



Time in the shelter

Asylum, destitution and legal uncertainty

MARK JUSTIN RAINEY

National University of Ireland, Galway

Abstract

Based on ethnographic research undertaken between 2012–2014, this article focuses on the experiences and narratives of four refused, male asylum seekers living in a network of emergency night shelters located in churches across Greater Manchester, UK. Without the right to work and under No Recourse to Public Funds, many refused asylum seekers are pushed into dependency on charitable support and live under threat of arrest, detention and deportation. This enforced destitution interlocks with other mechanisms of deterrence within the UK's asylum system to produce a weaponised time in which the state uses time to marginalise, destabilise and exert control over asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers. This paper argues that this weaponised time should be considered as a technology of state power alongside dispersal, detention, destitution and deportation. In making this assertion, it also takes stock of the UK's asylum system and its built-in forms of marginalisation. It also places both the ethnographic content and policy discussion within the controversy surrounding the UK government's 'hostile environment' towards so-called 'illegal immigrants' that was unfolding as the ethnographic research took place. This opens towards wider discussions on the mutually reinforcing relationship between asylum policy and political discourse.

Keywords: Asylum Seekers, Hostile Environment, Temporality, Migration, Deterrence

Introduction

I would last see Naveed in late January 2013. We were both in the Longsight Community Church in Manchester, United Kingdom (UK) which opens its doors as an emergency night shelter for refused asylum seekers and destitute refugees every Friday night over the winter months between November and April. Naveed was holding documents for an upcoming appointment with immigration authorities. It was his last chance to 'get papers', he said. Naveed pulled out letters, London bound train tickets and a tube map and began to meticulously go through his upcoming journey including train times, the tube stations he would need to use and the travel times between them and, finally, his arrival at the appointment. Naveed was visibly anxious as he talked through his journey. A friend of his, who was also staying in the shelter, would tell me privately that Naveed had begun talking to himself and had become increasingly withdrawn over the past few weeks. Originally from Pakistan and in his mid-sixties, Naveed had spent years living precariously in the UK as an asylum seeker and then refused asylum seeker before arriving in the night shelters where he would spend three months sleeping on a different church floor each night of the week. Just like his arrival, Naveed's departure from the shelters would be clouded in legal uncertainty.

The Longsight Community Church is one of seven night shelters operated by the Boaz Trust, a local faith-based organisation that provides housing, emergency accommodation, legal advocacy and support to both female and male refused asylum seekers and destitute refugees in the city.¹ The night shelters are offered specifically to men who would otherwise be sleeping rough and although the

Boaz Trust coordinates the network, the venues are operated by individual churches across Greater Manchester that open their buildings one night a week as emergency accommodation for up to twelve men. Each church provides its own set of volunteers, hot meals, bedding, toiletries and supplies. Alongside the night shelters is a drop-in space that is also run by the Society of Friends, or Quakers. This space opens every evening between 6.00 pm and 9.00 pm in a venue in central Manchester as the men staying in the shelters wait for transportation to the next church for the night. They may be taken by a minibus provided by one of the churches or a fleet of cars driven by volunteers. Located throughout the city, from leafy middle-class suburbs to post-industrial working-class areas, these shelters are at once sites of displacement, on the fringes of public life and society, while also being focal points of community activity.

Those using the night shelters are primarily men like Naveed who have become destitute following the refusal of their asylum claim, although others may have been recently granted refugee status (however temporary) and are experiencing a period of homelessness while they find employment and housing or connect up with state welfare services. Refused asylum seekers are denied the right to work and are placed under No Recourse to Public Funds [NRPF] and are barred from accessing state welfare and public housing. They are also expected to leave the UK, although many are unwilling or unable to do so and subsequently live in fear of possible arrest, detention and deportation. Stripped of the most basic rights necessary to support themselves, the men staying in the night shelters are simultaneously abandoned by the state and caught up in its bureaucratic processes as they attempt to re-engage with the asylum system through making a fresh asylum claim, lodging an appeal or applying for forms of temporary support. The men might stay in the shelters for days, weeks or months depending on their circumstances and opportunities. Some might move into Boaz Trust housing with other asylum seekers or into hosted accommodation that the Boaz Trust arranges with local residents. Others might find accommodation through friends or through temporary state support while others might simply return to the street at the end of a winter season. The night shelters are spaces of constant arrival and departure with up to 60 different men from over 20 different nationalities accessing the network at different points over a typical winter season (Boaz Trust 2013; Longsight

Community Church 2016). Yet, arrival and departure rarely coincide with a change in legal status and the refused asylum seekers entering and leaving the shelter network most often remain in a state of legal and social uncertainty.

This article is based on ethnographic research carried out in the Boaz Trust night shelters over the course of two winter seasons between 2012 and 2014 which involved participant observation as an overnight volunteer and shelter manager at the Longsight Community Church as well as a total of three weeks spent living in the night shelters, moving between different venues and sleeping on different church floors, alongside other refused asylum seekers and destitute refugees. Based on fieldnotes, conversations, meetings and semi-structured interviews, I draw on the experiences of four men who stayed in the night shelters during this time: Jacob, Victor, Salah and Temir. Their experiences elaborate on what Saulo Cwerner has termed the 'time politics of asylum' in which the state, through the mechanisms of legislation, policy and administration organises the temporal experience of asylum seekers in ways that serve to marginalise, delegitimise and exert control over individuals (2004, p. 72). Yet, while Cwerner's analysis of the UK asylum system emphasises the use of speed and efficiency to achieve these ends, these narrations offer a much more complicated understanding of the 'time politics of asylum' where, as Melanie Griffiths has also articulated, refused asylum seekers are subject to 'multiple temporal tensions' as prolonged periods of idleness and waiting are punctuated with moments of forced and sudden change (2014, p. 1991). In this article, I introduce the notion of the 'weaponisation of time' to designate the ways in which the UK asylum system uses time as a means to punish, discourage and exert control over asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers by maintaining lives in a seemingly perpetual state of uncertainty. In this respect, weaponised time is a technique of power and sits alongside other forms of deterrence within the asylum system including destitution, dispersal, detention and deportation.

The ethnographic research informing this article coincided with the introduction of the 'hostile environment' towards so-called 'illegal immigrants' in 2012. The hostile environment was a combined legislative and media campaign intending to encourage those without permission to remain in the UK to leave voluntarily or face the 'near and present danger of being arrested' (Home Office 2013).

The re-raising of the contemporary 'folk-devil' of the 'illegal immigrant' within public and political discourse—and its easy conflation with the category of asylum seeker in the public imaginary—not only provides an important background insight into how the mutually reinforcing domains of political discourse and policy shape the 'time politics of asylum', but also how border regimes more widely produce states of chronic uncertainty among irregular migrants (Cohen 2011).

The Immigration Line

In his discussions on contemporary migration and mobility in the UK the sociologist Les Back has turned his attention to the Lunar House tower block in Croydon, south London (Back 2007, pp. 27-49; Back & Sinha 2018, p. 2). It is the headquarters of the UK Visas and Immigration division of the Home Office.² In the opening years of the twenty-first century, Back writes, the queues outside the main entrance for 'managed migration' were so long that the Home Office erected screens to hide them from the view of passers-by. Asylum seekers arriving for appointments at Lunar House were dealt with separately and had to use an entrance at the back of the building. It was possible that Naveed was making a journey to Lunar House when I last saw him at the Longsight Community Church on that Friday night in late January 2013 and other men staying in the shelters may have made similar trips to the building regarding their asylum claims or appeals. Back's description of Lunar House, with its multiple entrances for different categories of migrants—all obscured from view and compelled to wait—reflects the central concern of this article: the ways in which the UK border regime, through the overlapping domains of discourse, policy and practice, creates 'hierarchies of belonging' that determine whether a person has the right to work or remain in the UK, and the unequal temporalities that are attached to this (Back & Sinha 2018, p. 77). Building on W.E.B. Du Bois' comment that 'the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line', Back suggests that it might now be more accurate to say that the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of the 'immigration line' (Du Bois 2007, p. 3; Back 2007, p. 11, pp. 31-32).

Deeply implicated in racisms past and present, this problem gives name to the ways in which thick social, political and legal lines are drawn through and

across peoples of the world, designating those who can move freely across the globe and those who cannot and demarcating those lives endowed with the gift of citizenship from those that can be put on hold by the border regime, becoming trapped in an uncertain present. The problem of the immigration line is the problem of 'divided connectedness' in which the promise of mobility and connection through new transport and communication technologies is met with increasing border control and enforcement and is made available to some while being denied to others (Back & Sinha, 2018, p. 2). Back's figuration of the immigration line also speaks to a wider, but no less relevant point: that national borders are productive and generative (Anderson, Sharma & Wright 2009, p. 6). Rather than being viewed as merely fixed lines demarcating the formal boundaries of the nation state, national borders can be more precisely understood as a regime of institutions, policies, laws and discourses that continually shape and re-shape people according to a stratified set of social and legal statuses—from the citizen and tourist to the asylum seeker and diplomat—each with their own set of rights and restrictions and varying degrees of exposure to border enforcement, policing and regulation (Balibar 2002; Anderson, Sharma & Wright 2009; Mezzadra & Neilson 2012; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Rainey 2018; Walia 2013, p.37). Julie Schulze Wessel writes that 'for some the border is not even visible, while for others it is a permanent presence' (2016, p. 52). In this respect, she argues, borders are not so much tied to places as they are to persons (*ibid*). Irregular migrants, including asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers, become 'border subjects' whose lives are shaped by controls and regulations while also attempting to press against them, shaping border controls in turn through sustained engagement with their legal and political processes. Border subjects are 'forced to be the border', in the words of Shahram Khosravi, suspended between inclusion and exclusion, in a near perpetual state of ambiguity and uncertainty (2011, p. 99).

Victor arrived in the Boaz Trust night shelters in November 2013. He had just spent three nights sleeping rough in central Manchester following a few weeks couch-surfing at a friend's place after being released from Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre. Victor was in his mid-thirties and originally from Cameroon but had lived in Nigeria for many years prior to arriving in the UK.

His life between these countries had been shaped by violence, conflict and displacement. He had claimed asylum after being arrested for overstaying his visa. During a recorded interview about his experiences in the UK, Victor described how his asylum application had been 'fast-tracked' while in detention. This was 'quite frustrating', he said, as he did not have the means or time to gather evidence and information that would be vital to his asylum claim. Added to this, he was given little opportunity to discuss his case with the legal representation that was provided to him. Sometimes, he claimed, he would meet with his designated lawyer only fifteen minutes prior to an interview with immigration officials while other times they would not be available at all. As Saulo Cwerner writes, the fast-tracking of asylum claims by restricting the period available for evidence gathering and appeals effectively silences and obliterates the temporal complexities of an asylum claim and refugee experience (2004 p. 73). Both Victor's asylum application and appeal were rejected while in detention. Alongside his frustration with this process, Victor also found 'waiting' to be one of the most difficult aspects of being detained. Comparing his experiences to that of a criminal, he said that while criminals are given sentences and know when they will be released, an asylum seeker is given no sentence if and when they are detained and have no idea when they will be released. For Victor it was five months. He was released without explanation, only to find that a 'friend' had sold his possessions, all of which put him on course to seek emergency support from the Boaz Trust.

Just like Naveed, Victor's arrival in the night shelters was clouded in legal and social uncertainty. And like Naveed, Victor would spend the next few months moving between different churches and sleeping on a different floor each night of the week and spend hours in the public library each day, waiting out the time before the next shelter would open. Ghassan Hage writes that waiting can be 'big and small, grand and trivial' and time in the shelters takes on these mundane and imposing forms in a bifurcated waiting: seeing out each day in a state of enforced idleness without the right to work and under NRPF, while also being caught up in the wider, prolonged and sometimes vicious bureaucracy of the asylum system and border enforcement (Hage, 2009, p. 4). Hage also writes that there is a politics around who is required and expected to 'wait' and, in part, it hinges on the question of whether waiting is

an exercise of one's agency or a lack of it (Ibid, p. 2). In certain respects, Victor once provided an answer to this question when he said to me and others, as we gathered in the evening drop-in space at the Friends Meeting House, waiting for transport to the shelters, that 'absolute power absolutely corrupts'. He said this in reference to the United Kingdom Border Agency [UKBA]—the now defunct division of the Home Office that had once administered immigration, asylum and border enforcement. In Victor's reckoning, when an agency like the UKBA is set up to 'please the government' rather than its users, it gains uncontrollable power over the lives of individuals, particularly in the case of the refused asylum seekers he was addressing.

Victor's observation reflected Pierre Bourdieu's theorisation of 'absolute power' as having the means to exert control over other people's time and make oneself entirely unpredictable by subjecting others to different velocities of waiting, whether through delay and deferral or speed and surprise (Bourdieu 2000, p. 228). This absolute power—manifest for Victor in the UKBA—perhaps asserted itself more directly following his departure from the night shelters. Victor, like some others staying in the night shelters, would eventually be moved into Boaz Trust housing as spaces became available, although this transition to more stable accommodation did not mean a change in legal status, despite attempts by Victor to re-engage with the asylum system by making a fresh asylum claim. Over the next couple of years Victor would also move between housing offered by friends and refugee justice activists in the city. He would be arrested, detained and released multiple times—a cat and mouse game orchestrated by the state and in 2017 he would be arrested and detained a final time, before being deported to Nigeria.

A key assertion of this article is that the UK asylum system, glimpsed here in the narration of the experiences of Victor, produces and utilises what can be termed a 'weaponised time'. This accounts for the ways in which the state—whether through fast-tracking asylum claims or prolonged destitution or other techniques—seeks to control the temporal experiences of asylum seekers in an attempt to marginalise, frustrate, discourage and punish individuals. The term was first introduced by the philosopher Nina Power in her reflections on the UK's criminal justice system (Power 2014). From the slowness of bringing someone to trial to the trial process itself, the criminal justice system stretches

out time in a way that punishes an individual even before it seeks to penalise them. Developed further here in the context of the UK asylum system, the weaponisation of time is not only the stretching out of time, but also the speeding up of time—from prolonged periods of destitution to sudden arrest, release and deportation. This weaponised time, with its multiple and antagonistic temporalities, sits as a technique of deterrence alongside detention, destitution and dispersal in an attempt to discourage and prevent asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers from pursuing paths to regularisation and encourage voluntary returns from the UK. In this respect, weaponised time helps to maintain the boundaries of the 'immigration line' that shapes and re-shapes people along a stratified set of social and legal statuses.

Yet, it is also important to recognise that the problem of the immigration line, as Les Back conceives it, is much more than a theoretical cipher to understand different phenomena within migration and border studies. It cuts through to the very heart of research practice and the production of academic knowledge. My position as a migration scholar is bound up with my own experience as a transnational migrant, albeit a highly privileged one. I was born in Canada but moved to Manchester, UK with my family when I was sixteen. Now a dual Canadian and British citizen, I have access to employment and residency rights in multiple countries. The category of migrant is wide and covers the full spectrum of the 'immigration line' and is filled with personal histories, stories and experiences. One day in late 2013, as we sat together in the back of a minibus on our way to a shelter for the night, Victor and I discussed our different experiences of the UK. Victor suggested that as a white Canadian I would always and easily be accepted in Britain, while as a black African with a heavy accent he could never be fully accepted. There is a risk of over-determining a single conversation in the back of a minibus, but our different backgrounds had informed our fundamentally different legal statuses. I was a migrant-become-citizen with research funding from a major university and Victor had his asylum claim refused. I had opportunities to flourish in the UK while Victor's future in the country would be brutally foreclosed.

For Nicholas De Genova, an intractable problem of ethnographic research is that it is often only made possible by such social and institutional inequalities which can be easily exacerbated by a tendency to frame research along an

'inside-outside' axis in which the researcher unlocks the apparently hidden truths of an exotic 'other', accessed from an imagined outside (De Genova 2007, pp. 21-2). Constituting irregular migrants as an object of ethnographic study can easily result in researchers becoming agents in the production of a migrant's uneven social and legal status and become in effect 'accomplices to the discursive power of immigration law' (De Genova 2001, pp. 422-423). It is necessary, therefore, to delineate the historical and social specificity of contemporary migrations as they have been shaped by the legal and political economies of particular nation states. In other words, terms such as 'asylum seeker'—as has already been deployed in this article—need to be approached as active and contingent social-legal conditions, rather than fixed labels to be taken at face value. It is only then that ethnographic study can critique these conditions so as to identify and transform them.

The Hostile Environment and the Community of Value

In 2012 Theresa May, then UK Home Secretary, publicly announced her intention to create a 'really hostile environment' towards so-called 'illegal' immigrants in an interview with *The Telegraph* (Kirkup & Winnett 2012). The phrase was soon taken up as a slogan for the Conservative-led government's combined legislative and media agenda targeting people without permission to remain in the UK and those who could not prove their right to remain (House of Commons 2018, §52-57; House of Lords 2018, §2,1; Bowling and Westera 2018; Home Office 2013). The accompanying 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts included measures to isolate irregular migrants by restricting access to housing, healthcare and bank accounts as well as extending the financial and custodial penalties for working without proper documentation or employing someone who does not have the right to work in the UK (Rowlands 2019, pp. 45-50; Jones et al 2017, p. 6; Bowling & Westera 2018). In the year leading up to the 2014 Immigration Act the UK government also launched a media campaign under the codename Operation Vaken (Jones et al 2017, pp. 11-15; Home Office 2013). As part of this campaign, Home Office sponsored advertisements were taken out in predominantly Black, Asian and minority ethnic newspapers encouraging 'immigration offenders' to leave the country voluntarily or face the 'near and present danger of being arrested',

while the official Home Office Twitter account also published images of migrants being arrested alongside the hashtags: #immigrationoffenders and #immigration-bill (Home Office 2013, p. 2). Perhaps the most notorious moment of this campaign was the two vans driven around six of the most ethnically diverse areas of London carrying billboards that read, 'In the UK illegally? GO HOME OR FACE ARREST'. As Jones et al write, the vans seemed to mark a turning point in the climate of immigration debate within the UK as government sponsored advertisements had adopted the abusive language of far-right racists (2017, p. 3).

In her interview with *The Telegraph* the journalists noted how the usually staid and careful Home Secretary became 'uncharacteristically vivid' when discussing 'illegal immigration' (Kirkup & Winnet 2012). The summoning of the folk-devil of the 'illegal immigrant' was perhaps useful for the future Prime Minister, particularly as the Conservative Party had failed to meet its 2010 election promise of reducing net migration to the UK to under 100,000 (Grice 2015). The figure of the 'illegal immigrant' represents the culpable outsider who threatens the integrity of the nation's borders and disrupts attempts to manage and control migration flows. The term also serves to distinguish the good migrant from the bad migrant, the wanted from the unwanted and those deserving of welcome from the undeserving. It designates the poles of the 'immigration line' and who can belong and who cannot. Bridget Anderson writes that modern nation states increasingly portray themselves as a 'community of value' in which certain people matter more than others—and 'belong' more than others—because they are imagined to act in good and proper ways (Anderson 2013, pp. 2-5; Jones et al 2017, pp. 121-2). In the community of value, the Good Citizen, who is a hard-working and law-abiding member of a stable and respectable family, is contrasted with the benefits claimant and migrant. Those on the periphery of the community of value are always at risk of sliding further away from its centre, particularly as the benefits claimant can easily be imagined as the benefits scrounger or Failed Citizen and the migrant can easily be imagined as 'illegal' and therefore criminal (Anderson 2013, p. 5).

A defining moment of the hostile environment was the Windrush Scandal in which Commonwealth citizens who had arrived in the UK between 1948 and

1971 were unable to prove their settled status and were subsequently classed as 'illegal immigrants'. Taking its name from the *Empire Windrush*—a ship that brought Jamaican workers to the UK in 1948—the scandal primarily involved British subjects and Commonwealth citizens from the Caribbean who were suddenly denied access to healthcare, housing and employment and were threatened with arrest and detention. It is estimated that up to 63 people were wrongfully deported from the UK (House of Lords 2018). 'As the Windrush Scandal indicates', write Bowling and Westenra, 'even British citizenship and an unblemished working life in the UK does not provide a guarantee of freedom from being declared an illegal immigrant' (2018 p. 14). As the scandal demonstrates, the parameters of who is considered 'illegal' continually shift and expand and do so in heavily racialised ways.

The 'illegal immigrant' is an entirely constructed category and the term can be more precisely understood as shorthand for a process of 'making illegal' and is an inevitable consequence of immigration controls coupled with nation state rooted notions of belonging and citizenship (Anderson, 2013 p. 118). In other words, as Nicholas De Genova reminds us, 'illegality' is a condition produced through law and policy and sustained through discourse (2002, p. 431). 'Asylum seeker' is a similarly constructed category, formed at the junction between law and political and public discourse. It not only designates the legal status of someone who has made a claim for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention and is awaiting a decision, but also designates status, as Bridget Anderson argues, in the sense of worth and honour and degrees of belonging within the community of value (2013, p. 4). It is a value-laden and often negative category, particularly as the figure of the 'bogus' asylum seeker or 'abusive claimant' became entrenched within political and public discourse from the 1990s onwards, throwing a blanket of suspicion on people who were still awaiting decisions regarding their status as refugees (Home Office 1998; Tyler 2013, pp. 75-103). In this respect, the figures of the asylum seeker and illegal immigrant are easily conflated. As Vicki Squire writes, although 'illegal' immigration is primarily represented in relation to asylum as a problem of entrance without authorisation, it can also refer to those who have reached the end of the asylum process without having their claims accepted by the state (2009, p. 13). Like the 'illegal' immigrant, the asylum seeker becomes

configured as a culpable outsider who has entered without permission and refused to leave, an affront to the nation's attempt to manage its own borders. Subsequently, the 'asylum-seeker-cum-illegal-immigrant' becomes a 'national abject', in the words of Imogen Tyler, which not only means a degraded 'false image', but one that carries a subjectifying force, informing policy and shaping and re-shaping lives in vicious and malign ways as asylum seekers become the targets of increasing regulation and control and are subject to forms of deterrence such as destitution, detention, deportation and compulsory dispersal (Tyler 2013, p. 9).

Enforced Destitution and Compulsory Dispersal

In many respects, when Theresa May introduced the hostile environment in 2012, she was simply giving name to a long-standing set of policies and practices within the UK's immigration and asylum system. The past thirty years have seen the introduction of indefinite detention, the near total erosion of asylum seeker employment rights, the replacement of indefinite leave to remain for refugees with forms of temporary protection, the exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream welfare provision and an ongoing 'culture of disbelief' in which the majority of asylum claims are refused in the first instance (Bloch & Schuster 2002; Bloch & Schuster 2005; Refugee Action 2006, p. 58; Independent Asylum Commission 2008; Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust 2007, p. 7; Cohen 2011, p. xxii; Crawley, Hemmings & Price 2011, p. 8; Hynes 2011, pp. 10-12; Philo, Briant & Donald 2013, pp. 19-28; Equality and Human Rights Commission & Refugee Council 2014; Rowlands, 2019, pp. 45-50).

A formative moment in the shaping of the current asylum system was the 1998 White Paper *Fairer, Faster, Firmer* in which the New Labour government outlined its belief that the UK's supposedly generous welfare system acted as an incentive for economic migrants to use the asylum route to enter the country (Sales 2002, p. 457; Phillimore & Goodson 2006, p. 1716; Hynes 2011, p. 45; Home Office 1998). The document made continual reference to 'genuine asylum seekers' and 'abusive claimants' which reasserted the moral distinction between the good migrant and the bad migrant, casting lives as either legitimate or illegitimate, and laying the groundwork for a restructured system

with built-in mechanisms of deterrence which, as Patricia Hynes and others assert, was inherently exclusionary and would produce widespread destitution among asylum seekers, recent refugees and refused asylum seekers (Bloch & Schuster 2005; Refugee Action 2006; Independent Asylum Commission 2008; Lewis 2009; Squire 2009, pp. 116-141; Hynes 2011, p. 46; Crawley, Hemmings & Price 2011; British Red Cross & Boaz Trust 2013; Rowlands 2019). Under the subsequent 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, asylum seekers are subject to compulsory dispersal to towns and cities outside London and the southeast of England on a no-choice basis to live in state-backed but privately operated National Asylum Support Service [NASS] accommodation while their claims are processed.³ Along with accommodation, asylum claimants receive a cash allowance of £37.75 a week.⁴ Although the initial rationale behind dispersal was to ease strain on public housing and services in London and the south east, as well as deter the long-term settlement of refugees and asylum seekers in these areas, the programme is also shaped by economic calculations and the availability of cheap and vacant accommodation, meaning that dispersal typically involves relocating a racialised and vulnerable population to areas of the country with existing social deprivation and poverty (Zetter, Griffiths & Sigona 2005, p. 171; Bloch & Schuster 2005; Schuster 2005, p. 617; Phillimore & Goodson 2006, pp. 1715-1717; Phillips 2006, p. 542; Gill 2009, p. 187).

Dispersal not only assumes that asylum seekers are a burden on public services and therefore need to be managed and controlled through forced relocation, but also constructs asylum seekers—both discursively and materially—as transient figures, unable to fully integrate into the places and communities where they temporarily reside (Zetter, Griffiths & Sigona 2005, p. 176; Schuster 2005, p. 608; Gill 2009, p. 187; Hynes, 2011; Squire, 2009 pp. 116-141; Darling 2017, pp. 182-3). The structure of NASS and the dispersal system also propel asylum claimants into destitution. Although destitution may be experienced throughout the asylum claims process, particularly if NASS support is withdrawn or delayed, the majority of reported destitution occurs at the end of the claims process, following an initial decision (Lewis 2009, §2; British Red Cross & Boaz Trust 2013, p. 5; Crawley, Hemmings & Price 2011, p. 16). Those who are granted leave to remain in the UK must vacate their

NASS accommodation within 28 days and within this time are expected to find housing and employment or connect up with mainstream welfare provision. Many are unable to do so in such a short space of time and become destitute as a result. Those who have their claims refused must vacate their NASS accommodation within 21 days and are expected to leave the country. Many are unwilling or unable to do so and without the right to work and under NRPF become reliant on friends, acquaintances or charities like the Boaz Trust to meet their most basic needs such as food, water, shelter and warmth. Refused asylum seekers are effectively abandoned by the asylum system in the towns and cities where they have been dispersed. Greater Manchester is a dispersal area and although there is no official data on the numbers of destitute asylum seekers living in the UK, the Red Cross and Boaz Trust estimate that 300 to 400 destitute asylum seekers and refugees access charitable support across the city each week (British Red Cross & Boaz Trust 2013, p. 7). As Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona indicate, a number of new refugee support organisations were established in dispersal areas following the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. This included the Boaz Trust, which was founded in 2004 after a notable increase in destitute asylum seekers accessing homeless support services in Manchester (Smith 2014, p. 35).

A 'last resort' for many asylum seekers facing 'enforced destitution' is to apply for temporary support under Section 4 of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum act (Independent Asylum Commission 2008 p. 2; Lewis 2009, §2.3.2; British Red Cross & Boaz Trust 2013, p. 5; Rowlands 2019, p. 24, pp. 48-49). This conditional and limited support provides voucher payments of £35 a week and accommodation to those who 'appear to be destitute' and are 'taking all reasonable steps to leave the UK' but are unable to do so (Home Office 2018, p. 9). This may be for medical reasons or that there is no lawful or viable route of return. Due to the eligibility requirements, claims for Section 4 support necessarily take place from a position of homelessness and claimants must sign a statement agreeing to return to their country of origin when it is safe to do so. Section 4 support maintains refused asylum seekers in a condition of legal and social uncertainty, as although accommodation is provided, the state still refuses to recognise Section 4 claimants as refugees. In this respect, it reflects what Patricia Hynes calls the 'policy-imposed liminality'—understood as both a

legal and social uncertainty—of the wider asylum system (2011, p. 191).

Arrivals and Departures

Jacob arrived in the Boaz Trust night shelters in early December 2013. He was a middle-aged man and a former state level civil servant in Zimbabwe and had been living in the UK for twelve years. The past decade had been one of prolonged legal and social uncertainty as although the UK would not recognise Jacob as a refugee, the government of Zimbabwe had refused to accept any deportees. Jacob had arrived in the shelters after delays in processing his application for Section 4 support. He had been informed by UK Visas and Immigration that a decision on his application would be given the day he arrived in the shelters, but he had heard nothing. He explained this all to me and others as we sat together in the evening drop-in space, waiting for transport to the next shelter for the night. He added that the most difficult part of this whole experience was the waiting. The lengths of time for decisions to be made were always unknown and in Jacob's words this led to a 'delayed life'. The following day Jacob would learn that his Section 4 application had been accepted and accommodation would be available in Bradford in a day's time. Jacob's stay in the night shelters was fleeting. It was only for two nights, but these two nights were shaped by a dysfunctional bureaucratic process and in this respect it was similar to the experiences of many of the other men staying in the shelters, albeit for others the lengths of time spent sleeping on church floors might extend to days, weeks or months.

Melanie Griffiths has described the chronic 'temporal uncertainty' faced by refused asylum seekers where multiple temporal tensions can be experienced simultaneously (2014). In her research with refused asylum seekers and immigration detainees in Oxford she has elaborated on Saulo Cwerner's 'time politics of asylum' by teasing apart four experiential temporalities: a 'sticky time' of bureaucratic waiting attached to an often distant hope in a change of status or circumstance, a 'suspended time' of prolonged stasis and stagnation, a 'frenzied' time of sudden change and the accompanying 'temporal ruptures' which tear into people's imagined time frames and futures (2014 p. 1994). This simultaneous speeding up and slowing down within these experiential temporalities is a feature of what I have termed the weaponisation of time and

were apparent in both Jacob and Victor's time in the shelters. For Jacob, moments of frantic change, whether arriving in the shelters from living on the streets or his sudden and forced dispersal to Bradford, were overridden by a continuing stasis and absent change in legal status, an ongoing 'delayed life' in his own words. For Victor, this similar absent change in status was concurrent with months of prolonged destitution as well as a series of sudden, frenzied changes—from multiple arrests and imprisonments to deportation.

Like Jacob and Victor, other men arriving in the night shelters would have been referred to the Boaz Trust after presenting themselves to other frontline refugee and homeless support agencies in the city such as Freedom from Torture, Refugee Action and Refugee Services of the British Red Cross, among others. Those arriving in the shelters may have been released from detention or forced to vacate NASS accommodation following the refusal of their asylum claim. They may have exhausted the hospitality of friends. It may be a combination of these and most often involved time spent living on the street. Due to the urgency of each situation and the need to prevent a person from spending another night sleeping rough, there was often little or no direct contact between individuals and the Boaz Trust beyond the paperwork exchanged between support agencies. Entering the shelters was a transition from the street to the more stable, but still unsettled life of moving between churches. It could be disorienting, at least initially, constituting forms of the 'frenzied time' and 'temporal ruptures' described by Griffiths. Those arriving for the first time had little idea what to expect. They were waiting on the unexpected and unknown and the shelters were another point of transition along a wider personal trajectory of displacement and forced mobility. Men arriving in the shelters might stay for one night or a few days, while others might be living in the shelters for weeks or, like Victor and Naveed, even months. Eventual departure from the shelters could be for a variety of reasons. Some may have been offered a room in Boaz Trust housing or hosted accommodation, or they may have been offered Section 4 support. They may have found better accommodation through friends and acquaintances and in some instances, as detailed in Temir's experience below, a person may leave the shelters simply because they are closed for the season. Just like arrival, departure is also a moment of transition and this transition is not always attached to a sense of

progress or resolution. Both arrival and departure are clouded in legal uncertainty.

Two years after his stay in the night shelters, during which time he first moved into Boaz Trust hosted accommodation with a local family and then into shared Boaz Trust housing with other asylum seekers, I would meet Salah in central Manchester. Salah was a former engineering student from Cairo and it was one of several times that we would meet after he had left the shelters in the spring of 2013. Although he was now in more stable housing, like Victor, Salah's status had not changed over the two years. This was despite attempts to mount a judicial review of his asylum case. Two years of inertia had weighed down on him. He mentioned that he had not spoken to any volunteers from the night shelters for a long while. As his status had not changed, 'there was little to say'. Salah had previously spoken about how the shelters had been an opportunity to build contacts with volunteers and other people, as well as overcome his shyness. After leaving the shelters he felt increasingly isolated. He spoke further about these feelings. Salah had recently attended a filming of the BBC's Big Questions television show in Media City, Salford. Queueing with others before the filming and participating in the studio audience had made him feel 'part of society' again, he said, however brief.

Les Back and Shamser Sinha have described irregular migrants and asylum seekers in London as living with an 'existential straitjacket' that not only restrains an unfolding sense of self, but creates social disconnection and exacerbates 'hierarchies of belonging' (2018 p. 77). The 'delayed life' produced by the weaponisation of time not only frustrates a sense of the future for refused asylum seekers like Salah and Jacob, but also creates a social dislocation as life seems to progress and change for others, while they remain in a seeming 'eternal present' (Anderson, Sharma & Wright 2009, p. 6). Over the past three years Salah had undergone significant shifts in status—from 'international student' to 'asylum seeker' to 'refused asylum seeker'—with the depreciating rights that each entailed. These shifts can be loosely mapped on to the uncertain temporalities identified by Griffiths, particularly as the goal-oriented bureaucratic 'sticky-time' of waiting during the asylum claims process gave way to the suspended time of directionless stasis that Salah was now facing. These shifts, in turn, were overlaid with changes in accommodation,

from state-backed but privatised NASS accommodation, to the prospect of living on the street, to reliance on the Boaz Trust night shelters and housing. Salah's goal was to now re-engage in the asylum appeals process and gather fresh evidence for a judicial review of his case. Effectively, it would mean shifting from the 'suspended time' of stasis back to the 'sticky time' of waiting, which offered the small hope of a change in status, yet also remained firmly within the systemic temporal uncertainty of the asylum claims process.

In the spring of 2013, I recorded an interview with Temir, a young Kurdish lad originally from Iraq who was staying in the night shelters. During the interview he spoke of 'being alive-dead'. 'Being alive-dead', he said, meant 'losing everyday hope, everyday faith'. It meant he could not make plans or even imagine his future. 'I know that there is my future', he said, 'but how can I show that it is really mine?'. The sense of a loss of control over one's life contained in Temir's words was most likely not only a response to his long-term social and legal uncertainty, but also the events that had taken place that morning.

The interview had taken place in the Longsight Community Church on a Friday night, alongside Salah and another man staying in the shelters. Earlier that day Temir had walked two hours to a solicitor's office where he waited for hours only to be told to come back in a fortnight. According to Temir, this would mean that his application for Section 4 support would be delayed for at least one month. As the shelters were closing in two weeks, Temir was facing the prospect of a fortnight on the street. Like Jacob's 'delayed life' spent waiting and the existential straitjacket described by Back and Sinha, Temir had lost agency over his immediate future and the bitter prospect of destitution and a return to the street was a distinct possibility. 'Being alive-dead' is an existence shaped by legal and temporal uncertainty, where time is weaponised and the future uncertain or seemingly foreclosed. As in Salah's reflections, this led to a sense of detachment from what Temir called, 'normal' society:

We are not normal people. We have engaged in so many problems. We engage in so many problems that are not normal at all. [...] People I see everyday, they have problems. But it's very far from our problems, y'know. So, I see a guy who is in a rush because he's late to meet his girlfriend and he's got some problems with her. I see another guy and he don't have the money because he lost it. And I see somebody else who is crying because their father just died.

We don't have these kinds of problems.

Temir's observations of the problems faced by 'normal' people became evidence of his own dislocation from everyday social life. His own problems, he said, were about getting a passport and papers which seemed like an impossible task. He described it as a fight 'which takes a lot of anger and waiting, but I feel it doesn't exist'. In his auto-ethnographic book *'Illegal' Traveller*, Shahram Khosravi writes that 'a life in exile is like being condemned to purgatory, a state between life and death, a limbo between here and there' (2011 p. 74). Temir's description of his external landscape, watching people go about their daily lives—and here we must picture him seeing out the day in Manchester Central Library or Manchester Piccadilly station or walking the streets—becomes a description of his internal landscape and the social dislocation from the world he felt, a product of the temporal uncertainties placed on refused asylum seekers by the machinations of the UK's asylum system.

Conclusion

In the early summer of 2013, I visited Salah in his hosted accommodation in south Manchester, where he was living with a local family. He had recently moved out of the night shelters and had invited a small group of friends around for a meal. I arrived before the others and sat with Salah in the front room, chatting. The television was on and a piece on the Go Home vans flashed up as the headline item on the BBC news. The message of the vans—and the wider hostile environment—was ostensibly aimed at him, a refused asylum seeker who had been told to leave the country. 'What do you think of this?', I asked. 'It's just a show', he replied. In their analysis of the Go Home vans, Jones et al refer to Operation Vaken as an example of the 'performative politics of immigration control' in which the government had given up on trying to discuss the facts of immigration in favour of emotional appeals to reassurance and fear (Jones et al, 2017 p. 19, p. 38). But the response to Operation Vaken, as their research indicated, was often one of scepticism. A focus group conducted in Barking and Dagenham by Yasmin Gunaratnam included anti-immigration UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) supporters and a former electoral candidate for the far-right British National Party. The former BNP candidate, and others,

regarded Operation Vaken as a sort of public-relations game with one participant saying, 'They're trying to give the idea to the general public that they're doing something about it [immigration], but they're doing absolutely nothing' (Jones et al 2017 p. 55).

The scepticism by these varying audiences to the Go Home vans, whether Salah dismissing it as 'just a show' in his front room or within the focus group in Barking and Dagenham, seemed to suggest that the vans were an inept piece of 'political theatre' (Jones et al 2017, p. 60). Yet, it was also part of a wider policy agenda of the hostile environment which, as we have seen, not only re-inserted the figure of the illegal immigrant into official political discourse, but also included increasingly restrictive legislation and border enforcement practices. As Jones et al state, communication campaigns and the physical assertion of the border through checks, raids, detentions and deportations are both modes of 'state performance' (Jones et al. 2017, p. 40). Such state performances are not always coherent in either their attempts to convince an assumed concerned public that immigration is somehow under control or in their attempts to deter people from seeking asylum in the UK. As Nicholas De Genova reminds us, we should avoid taking migration law at face value and treating it as effectively definitive, coherent and complete as this not only recapitulates the reification of the state's authority and power but also, I suggest here, misses some of their unstated, malign and vicious effects (De Genova 2002, p. 425). In other words, technologies of deterrence whether explicitly stated, such as deportations, detentions and dispersal, or simply built into the asylum system, like enforced destitution and weaponised time, do not necessarily prevent people from claiming asylum or leaving voluntarily, but they do shape and re-shape lives in harmful and cruel ways. The stories and experiences of Jacob, Victor, Salah and Temir and their time in the shelters indicate this.

In this article, I have elaborated on what Saulo Cwerner has called the 'time politics of asylum' and the ways in which technologies of power and deterrence within the UK's asylum system interlock to produce chronic legal and social uncertainty among refused asylum seekers, where time is simultaneously sped up and slowed down, creating experiences of prolonged stasis and frenzied change and where the future remains uncertain or life in the UK is foreclosed

with impunity. In these descriptions of time in the shelter, I have developed the notion of the 'weaponisation of time' which works alongside deportation, detention, dispersal and destitution as another technology of power within the UK asylum system.

MARK JUSTIN RAINEY is a post-doctoral researcher in the School of Geography, Archaeology and Irish Studies at National University of Ireland, Galway. In 2017 he completed his PhD on a joint research project between the School of Geography, Queen Mary and the Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths. Writing on migration and urban geography, he combines scholarship with activist work and in 2017 founded and co-chaired the Migration and Destitution Action Group within the Manchester Homelessness Partnership.

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Notes

¹ www.boaztrust.org.uk, viewed 1 November, 2019.

² In 2013 UK Visas and Immigration replaced the section of the United Kingdom Border Agency that had administered visas. Prior to 2008 this agency was known as the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

³ In 2010 the UK Home Office announced that it would end local authority control over asylum housing and all asylum seeker reception services and dispersal accommodation would be contracted out to private service providers, cf, Darling, 2016a and Darling, 2016b.

⁴ This was reduced from £42 in 2009. The original figure was set at the equivalent of 70 per cent of Job Seeker's Allowance (cf, Crawley, Hemmings and Price, 2011, p.8).