s, interpretation of his patient’s story, as outlined in Chapter Seven. Whilst censoring significant details has taken away from participants’ everyday lived experiences, it is, I believe, the only way to safely tell certain stories. I hope that by making this explicit the reader will reflect on why people involved in the asylum process, in particular asylum applicants, often find themselves in situations I cannot write about. The reason I have had to omit information is the same reason that this thesis is about structural violence.

## **Contribution of this thesis**

The main contribution this thesis makes to anthropological knowledge is an empirical one. I recruited and worked with a diverse range of participants to investigate the ways that they were connected to the asylum process and their lived experiences of distress. Due both to my experience of the field of study and to the slow, careful relationships I built up with numerous participants, rich, deep, and sensitive data was produced. It is neither ground breaking nor original to state that ‘in the UK (as throughout Europe) asylum seekers are treated extremely harshly’ (Kirkwood et al., 2016: 193). Working with these different individuals, however, has enabled me to build a more complex, multi-faceted and inclusive picture of how the asylum system affects those connected to it. Previous studies of the UK asylum system have tended to focus on one group of people, for instance, asylum applicants, legal representatives and NGO workers. This thesis analyses a network of relationships, and it is through this that I have



been able to show how distress permeates throughout the different groups of actors (human and non-human) connected to the asylum process.

Methodologically, this thesis contributes in challenging the common conception in qualitative research of the notion of 'hard to reach' populations. Asylum applicants and refugees are commonly identified as a 'hard to reach' group. My own experience suggests, however, that this label is both unstable and unreliable. I turn it on its head to argue that, in fact, asylum applicants and refugees are a lot easier 'to reach' than those working in relatively secure institutions such as the UK Home Office. To illustrate this point, I am contrasting here what might be seen as two polar opposites in terms of groups, but this also applies to different groups working in supportive roles. For example, there was a marked difference in how I approached and accessed Rise members as compared to Asylum Help staff. This is primarily due to the levels of protection (mainly through gatekeepers) individuals have around them: asylum applicants and refugees have relatively little to no protection, whereas immigration officials have a lot. Moreover, not only are those organisationally protected harder to reach than those without this type of protection but the methods that are available to research with them are limited. Firstly, those with more protection also hold more power regarding when and how researchers spend time with them. This resulted in me conducting one-off interviews with a lot of the 'professional' participants whereas with others I spent more time just 'hanging out'. Secondly, and related to the first point, protection is also a factor in the individual's ability and confidence in saying 'No' to the research, or to multiple encounters. This may also be due to actors' knowledge of anthropological research techniques, suggesting the need for a certain level of a specific type of education. Thus, I argue, these populations are doubly hard to reach.

This finding is important, as it indicates that there are other factors at work in the relationship dynamics with different groups of actors, and that 'hard to reach' is an unhelpful term as it can mask a more complex picture. This research suggests that some of these factors are structural and related to power and knowledge. 'Hard to reach' can refer to the impenetrable institutional barriers that protect workers from researchers as well as to the powerlessness of the system experienced by asylum applicants and refugees. This has implications for

the way that researchers approach different groups, and indicates a need, in every case, to analyse what might be the barriers to engagement.

The ethnographic data that is presented in this thesis also provides an empirical contribution to a critical anthropology of structural violence. The concept of structural violence is key throughout this thesis and I demonstrate the extent to which the asylum process is violent. This violence affects asylum applicants in numerous ways that are detailed throughout. This thesis aims to bear witness to the structural violence connected to the asylum process; bearing witness is not just an act of seeing but a morally and politically-loaded practice. Rylko-Bauer et al. state, 'witnessing, documenting, and analysing are not enough, of course' (2009: 15-6); indeed, much more action is needed if the suffering of those connected to the asylum process has a chance of being reduced. This thesis provides a beginning for this. Its contribution is mainly to academic knowledge, but it also has many implications for policy and practice. The ethnographic account of the lived experiences of legislation and policy demonstrates various instances in which small tweaks to practice could reduce the suffering of those concerned. Examples include Orchard and Shipman being able to contact the Home Office directly rather than going through their contractor, Serco, thus reducing the time and stress involved in attempting to sort out mistakes; allowing asylum applicants to work so that they are not 'sitting idle' waiting for months, sometimes years, but instead are able to make a contribution to their community; providing applicants with support in the form of cash rather than an Azure Card in order to reduce stigma and allow them a small slice of privacy. Whilst the current government wears on its sleeve its aim to create a 'hostile environment' for those who have no legal right to stay in the UK, it purports to treat asylum applicants (to whom they have a universal commitment) fairly. This thesis shows that this is not the case and, while it does not provide explicit policy recommendations, it can be a useful starting point from which to work towards change.

## **Areas for further research**

Writing, in 2017, three years after the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted, and in a climate of fast-paced change in asylum and immigration legislation and policy, some of the specifics this thesis addresses are already outdated. It is

almost impossible for one piece of research to be absolutely up to date in the area of migration. The ever-changing legislative and policy context of immigration in the UK indicates the need for continuing research around the asylum process. Changes made in the Immigration Act 2014 (see Chapter Four) mostly came into effect after the fieldwork period. The subsequent Immigration Act 2016 builds on the creation of a ‘hostile environment’, with many of the provisions laid out in the 2014 Act, such as increasing the use of private sector actors, for example, landlords<sup>84</sup>, bank tellers, DVLA, universities, to act as agents of immigration control, widens the surveillance of migrants into the public sphere. The Immigration Act 2016 focuses on restrictive legislation such as the repeal of Section 4 support. Many of the effects of these changes on the lives of those connected to the asylum process is as yet unknown and indicates the need for more research.

One of the major limitations to this research is its monolingual nature: I only worked with people who could communicate at a level of English that was sufficient to understand the nature of my work and for us to discuss the topics we did. As I mention in the introduction to this thesis, this meant that those applicants who may have experienced the most distress (by going through the asylum process with no or limited English) were not included. Researching monolingually also means that those people I worked with for whom English was their second, third, or fourth language were potentially inhibited during our discussions, especially when dealing with sensitive and emotive topics. A multilingual approach would have given the research more depth by being able to include a wider range of applicants from more diverse regions and would potentially have brought additional insights into how distress is manifested, dealt with and spreads.

There is another group of people whom, had time and space allowed, I would have liked to include in this research, and that is the interpreters working with asylum applicants. High-quality communication is a crucial element of the asylum process, and most asylum applicants are totally dependent on the skills of interpreters as they undergo asylum interviews, converse with solicitors, write statements, engage with doctors and psychiatrists and attend court

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<sup>84</sup> In Scotland this is complicated by the Sewel Convention (Mullen and Craig, 2016).

proceedings (Good 2007: 153-4). Narratives of distress are literally passed through interpreters as they translate and mediate asylum applicants' words and meanings to legal representatives, medical professionals, immigration officials, adjudicators and so on. Research involving interpreters could explore their place among the network of individuals that this thesis already addresses, to investigate how the addition of this group might affect the manifestation, diagnosis and spread of distress. Because of the changes to the governmental funded asylum advice service during my fieldwork period, interpreting for this service was now conducted over the telephone rather than face-to-face. This was briefly mentioned by Jill in Chapter Seven, who thought that some applicants preferred disclosing information to interpreters over the telephone. Examining the differences between face-to-face and telephone interpreting, with regard to their respective relationship with distress, would be an interesting avenue to explore further.

Religion is another area that I was not able to explore fully in this thesis; further research could help illuminate its relation to distress, hope and coping among those connected to the asylum process. Religion played a key role in many participants' lives, but in different ways. For some, both their individual faith and attendance at religious services was vital to their wellbeing and success in their asylum claim. For others, religion was a personal source of hope, but they did not let others in their religious community (at church or mosque) know that they were in the asylum process. In all the instances I came across, religion was inextricably linked to a sense of hope. Many applicants struggled for years without papers whilst doing all they could (and according to advice from solicitors and friends) to be perceived as credible, such as collecting evidence and letters of support. Ray was one of this people, yet for him it was ultimately the power of prayer that was of real value:

God is in the top of the Home Office, sometimes you can see (*an immigration official*) can take your file, he says, "Oh we will read", if for example he doesn't want to give you paper, (*then*) something can happen and he will sign and he will give you papers <laughs> yes, this is the power for God and the power for prayer [...] when you are respecting the commandment we see the result ... 99% they got status from our church because we are here and we are keeping praying as well, and it is God hear our prayer, that's why.

From a different perspective, GP Juliette, also held onto her belief in God as a coping mechanism for her frustrations with the Home Office at work. The relationship between religion and faith and hope and coping would be an interesting area for further research.

This thesis deals with violence in 'peacetimes' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009), although I am not convinced that many asylum applicants would describe it in this way, rather than direct harm through war, bombs and bullets. It does not involve the violence done in asylum applicants' countries of origin, or the 'poor' countries in which other anthropologists interested in structural violence have studied (Farmer, 2005; Scheper-Hughes, 1996, 1992). Instead, it involves the violence that exists in the one of the world's richest countries that has a commitment to hearing asylum claims. It is primarily about violence that is done to non-citizens, those living in limbo, those more structurally vulnerable to pseudospeciation. It is about the implicit distress enacted through structural violence, distress of which the causes are not always discernible. Yet it also leaves unresolved questions around the 'slippery concept' of violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2009: 1), and structural violence in particular, a concept that, 'all too often defeats those who would describe it' (Farmer, 2005: 40). Continuing research is therefore needed to uncover evidence and the modalities in which structural violence is exercised in order to develop a deeper understanding of it.

# Appendices

## Appendix One: Information Sheet

### Following Mental Distress within the UK Asylum System.

Researcher:

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077xx xxxxxx [a.beesley.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:a.beesley.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

#### The purpose of the study

I am looking for people to take part in a study about the occurrence of mental distress within the asylum system. I have not defined the term 'mental distress' as I want to know what it means to you. I will be talking to many different people involved in the asylum system including asylum seekers, clinicians, lawyers, adjudicators, Home Office representatives, campaigners and other relevant service providers.

I would like to hear about what you do in your daily life and your place within the asylum system. I would like to hear about your understandings, experiences and thoughts on what both wellbeing and distress means.

You do not have to have experienced mental distress to take part.

This is not medical research and I am **not** connected to the UK Home Office.

The study will take place between January 2014 and December 2014.

#### Why have I been approached?

I would like to hear from people who are:

- Involved in the UK asylum system
- Live or work in Glasgow
- Are over 18 years of age

#### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide if you wish to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

I would like to stress that taking part in this research will **not** affect any asylum claims.

I will carry out the research in various ways, this may include:

- Accompanying you as you go about your daily life, either as a one off or on a more regular basis. You will be able to decide when and how often this take place.
- Interviewing you in a mutually agreed location.
- Using photographs and/or drawings that you or I produce to discuss certain issues.

All the contact we have will be confidential and will only take place if you feel comfortable. With your agreement I would like to audio-record some of the conversations we have so that I can type it up and think about the issues involved.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All of the data I collect will only be available to me and my PhD supervisors. The only situation in which I would break confidentiality is if I believe you may cause harm to yourself or others. All recordings shall be stored on a password-protected computer. Any typed records, film, photos, drawings and any other notes that I make shall be kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Glasgow. I will take out any personally identifying information so that nobody will be able to identify you in any publications that result from the research.

I will destroy all recordings, typed records and notes that contain anything which may identify you when I have completed the study and any publications that arise.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the research will be published in my PhD and any articles that arise from it. The PhD should be completed in September 2015. You will be invited to attend a presentation of my findings and the thesis will be available on request.

### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

This study is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

### **Who has reviewed the ethics of the study?**

This study has been reviewed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

### **Further Information**

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project you may contact Dr Robert Gibb, my PhD Supervisor at [robert.gibb@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:robert.gibb@glasgow.ac.uk), or Valentina Bold, University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer at [Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk).

## Appendix Two: Consent Form



### Following Mental Distress within the UK Asylum System.

#### Researcher: Anna Beesley

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand both the researcher's role and my own.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
4. I consent to the interviews being audio-recorded.
5. I understand that any conversations with the researcher are confidential.
6. I understand that my name and any other personally identifying data will be removed in any publications arising from the research.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant, Date, Signature

Researcher, Date, Signature



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