No 'Place' For Home:

Stories of Discomfort and Depoliticisation in the Privatisation of Dispersal Accommodation in Yorkshire and Humberside

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Acknowledgements

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List of Acronyms

COMPASS: Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services

G4S: Group 4 Securicor

LA: Local Authority

NASS: National Asylum Support Service

RAASS: Refugee and Asylum Advocacy and Support Sector

UKBA: United Kingdom Border Agency

Where Are We Now? January 2014

From strongly worded criticisms in the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Asylum to recent revelations of G4S' main contractor in the region not paying Council Tax on any of their properties in Leeds, the management of housing provision for asylum seekers in Yorkshire and Humberside has been under intense governmental scrutiny over the last six months.

Many of the concerns articulated by my research participants seem to have recently materialised into fact. We have rapidly seen service provision severely damaged by a desire for profit, with pastoral care frequently pushed aside and housing standards plummeting. The COMPASS contract's neoliberal mantra of speed and cost-efficiency is starting to bear rotten fruits.

But perhaps this disease has taken root deeper than we first thought. We now find ourselves in a social, cultural and legislative environment which in which hostility towards migrants is accepted as a 'common-sense.' If the Immigration Bill comes into law in April this year, we will find ourselves in a situation where every individual in the UK may be forced to divulge their immigration status in order to access a plethora of public and private services, including the NHS, bank accounts, legal support and private rented housing. Many professionals working in these sectors will also find themselves expected to act as an outsourced border force for the government. This is a *privatisation* of immigration control, both in the sense that it is reconfigured as an operation kept at arm's length from the state, and in that the border is reconstructed in domestic, or private, settings away from traditional sites of immigration control.

Many critics often state that a restriction on the rights of asylum seekers and refugees is always a pilot for a more generalised movement towards regressive national policies. We've seen the very same neoliberal governmentality that was used to rationalise the privatisation of housing and support for asylum seekers being used to rationalise a wide-reaching reform our public services in the name of immigration control.

It's time to be more vigilant. We must start to learn from our mistakes, or we will all be faced with the rotten fruits of a neoliberal governmentality where our rights are increasingly disposable, delimited and degraded.

30.1.2014

Introduction

Summer 2012: COMPASS

In July 2009, the Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services (COMPASS) contracts for "initial and dispersed accommodation and associated services for asylum applicants; and transport for asylum applicants" (Home Office & UKBA 2012) were put out for tender. The previous system (TARGET contracts) where individual Local Authorities (LA) in dispersal areas were contracted to organise housing and the provision of support, was redesigned and the UK was separated in six, trans-regional "super-contracts" (Burgess 2010: 123). By March 2012, the six contracts were awarded to three multi-national security companies: G4S, Serco and Clearel Ltd.

Summer 2013: Yorkshire and Humberside

Sat in the lounge of a young refugee mother as she fed her one year old son, I looked around at the sparsely decorated room. You could not see out of the bay windows that looked out onto the street. Her whole life was still in boxes; precarious towers of nappies, brightly coloured toys, bedding, and papers prevented the warm July sun from reaching my seat on the other side of the room. She had lived in six different COMPASS properties in the last six months: "It has made it so so difficult to make me settle – you know – and I've still got that fear that every accommodation that I'm

going to be provided with might be really nasty and disgusting, and you know, horrible."[1]

The COMPASS 'event' in Yorkshire and Humberside

Between these two events, the COMPASS contracts had been fully initiated; the transition period had passed, Council Asylum Teams had been dissembled and all asylum seekers had been accommodated by the new suppliers. According to the UKBA, this UK-wide transition of 19,000 recipients of housing support to the new contracts resulted in the physical move of just over 2,300 (12%) applicants (UKBA 2013).

Whilst ideological critiques of privatisation typified early responses to the contracts, wider concerns surrounding the operational capacities and practices of the new service provision have gained momentum over the last 12 months. The contracts are now forming part of the UKBA's investigation into asylum support, whilst concerns around the provision of housing and support within COMPASS has featured in all but one of the oral transcripts for the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Asylum.[2] Equally, a number of charities and individuals have submitted specific evidence to the government focusing on the problems with the contracts (JRF 2013; Grayson 2013; Krause *et al.* 2013). The majority of scrutiny has fallen on G4S, the contract holder for the North East and Yorkshire and Humber, and the Midlands and East of England.

Arguably the privatisation of NASS housing[3] and support has brought a number of critical perspectives into focus. It is important to state that the involvement of private companies within the "asylum market"[4] is not new. However, their involvement has

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1 Interview I, 17/07/2013.
2 Transcripts of oral evidence are available at www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs -commitee/inquiries/parliament-2010/asylum/
3

previously been concentrated within the arenas of detention and deportation, rather than 'support' and 'humanitarian' sectors such as housing. Thus, with the introduction of these new contracts, narratives of privatisation, protection, and the 'placement' of asylum seekers within the UK begin to collide.

Through a series of conversational interviews with campaigners, advocates, sector workers and asylum seekers themselves in Yorkshire and Humberside, this research project aims to investigate the way in which these individuals *make sense* of the recent changes to NASS housing.

Setting the Scene

Yorkshire and Humberside has a long standing history of providing sanctuary for asylum seekers and refugees and has been a region with high levels of dispersal since the introduction of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. However, under the terms of COMPASS, the region has been merged with the North East, another region with high dispersal figures. The latest government figures (Q2 2013) reveal that Yorkshire and Humberside and the North East combined currently house more than 4,000 recipients of Section 95 support; over a fifth of all dispersal housing.[5] Rotherham (388), Stockton-On-Tees (490) and Middlesbrough (702) house the largest proportion of those on S95 in the region (See Appendix VII, fig. 2 & fig. 3).

Due to its history, the region has a large refugee and asylum advocacy and support sector (RAASS), providing front-line support services alongside more radical campaigning and activism work. As my research is focusing on how the changes to the provision of housing and support has affected both asylum seekers themselves and the RAASS, the presence of a strong network of charities and NGOs in the region is crucial.

This research project focuses on the provision and privatisation of housing for asylum seekers because it provides us with an interest nexus where concerns around the demographics of a nation, immigration, right to welfare and ideas of liberal hospitality

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[5] Data on the geographical distribution of S4 applicants is not available.

collide. The "residentialist bias" (Papastergiadis 2010) of Western European states and the reification of owner occupation (Sivandanan 2013) can be seen to for

power (Springer 2010) in the situated experience of privatised NASS housing.

No choice of place to stay;

Belongings remain packed, ready for the next move.

Anytime, anywhere, anyhow as the locker man dictates.

Fear, sleepless nights, confusion, depression and stress,

Characterise all the veterans in the struggle.

'The Brown Envelope', performed by WAST (Women Asylum Seekers' Together) in Leeds, 21st July 2013.

Literature Review

This thesis will first outline the theoretical framework that has informed the development of the project. Tracing the development of the dispersal policy in the late 1990s, I contextualise the "institutionalised exclusion" (Carter & El Hassan 2003, in Hynes 2009: 101) of the asylum seeker from an increasingly nationalised welfare state, and consider the dissemination of border-zones (Squire 2011) into sites of social welfare. This legislative background informs the figuration of the asylum-seeker as administrative burden and national threat through the everyday governmentalities of domopolitics (Darling 2011b; Walters 2004). Next, I will consider the psycho-social effects (Gill 2009b) of these governmentalities through the distribution-logic of dispersal, and the marginalisation of the asylum-seeker's *presence* within the *domos-as-state* and the *domos-as-home* (Squire & Darling 2013). Finally, I will contextualise these critical trajectories within a wide-reaching theoretical discussion of neoliberalism, neoliberal governmentalities and the 'efficient' state (Ferguson & Gupta 2002; Springer 2010).

1: Welfare Restrictionism

Many scholars have recorded the influential changes to UK immigration policy that foreshadowed the introduction of dispersal in 1999 (Dwyer 2005; O'Mahony & Sweeney 2010; Phillips 2006: 542; Rahilly 1998; Zetter & Pearl 1999). The 1985

Housing Act excluded asylum seekers from LA homelessness support, whilst the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act and subsequent 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act removed asylum seekers from mainstream welfare support (Dwyer 2005; O'Mahony & Sweeney 2010: 303; Rahilly 1998: 244; Zetter and Pearl 2010: 680). The 1999 Act established the National Asylum Support System (NASS); a centralised body responsible for allocating both section 95 and section 4 support for asylum seekers. This "institutionalised exclusion" (Carter & El Hassan 2003, in Hynes 2009: 101) of the asylum-seeking individual from a nation's welfare-state can be understood in terms of both a 'nationalisation' of welfare and the transition from the border-as-site to the border-as-zone (Squire 2011).

1.1: 'Nationalisation' in the Welfare State

Through the allocation of welfare, the state is able to classify and categorise legitimate and illegitimate recipients of support; the 'deserving' and the 'underserving' poor (Sales 2002). However, when faced with the impossible numbers game of migration statistics, governments are left to manage the quotidian sites of belonging and citizenship (Squire 2011: 3). Increasingly, the organisation of welfare support for migrants in the UK is becoming a governmental technique to manage migration flows into the country. Whether that be the so called 'residency test' for European migrants before they are accepted on social housing registers, or the reduction of migrants' rights to free healthcare on the NHS, access to welfare is becoming a question of the 'deserving' national and the 'underserving' migrant.[6]

Changes to welfare provision created the legislative category of 'asylum-seeker', both 'fracturing' the refugee label (Zetter 2007, in Hynes 2009: 101; Tyler 2006: 189) and facilitating the marginalisation of the asylum seeker from state-support that was increasingly becoming exclusive to 'nationals'. In this respect, the state's distribution of welfare can be understood as an "organic boundary mechanism" (Laegaard 2007: 51). When the borders of the welfare state and the psycho-geographic boundaries of the nation-state are pushed into alignment, the asylum seeking individual can only be

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[6] Edit 2014: The introduction of the new Immigration Bill 2013 crystallises this theoretical approach to the nationalisation and neoliberalisation of the Welfare State. See new Prologue for further information.

constructed as an unwelcome guest and a financial, social and national burden (Gibson 2003; Hubbard 2005; Rahilly 1998).

It is also important to briefly outline the contributory turn in recent political conceptualisations of welfare provision (Dwyer 2005). Ending the "culture of something for nothing" has become the catchphrase of the current Coalition government (Hennessy 2013). This principle of entitlement-through-contribution

peripheries of the nation-state nor in its grammatical stasis as a noun; its classificatory mechanisms and conditioning principles are active practices, permeating all levels of social life. This is not to say that asylum seekers are not subjugated to "forceful, blunt forms of power", but that they are also experiencing "subtler governmental techniques" (Gill 2009b: 186). Triggering "multi-level networks" (Dwyer 2005: 627) of bordering practices and border experiences, some argue that there are "new configurations of power, new conceptions of territory and control." (Walters 2004: 253). The management of welfare as a bordering practice is, arguably, an act of governmentality.

2.1: Domopolitics and Welfare

Governmentality has been used as a useful critical framework for analysing the conditionality and conditioning effects of welfare distribution in the asylum process (Darling 2011b; 2013; Dwyer 2005; Walters 2004). More specifically, both Walters (2004) and Darling (2011b; 2013) have focused on the concept of domopolitics, a mode of governmentality concerned with governing the state-as-home and the 'domestication' of the foreign. Walters (2004) argues that the welfare state's inherent desire to identify, locate and produce certain types of citizen makes it a domopolitical project. Domopolitics works to maintain the illusion of a static national space or territory (Squire 2011: 12) by drawing together an "array of techniques of security designed to 'secure' and regulate the place of the 'homely' nation within a world of global flows" (Darling 2011b: 264). Fundamentally concerned with "fixing locations, imposing mobility and defining distributions" (Darling 2013: 6) in a world where this is becoming increasingly difficult, domopolitics aims to reconfigure state power in the "alignment of security, territory and nationhood in governance" (Darling 2009b: 264).

In governing the state as home, domopolitics purports the idea that there is some natural connection between birthplace and 'home'; the link between national and nation is assumed to be universal and inescapable (Walters 2004). Thus, the 'homeliness' of the nation relies on the coherence of the national family and the management of the 'unhomely' migrant. This is, quite literally, "social security." (Walters 2004) in which there is a clear confluence of the "logic of identification and

[the] logic of spatial containment." (Darling 2013: 7).

In terms of the domopolitics of dispersal housing, Darling argues that NASS created a "mode of circulation which is both highly disciplined and pervasively disciplining" (2011b: 268). The controls articulated through housing provision over the asylum seekers' *space* in the nation (no-choice allocation of housing), *length of stay* in the nation (integrated with asylum claim), and *conduct* within the nation (accommodation provision is heavily conditional), work to both contain and condition the asylum-seeking individual within the 'homely' nation. If they misbehave – refuse to accept dispersal accommodation, do not co-operate with immigration officials, or fail to report regularly – their 'right' to be accommodated in the nation-state is withdrawn (Perry 2005: 23). Echoed in Hubbard's (2005) discussion of the proposed introduction of asylum hostels, the space afforded to asylum seekers in the UK is forever constrained by a figuration of the hosting nation-state as someone else's home.

Thus, the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers in the UK can be conceptualised as another governmental technique that aims to identify the asylum seeker as a 'suspect body' that needs to be heavily regulated (Dwyer 2005; Gill 2009d; Sivanandan 2013; Walters 2004). If the nation is governed as home, it is consequently understood as "our place, where we belong naturally, and where, by definition, others do not" (Walters 2004: 241). Therefore, when migration is considered as something out of our control, what is at threat is not just the space of the *domos*, but the domestic; our way-of-life is conceptualised as under threat (Papastergiadis 2010: 352).

3: Dispersal: Unwelcome Visitors and the Inhospitable Host

Arguably, an attention to the house as not just a place where the asylum seeker is 'fixed', but a place where mobility, rights and access are regulated and managed (Gill 2009b; 2009d), is an important caveat to recent understandings of the internalisation, proliferation and normalisation of border zones in a multiplicity of mundane spaces. A "positioning of asylum seekers as forever at the border" (Darling 2011b: 264) in the

domopolitics of asylum accommodation is not to say that they are always at a site that demands either inclusion or exclusion, but to say that they are forever in the process of negotiating their presence in a seemingly unwelcome space.

3.1: Mobility and Governance

For some scholars, governmentality in the asylum process is concerned with a management or circulation of unease (Gill 2009c; Rygiel 2012: 219). Caught between a discourse of support and surveillance (Lewis *et al.* 2008: 33), dispersal accommodation's reflection of liberal toleration rather than hospitable housing identifies it as a site of discipline, marginality and discomfort (Darling 2011b: 266). These "emergent entanglements of governance" (Darling 2011b: 267) are not concerned with pure securitisation nor discipline - subjectification or objectification – but highlight complex diagrams of mobility and control. In attempts to "define the boundaries between […] those who are at home and those who are not" (Sirriyeh 2010: 214), there is a restructuring of asylum seekers' lived experiences of migration (Gill 2009d).

Gill (2009; 2009b) argues that mobility and controls over mobility are used in a number of disciplinary ways in the dispersal process (2009b: 187). This sentiment is echoed in a number of critiques of dispersal in general, where it is theorised as displacement from social networks (Bloch & Schuster 2005: 493), affective bonds (O'Mahony & Sweeney 2010: 297), and a technology of deterrence (Lewis *et al.* 2008; Hynes 2009; Phillips 2006). For Darling (2011b) and Rygiel (2012), these affective discomforts in the asylum process also work to rationalise the delimitation of rights from the asylum seeker and the refugee. Their "ontological homelessness" (O'Mahony & Sweeney 2010: 285) in the national home is a performative construction; the liminal status of the unwelcome guest both produces and justifies further discomforts. Rather than solely acting as an initiation procedure (Conlon & Gill 2013: 242), the discomforts in asylum accommodation reiterate an unwillingness to give geographical, ideological nor political space to the asylum seeking individual.

In light of this, a number of scholars have discussed the relationship between

discourses of hospitality and asylum (Darling 2009; 2011a; Gibson 2003; Squire & Darling 2013). Arguably, a reification of owner-occupation in Western democracies has perpetuated the idea that 'settlement' can be conceptualised in terms of a fixed house (Papastergiadis 2010: 344). This forms a "residentialist bias" in which the migrant is always cast in a negative light and as a threat to the supposedly bound, static nation-state (*ibid*: 352). Thus, the liminality of housing provision for asylum seekers can be conceptualised in terms of a discourse of visitation (Gibson 2003: 369) and the temporality of hosting (Squire & Darling 2013: 64). Forever shadowed by the fear that the host may not be able to continue hosting, discourses of hospitality are marked by a pervasive power imbalance between the grateful visitor and the sacrificing host (Darling 2011a: 412). This provides a rationalisation of the "moral panic"[7] (Robinson 2010) surrounding the *gifting* of social housing from a 'national' welfare state to 'dependent' migrants. A discourse of 'reasonable' hospitality, like 'reasonable' humanitarianism, can be co-opted (Every 2008) in order to rationalise the very lack of hospitable spaces within the asylum process. Sitting "on a precarious and sensitive political axis" (O'Mahony & Sweeney 2010: 296), social housing for asylum seekers becomes a place where ideas of homeland, belonging and *presence* are negotiated.

3.2: Refiguring a pl0(d)1(.)1()-1()10i6286(p)-1(t)1

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housing providers over the asylum seeking individual. There can be no such thing as the asylum seeking tenant; they are merely guests in a space hosted by a private company. Arguably, then, this abjectification (Tyler 2013) of the asylum seeking resident functions through a process of 'disappearance' in which the asylum seeking individual is afforded no active legal presence in the NASS property.

What becomes a useful vocabulary for understanding the legislative and political positioning of asylum seekers in relation to the provision of dispersal housing is the relationship between concepts of abject spaces (Isin & Rygiel 2007), the process of abjectification (Tyler 2013) and the idea of a rightful presence (Darling 2013: 7; Squire & Darling 2013). The abject space, where the individual is neither a subject of discipline nor an object of elimination, is a space where the individual has no *presence.* This is not because they don't exist, but because "their existence is rendered invisible and inaudible" (Isin & Rygiel 2007, in Darling 2013: 7). The asylum seeker is at once hypervisible (Tyler 2006) as burden and threat and invisible as human agent; only figured in terms of the circulated discourse of stereotypes, the asylum-seeker is but a folk devil (Lynn & Lea 2003, in Hubbard 2005; Robinson 2010). Faced with a "legal and social desert at the very borders of visibility" (Tyler 2006: 187), an analytics of rightful presence aspires for justice, not inclusion, in the face of the 'crisis' mentality surrounding asylum (Squire & Darling 2013: 72). A consideration of 'rightful presence' demands both a critical analytics of the limitations of institutionalised rights-based discourses, and a redrawing of new spatial and discursive narratives of *being* in the nation-state (Darling 2011a; Gibson 2003; Squire & Darling 2013: 72). This is also echoed in Gill's (2009d) articulation of acts of 'co-presence' where asylum seekers and local communities work together to disrupt stereotypes; they are able to write their own *presence* through a sense of lived relationality. Being a "rightful claimant to support is something qualitatively very different than being a recipient that simply receives a gift from a person" (Korf 2007 in Darling 2011a). It becomes a question of refiguring a politics of *presence* in the face of geographic and social marginalisation.

In a system of multiple displacements (Gill *et al.* 2011), the well-meaning calls of researchers and the third sector for 'safe', 'secure' and 'stable' housing provision (JRF 2013) flattens fixity into safety, and mobility into insecurity, running to the same binary logic in which liberal governmentality associates mobility with freedom and fixity with incarceration (Bigo 2011). It is at this juncture that the acts of citizenship literature can provide a re-routing of entrenched conceptualisations of mobility.

In these dispersed governmentalities, mobility and stillness can also be used by migrants as a means of survival and a resource of connectivity (Rygiel 2012b: 820)

shadow of budget cuts and increasing poverty, the outsourcing of housing and support for asylum seekers from the public sector is not only rationalised through nationalism, but through neoliberalism.

4.1: Neoliberalism and Asylum

The fairer, faster, firmer logic of New Labour's restructuring of the asylum process has been described both in terms of modernisation (Walters 2004: 238) and in terms of "speed" (Darling 2009b: 266). Even in the National Audit Office's own analysis of NASS support in 2005, efficiency was cited as a key rationale for the eventual diagram of service provision introduced in 1999 and the restructuring of the system in the late 2000s (NAO 2005: 7). Designed with administrative and financial 'efficiency' in mind, the ideological formation of the dispersal system can be easily figured in terms of a specific "joined up network of governance" (Dwyer 2005: 627) designed around neoliberalism.

4.2: (Neo)liberal Governmentality

The combination of protecting the state-as-home (domopolitics) and running the state like a business has combined to produce a strange mode of governance. For Bigo (2011) and Conlon & Gill (2013), this intersect potentially highlights a paradox of liberal governmentality. Whilst liberal governmentality is reliant on the management of mobility in order to ensure the efficient freedom of some at the costs of the control of others (Bigo 2011: 31), the liberal *government* demands a system without overarching state intervention (Conlon & Gill 2013: 241). This concern with how to produce a society that can "at once be governed and be a partner in its own governing" (Conlon & Gill 2013: 242) can be further understood through the prism of *neoliberal* governmentality.

Coined by Ferguson & Gupta in 2002, neoliberal governmentality is described as a particular modality of governance that functions through distance (2002: 989). Transferring risk onto the 'enterprise' of the individual and devolving responsibility for discipline onto the 'free' subject, neoliberal governmentality can be conceptualised in terms of the reworking of scales of responsibility and the reification of market logic

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and the enterprise model (*ibid*: 989). Alongside this circulation of market logic, Springer (2010) also identifies neoliberal governmentality as the "transformative practices through which the capitalist expansion became tied to a legitimising neoliberal discourse of progress and development." (2010: 1033). Therefore, the market logic of neoliberalism (Springer 2010) demands a rescaling of responsibility that keeps the state at a distance.

4.3: Neoliberalism and the Age of Consensus

The legitimisation of market logic within neoliberal governmentalities is evident in the recent restructuring of asylum accommodation. If the asylum-seeking population is forever figured as a financial and social liability (Dwyer 2005: 624; Hubbard 2005: 11; Malloch & Stanley 2005: 55), it is arguable that the outsourcing of their 'management' is the next logical step in the trajectory of neoliberal governmentality; the restructuring of public areas for private profit is understood as 'economic common sense' (Hall *et al.* 2013: 18) in the context of austerity. Following on from the removal of asylum seekers from the "responsibility of the public sector" (Dwyer 2005: 623; Pearl & Zetter 2002: 230), outsourcing the administration of housing and support for asylum seekers to the private sector can allow the state to fore-go certain responsibilities and duties towards the asylum-seeking population.

Thus, in neoliberal governmentality's attempt to order the conduct of conduct (Springer 2010) according to market logic, the increase in privatisation can be accompanied by a decrease in political debate. This is arguably the age of consensus politics (Darling 2013; Grayson 2013b; Hall *et al.* 2013; Papastergiadis 2010

set parameters of 'legitimate' beliefs:

> "Neoliberal ideas seem to have sedimented into the
> Western imaginary and become embedded in
> popular 'common sense.' They set the parameters –
> provide the 'taken-for-granteds' – of public
> discussion, media debate and popular calculation"
> (Hall *et al.* 2013: 17).

Much like Ranciere's police order, where the construction of hierarchy and 'location' masquerades as the natural (Darling 2013: 5), neoliberal governmentality demands a common commitment to the acceptable limits of working with and within the framework of the market.

4.4: Neoliberalisation and the Voluntary Sector

Finally, it is important to briefly outline how neoliberalism and neoliberal governmentality has been conceptualised in terms of the changing relationship between society, state and the third sector. Scholars have repeatedly highlighted concerns over the internalisation of certain aspects of governmental logic within the voluntary sector (Conlon & Gill 2013; Gill 2010; Independence Panel 2013; Judge 2010: 13; Nielson 2009; Noxolo 2009; Zetter and Pearl 2010), but there should be increasing concerns about the neoliberalisation of the voluntary sector. With the consolidation of contract culture and the barren funding landscape, the independence of the third sector can be seen as under threat (Independence Panel 2013).

When the relationship between state and space, system and society, is considered to be in a constant dialectic of production (Ferguson & Gupta 2002: 984), the process of neoliberalisation (Springer 2010: 1029) in its mutated forms demands joined up governance for maximum efficiency. As the asylum seeking individual is moved around an increasingly administrative system, they are moved downwards towards eral

provision is crucial for understanding the redrawn diagrams of responsibility in the privatisation process: "how asylum seekers are being excluded from Western Nations' sphere of moral responsibility to non-citizens" (Every 2008: 224).

5: Setting the Scene

Through looking at the supposedly "hospitable space" (Gibson 2003: 367) of the home in the supposedly hospitable place of the Western democratic nation, this project aims to contribute to research regarding the discursive and spatial "place" (Hubbard 2005) afforded to asylum seekers in the UK. Triggered by the privatisation of housing provision in 2012, it first aims to look at how neoliberalism "takes place" (Springer 2010: 1031) and restructures space in the COMPASS housing contracts. Secondly, it will consider how asylum seeking individuals and the RAAS sector have positioned and navigated the contracts. Finally, inspired by a relational approach to space that demands an attention to the spatial grammar of becoming and solidarity rather than the fixed nouns of being and belonging, it will look at the ontogenetic processes (Rygiel 2012b: 817) of resistance and solidarity in challenges to housing provision.

> **Ethics is not simply a matter of following rules and procedures, as is often the focus of research ethics, but should inform all aspects of the discursive interactions between people**.
>
> Pittaway *et al.* 2010: 241

'So, you're from the Home Office right?' A Methodology of Ethics

Waiting to talk to a volunteer at a well-established drop-in for individuals seeking asylum in South Yorkshire, a service user engaged me in conversation. He told me that he was a regular attendee of the drop-in and that he knew most of the people involved. About one minute into our conversation, he suddenly asked me: 'you're from the Home Office right?' Surprised by my shocked response, he explained that the week before a woman that was rumoured to have been a Home Office official had been sitting in exactly the same place where I now found myself. This small incident interrupted what I felt was my self-evident role as a researcher-advocate (Silove *et al.* 2002) and raised some important questions regarding the construction of an ethical methodological approach.

The methodology of my research – from the structuring of research practice to the selection of analytical approach – was driven by a politics of ethics. For this reason, this chapter will outline key ethical considerations before describing the eventual trajectory of methodological practice.

1: A Question of Power: The Politics of Ethics in Refugee Research

From questions of co-optation (Darling 2011a; 2013), issues of visibility (Nyers 1999) and emotional sensitivity (Hynes 2009), and the figuration of the 'vulnerable' research subject (Pittaway *et al.* 2010), academics and practitioners within asylum and refugee

studies have problematised traditional research practices. In the main, concerns have revolved around ideas of informed consent (Hugman *et al.* 2010; MacKenzie *et al.* 2007), the reciprocal nature of research outcomes (Pittaway *et al.* 2010) and remapping the researcher-researched power relation (Doná 2007; O'Neill & Harindranath 2006). Fundamentally, a commitment to a methodology of ethics (Doná 2007; Hugman *et al.* 2010; MacKenzie *et al.* 2007; Pittaway *et al.* 2010) is both a political and practical choice; it is a question of power.

Essentially, the main ethical question can be reduced to this: "how do researchers engage with refugees as human subjects?" (Hugman *et al.* 2010: 255). Rather than replicating the subjectifying discursive fix of the 'vulnerable' asylum-seeker without the capacity to give informed consent, how can we attempt to empower through research? How can we ensure that our research practices do not work in similar ways to the classificatory and conditioning logic of everyday governmentalities?

2: Ethically Inflected Methodology

This research project has been heavily influenced by the political framework of reciprocal research (Hugman *et al.* 2010; Pittaway *et al.* 2010). The principle of reciprocity "suggests that the risks and costs associated with participation in research can be offset by the delivery of direct, tangible benefits to those who participate" (Pittaway *et al.* 2010: 234). A commitment to reciprocity demands that we practice what we preach; the very same hegemonic structural powers that are the subject of our academic critique need to be equally challenged in our methodological approach.

Influenced by a Foucauldian understanding of power as a network with multifarious points of (re)application, some have claimed that researchers and participants are "vehicles of power, not its points of application, across complex and dynamic net-

actor within the research event. The "aerobatics" (Marston *et al.* 2005: 422) of claims to objectivity and impartiality exploit asymmetries of power between the supposed "God's-eye-view" (*ibid*) of the researcher and the researched object, reducing both a capacity for and right to agency for the research subject. Until we recognise our own political subjectivity as the 'researcher', we cannot begin to address the ethical problematic of power (Ezzy 2002: 34)

However, the alignment of political considerations with practical research methods can be problematic. Some of the reciprocal research designs posited by authors such as Hugman *et al.* (2010) and Pittaway *et al.* (2010) are arguably only possible in large-scale research projects, with extra-time, funding and resources built in to accommodate the activities of reciprocal research. Equally, a commitment to polyvocality (O'Neill & Harindranath 2006: 46) and joint access to research data has knock-on ethical considerations for confidentiality and anonymity. One must be careful to balance the political motivations of the s

Initially

any personal relationships of trust and reciprocity (MacKenzie 2007: 306). Whilst one interview with an asylum seeking individual was conducted in the setting of a drop-in, this was only through a personal introduction and with the negotiated consent of the participant.

The final make up of interviews consisted of 4 individuals with recent experience (within the last 12 months) of asylum housing in the region – two housed in South Yorkshire and two in West Yorkshire[8] – and 12 individuals working at various levels within the Refugee and Asylum Advocacy and Support Sector in Yorkshire and

means of articulation and action" (Foucault 2003, in Fadyl and Nicholls 2013: 25). Moving away from essentialist understandings of oral narrative as a 'window into the soul' (see Linde 1986 for an example), an attention to eliciting stories and narratives from allowed for a greater sensitivity both the performativity of language and the constructedness of the interview text (Fadyl & Nicholls 2013: 26; Wiles *et al.* 2005).

A focus on narrative in research with refugee and asylum seeking individuals has also been discussed as an explicitly political choice. For some, the use of biographical research techniques can work to undermine the linear narratives defined and demanded by UKBA and state-demanded 'documentation' (Plummer 2001). This positioning of the messy, contradictory and situated *human* document against the officialdom of passports, resident papers and visas works to combat the dominant power/knowledge axis of the asylum-*issue* (O'Neill & Harindranath 2006: 42).

Fundamentally, narratives and narrative analysis can help "tell us something about how social actors, from a particular social position and cultural vantage point, make sense of the world" (Eastmond 2007: 250). As this research is fundamentally concerned with how the RAASS and asylum seeking individuals have positioned themselves in relation to, and how they've found themselves positioned by, the introduction of the COMPASS contracts, an attention to narrative allows us to analyse both their modes of representation and reasoning (Wiles *et al.* 2005: 90).

5: Limitations

There are a number of limitations to the sampling strategy used for this research project. Access to those within the asylum process was impossible without the help of participants in the RAASS. It is therefore possible that candidates were selected in order to illustrate the points of view of that specific gatekeeper. Equally, this political model of research design made it difficult to access a large number of participants. Thus, this research project does not claim to be representative; it is a situated account of situated individuals.

The privatisation of asylum provision and securitisation has significant depoliticising effects. It allows for a partial foreclosure of dissent and debate, as asylum becomes an issue of outsourced responsibility, multiple and shifting accountability and procedural practices of 'disciplining, quantification and benchmarking.'

Swynegdouw 2011, in Darling 2013: 10

CHAPTER ONE
Conceptualising COMPASS: Making Sense of Contract Culture

of the housing and support contracts.[10] These concerns were often accompanied by a heightened awareness of the asymmetrical distribution of knowledge, power and control in the administration of housing and support. Fundamentally, these narratives

> "There's a problem, you call UKBA. Oh you need to call G4S. You call G4S, guess who you need to call: UKBA. So that was the start of the weakening of that kind of accountability we had before […] with the council to some extent."[17]

The blurred lines of responsibility within private provision are once again discursively positioned against the perceived 'accountability' of previous council provision; even

Similar to another asylum-seeking individual's experience of not knowing where housing providers and G4S were based,[21] this positioning of the new contract holders as an abstracted body, with unknowable individuals in unknown places, can contribute to the physical and psychological isolation of the asylum seeking individual from avenues of support. What is interesting here is how these individuals conceptualise their *capacity* to engage with the contract holders in spatial terms. Remembering the way she could "just walk into the council", and how she knew where to go - "with the council, if you're in Leeds, Manchester, or Sheffield or London, or wherever there's a council office, [you] go in there and there's somebody to speak to you face to face"[22] - her ability to access support and engage with the process is linked to the *placedness* of council provision.

For one respondent in the RAASS, the increased anonymity and inaccessibility of service provision threatened an outsourcing of the state's responsibility:

> "My main concern is that if the government is handing over responsibility to a private contractor to do something, the government is effectively handing over its moral responsibility, say urm you know how you do it and make whatever money. […] Those private firms aren't interested, primarily at least, interested in urm the care and support side of it, they're more interested in their shareholders."[23]

This redrawing of 'moral responsibility' as something that is mutable within the

For many, the incomprehensibility and anonymity of privatised service provision was articulated in terms of dehumanisation. In the words of one female asylum seeker

others, the key rationale for this decline was the profit motive of private companies.[28]

Speaking explicitly about G4S, one respondent in South Yorkshire explained how the increasing marketization of support services would have inescapable effects on the humanity of service provision:

> "They're a money grabbing, you know, corporate capitalist business, and that's their job. However, if they are your criteria for housing, then you're going to see changes in housing won't you. You'd expect to see quality going down, peoples' rights being diminished, peoples' human rights and liberty and anonymity being compromised, and we've seen all of those things."[29]

For this individual, privatisation is conceptualised as something that forces a reorganisation of priorities. When profit-motive takes centre-stage, aspects of pastoral support – represented by ideas of liberty and human rights – are increasingly side-lined in favour of a more streamlined system. This is the logic of the "asylum market"[30], where the provision and administration of international protection becomes a lucrative business (Burgess 2010: 125). In the words of one volunteer in South Yorkshire, "when money takes over […] you're not thinking primarily about human rights and human beings, you're talking about bottom lines."[31]

Fundamentally, the 'business model' of privatisation was conceptualised as an inflexible, one-size-fits all approach to a more complex provision of welfare. Referencing previous council provision, it was conceived to have "a bit of give in the system"[32] and to have made space for care and wellbeing activities.[33] This need for

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28 Interview E, 04/07/2013; Interview C, 24/06/2013; Interview Miv, 17/07/2013; Interview Mi, 17/07/2013; Interview Fi, 04/07/2013.
29 Interview L, 24/07/2013
30 Interview L, 24/07/ 2013
31 Interview Fi, 04/07/2013
32 Interview B, 24/06/2013
33 Interview Fii, 04/07/2013

"a bit of slack"[34] in the provision of "humanitarian housing"[35] is something that the newly privatised system was seen to lack. One respondent felt that the Council's

in danger for the love of money."[40]

4: Making Sense of Senselessness

Nevertheless, some understood the incoherence, anonymity and inhumanity of privatised service provision as symptomatic of a system that just doesn't make "sense."[41]

> "So for example, someone's got a relatively simple problem to fix with their house, let's say the washing machine isn't working, whose responsibility is that? Is it my landlord? Is it Live Management? Is it G4S? Is it UKBA? And people were led on a merry dance between those, sometime deliberately – I think to obfuscate and obscure critics – sometimes because I think the system just wasn't working."[42]

The obfuscation of responsibility through the subcontracted service provision is articulated through a narrative of incompetence as well as one of deliberate control. This sequence of interrogative questions without answers articulates a system that isn't "working"; it doesn't make sense. A number of respondents also reflected on the ways in which incoherence manifested itself as incompetence in service provision. Recalling a family who moved into a property without a functioning kitchen, one respondent detailed the subsequent incompetence of 'support' from the housing provider: "a rudimentary kitchen was fitted, and they fitted the worktop over the hob so then she couldn't use her hob." [43] Similar to narratives of individuals being housed miles from supermarkets that accept Azure cards[44] or Post-Offices where they can pick up support tokens[45], these manifestations of incompetence become part of a generalised discourse of discomfort and a lack of respect exacerbated by the irrationalities of a support service run for profit.

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40 Interview I, 15/07/2013
41 Interview D, 03/07/2013
42 Interview L, 24/07/2013
43 Interview B, 24/06/2013
44 Interview D, 03/07/2013
45 Interview Mi, 17/07/2013

G4S and the housing providers' spatial distancing from the everyday lived experiences of those in their 'care' – both in terms of a vertical hierarchy of knowledge and the expanding chains of subcontracted companies - complicate the capacity for accountability and oversight within their own mechanisms. Concerned with quantification and efficient distribution, it does not give sufficient space for support; this system "is not functioning"[46] because it neither provides nor protects. This is not just about gaps into provision due to changing policy (Phillips 2006: 551). It is about a restructuring of the physical and political space afforded to the asylum-seeking individual within an increasingly neoliberal approach to care.

CHAPTER TWO
Experiencing COMPASS: (New) Geographies, (New) Geometries

During the transition process between the two contracts, it became clear that G4S were struggling to procure properties in certain parts of the region. Areas in West and South Yorkshire which previously accommodated relatively high numbers of asylum seekers were seeing a decrease in the number of new arrivals in their towns and cities, whilst parts of the North East (Middlesbrough and Stockton-On-Tees) were experiencing a relative increase (see Figure 1). This geographical shift was explained to those working in the sector through an email from the regional UKBA office:

> "You will be aware that UK Border Agency are now providing accommodation to eligible asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers via the new COMPASS contract with G4S. [...] As with all changes, we are experiencing some operational issues, particularly with regard to the availability of accommodation in the south of the region. In order to meet our obligations in accommodating eligible persons we are primarily dispersing people to the north of the region currently and expect this to continue in the short term whilst capacity is built up across the region as a whole."
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> *(UKBA July 2012)*

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46 Interview C, 24/06/2013

project were driven by profit-motive or incompetence, the impact of the shifting geography of housing provision is evident in both the narratives of asylum-seeking individuals and those working in the RAASS. This chapter will consider how the shifting geographies of the COMPASS contracts have affected the geometries – diagrams of support and the relations of resistance - of asylum support in the region.

1: Lost in the System?

A number of respondents told stories of asylum seekers being redispersed to

under the COMPASS contracts emphasised the speed in which they were expected to sign the 'Mutual Agreement' document.[51]

> "When I moved […] from another house to this new house, this time […] they take some papers, signature, accommodation agreement, then just 5 – 10 minutes […] just say you need to sign this is a house agreement that's all. Here's your room key and even he no go to open and have a look in your room – no – just downstairs, waiting room."[52]

The 'Mutual Agreement'[53] document, the closest the asylum seeking individual comes to a tenancy agreement, becomes just another piece of paper to sign; another document to be handed over to the authorities in order for the individual to be quantified and recorded as 'present.' Fundamentally, being present within the administrative system is more often articulated through narratives of dislocation, disappearance and a *lack* of active presence: "all they say to you is if you move or change your address please notify us. That's what they're bothered about. They don't want to come and see."[54] In the same way that the housing provider does not venture further than the front room, the administrative system is seen as being more concerned with fixing the asylum seeking object in its designated space.

The minimal rights afforded to the asylum seeking individual in the 'Mutual Agreement' are exacerbated by a generalised feeling of disempowerment within the asylum process: "as long as you are an asylum seeker, you are meant to like take whatever thing they give to you, stay wherever place they put you."[55] Whilst this lack of choice is not new in the dispersal process, there were certain aspects of new service provision that were seen to compound the process of marginalisation of the asylum-seeking voice.

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51 Interview H, 09/07/2013; Interview K, 24/07/2013; Interview Miii, 17/07/2013
52 Interview H, 09/07/2013
53 See Appendix VIII for an example copy.
54 Interview I, 15/07/2013
55 Interview I, 15/07/2013

1.3: (Dis)Locating Presence

In the same way in which the bureaucratic fixing of the asylum seeking individual works to minimise their presence to an administrative 'signature', certain narratives of dis

Other narratives of discomfort, such as overcrowding in NASS houses, also contribute to certain metaphorical articulations of the dehumanised asylum-seeker. One respondent spoke of his experiences of living in a 6 bedroom house in which all of the bedrooms were shared.[59] Advocacy workers also voiced their concerns regarding shared bedrooms.[60] For these individuals, the multiple occupancy of rooms was indicative of a dehumanised approach to housing. It was more a case of

the illegibility of the complaints procedure discussed in the first chapter, the original complaints phone line was an 0845 number, and was expensive to call from a mobile phone.[66] On the whole, individuals were encouraged to direct all complaints to this centralised call-centre, from which G4S would then take the necessary steps to deal with the issue. However, a number of respondents highlighted the practicalities of asylum-seekers engaging in this type of complaints procedure, focusing on the inability for many to afford the call costs.[67] In the words of one asylum-seeking individual, "I have to sacrifice my 4 pounds for a day – maybe I'm not going to eat to buy that credit. […] So for me to top up that phone, I have to sacrifice."[68]

Alongside generalised feelings of disempowerment and fear within the asylum seeking population,[69] this process was seen to further marginalise a number of asylum seekers from personally engaging with the complaints procedure, and forced a greater reliance on the third sector to act as 'representatives' for asylum seeking individuals. Essentially, the capacity to engage in the complaints procedure was contingent on both financial and social capital that

This individual's capacity to access acceptable accommodation is only possible through the intervention of a non-asylum seeking individual; somebody that is not already a 'ghost' in the system.[73]

Yet the adhoc dispersal practices enacted in the initiation of COMPASS saw individuals dispersed to areas without well-established asylum and refugee support networks. Individuals were lost; they are ghosted by the system (Gill 2009b: 187):

> "I had clients who sort of went up there [the North East] who have disappeared […] who'd kind of disappear and you'd talk to them on the phone and they'd be 'there's nothing here' or 'there's no-one here.'[74]

This is more than an inability to locate where an individual client is. In an increasingly subjugating system, the loss of the RAASS as a force of representation allows individuals to slip through the net: "well we lost her – I mean [name] wasn't answering her phone, and then the Social Cohesion Manager left and..."[75] As this South Yorkshire project workers' sentence trails off, she mirrors the gradual dissolution of the asylum-seeking individual from the witnessing eyes of the third sector. The individual's presence in the dialogue of advocacy disappears; they are lost in a new cartography of service provision.

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73 Interview Mi, 17/07/2013
74 Interview D, 03/07/2013
75 Interview SG, 04/07/2013

CHAPTER THREE
Challenging COMPASS: Moments of Rightful Presence?

With the past two chapters in mind, it is now important to introduce the ways in which certain points of (dis)location and dehumanisation were challenged by the voluntary sector and by the asylum-seeking individuals themselves. If the "practices of asylum governance serve to depoliticise those seeking asylum in the UK" (Darling 2013: 1), what sorts of moments of interruption (Conlon & Gill 2013: 245) to the increasingly neoliberal modality of asylum governance have been articulated in the context of the COMPASS housing contracts? How have the unstable geographies of dispersal under COMPASS affected both the capacity for and right to 'presence' for asylum seekers and the RAASS in the region?

1: Navigating the System

One of the techniques mobilised by a number of refugee and asylum advocates in their stories of support was the idea of individualising a seemingly anonymous system. Alongside the acts of 'representation' in the complaints procedure, a number of campaigners and RAASS workers noted that their advocacy work was most effective when contacting known individuals in G4S or the housing provider.[76] The 'Social Cohesion Manager' at G4S was frequently identified as a tangible foot-hold in an otherwise anonymous and unmappable system. In the words of one campaigner in West Yorkshire, "the individual contacts that you can make provide you with some light and some hope as to the possibility on individual cases."[77]

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76 Interview B, 24/06/2013; Interview C, 24/06/2013; Interview E, 04/07/2013; Interview G, 09/07/2013
77 Interview C, 24/06/2013

For those campaigning against the privatisation of housing and support, monitoring redispersals became a key tactic for challenging the contract.[78] In the context of the asymmetrical power relation between the COMPASS contract holders and the voluntary sector, the act of monitoring and tracing became a way to turn the tables:

> "I guess bringing some accountability into the process. I guess G4S and their subcontractors know they're being watched by us, and that was one of our motivations for our involvement in the campaign."[79]

The process of monitoring not only illuminates an increasingly anonymous service provision, but also establishes the active presence of advocates and campaigning individuals. Creating new networks of organisations and individuals monitoring the contracts – both within Yorkshire and Humberside and also the annexed North East – allows for a horizontal distribution of information away from the asymmetries of power and knowledge symbolised by the COMPASS project. In the words of one campaigner in West Yorkshire, "we tried to link up with other organisations so that we could get information filtered through."[80] Whist information was still considered to be difficult to access, grass-roots networks of monitoring organisations were able to counter-map the institutional diagrams of service provision.

1.3: Scales of Engagement

However, whilst almost all respondents articulated concerns with the current provision of housing and shared stories of discomfort, their scales of engagement varied hugely. A number of respondents noted the conflicted,[81] fractured,[82] divisive[83]

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78 Interview G, 09/07/2013; Interview L, 24/07/2013; Interview Fii, 04/07/2013; Interview E, 04/07/2013
79 Interview L, 24/07/2013
80 Interview Miv, 17/07/2013
81 Interview E, 04/07/2013
82 Interview G, 09/07/2013
83 Interview C, 24/06/2013

and politicised[84] response to the COMPASS contracts from the RAASS. The difficulty of precisely *where* RAASS should be in relation to COMPASS was a recurring problem for some respondents:

> "I suppose the fault line was between those people who believed you could make the contract good, or it was here to stay so you had to do the best, as opposed to those of us who thought you know we have to get rid of the whole contract. […] The fact that you're working alongside G4S actually gives them some kind of cover, some kind of cover of respectability."[85]

For this respondent, increased proximity to and engagement with G4S signalled a loss of independence; working alongside G4S was to be working within a system designed with profit in mind; co-operation is recast as co-optation. This challenge of navigating COMPASS without co-optation was articulated as another narrative of discomfort within the third sector:

> "It think people are really caught up in something deeply political and so for some people that's unbearable, so what you do is your day-to-day work, you work with the individuals, you deal with – attempt to deal with – problems, you engage with G4S."[86]

For this project worker in West Yorkshire, the tactics of individualisation are recast as tactics of survival rather than resistance within the voluntary sector. Faced with an almost inconceivable ideological battle, a focus on the daily struggle of individuals makes the process both manageable and bearable. However, these acts of necessity are also figured as moments of depoliticisation for the voluntary sector:

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84 Interview L, 24/07/2013; Interview C, 24/06/2013
85 Interview L, 24/07/2013
86 Interview C, 24/06/2013

> "You know, I think a lot of other organisations feel like they're just fire fighting. They're just dealing with the immediate need, but what we all want to do is give people some independence and let – allow – people to be doing things for themselves and speaking up for themselves and all the rest of it. But you can't do that when you've got a queue of destitute people by your door needing a meal."[87]

When faced with immediate need, the third sector struggles to be *political* in the most general sense. The discomforts of the asylum process, and in this case the organisation of housing and support under the COMPASS contracts, does not afford the space or the time for a politicised approach to service provision. Faced with a forever changing legislative landscape, undulating geographies of dispersal and an increasingly restrictivist approach to migration in general, the potentiality for the voluntary sector to inhabit a *political* space is diminishing.

One interviewee, in response to a question regarding the state of NASS housing in the region, stated that "it's not my job to monitor this."[88] She explicitly separated her role as a support worker from any political positioning:

> "I suppose that's kind of, that's my role. My role is to support people, not to wonder why things are you you know – I'm not a campaigner, I'm just, I'm a service deliverer."

caught in an increasingly restrictive and politicised asylum system had a practical impact on the campaigning capacity of one individual in South Yorkshire:

> "They are a giant, and all these little organisations are just these tiny little things. […] Obviously we all want to work for the good of the client, so nobody wants to make things harder for people by kind of stocking up bad blood."[90]

The privatisation process created a second giant in the asylum system: the multi-national security company. In the shadow of the first giant – the state

"In some ways, and this will be really cynical probably, but urm I think it's probably a good thing not to give people too good accommodation when they're asylum seekers because they're going to be in for a hell of a shock when they become refugees."[96]

In these narratives of relativity, there is concurrent depoliticisation of debate. These work in tandem with the everyday discomforts experienced by asylum seeking individuals under the COMPASS contracts, as well as the marginalisation of political space within in the voluntary sector (Independence Panel 2013; Williams 2013) , in order to create a static consensus on the impossibility of improving housing provision.

Yet, respondents did articulate moments where this consensus was challenged. Recalling experiences of advocating on behalf of asylum-seekers in terms of housing, many respondents described how the use of multiple rights-claims in lobbying for better housing quality or better *control* over housing quality was more effective. This ranged from citing the rights of the child[97], to mobilising narratives of the sick body and medical need[98], as well as general claims to wider human rights and housing rights concerns.[99] When concerns surrounding housing for asylum seekers were perceived as "kind of out of the system in a way"[100], these cross-referenced rights

active visibility by refusing to be 'fixed':

> "All that they were after was for you to sign, sign sign. I said what am I signing, and I said really you can't ask me to sign for this house? You want me to sleep in this house? […] I said 'no I am not signing.'"[105]

By refusing to enter into the 'mutual agreement' with G4S, this individual interrupted the asymmetrical power relation between the asylum-seeking visitor and the managerial host. Withholding her name, she withheld her consent to be compartmentalised as another 'poor-African', another burden to bare, another number in the system; she refused to be dehumanised.

This is an act of not just being present, but having presence as an active individual. For another individual with experiences of being housed under COMPASS, the process of resisting the arbitrary, no-choice nature of housing allocation allowed her to *feel* like she had a presence as a human, and not just as an asylum seeker: "That's when I had to feel like a human being as part of a community, to say I actually want to go and see where I want to live."[106] After a thoroughly dehumanising and humiliating experience of living in properties full77( )-1s6(ally)oa8k-0ach(e)3(rt)1,77( )-(rt)1l(t)1(

evidence.[109] In another act of substantiating the subjugated and disbelieved narratives of the asylum-seeking individual, the visual testimony of the photograph fleshes out the skeletal conception of the asylum seeking body; it gives it a substantiated *presence.*

"We all suffer when our access to a secure base for housing and home is rendered precarious."

O'Mahony & Sweeney 2010: 313

Conclusion

What I have attempted to do in this discussion of the privatisation 'event' of COMPASS is reconsider the idea of domopolitics in the light of increasingly neoliberal modes of governmentality, where the figuration of the asylum seekers as financial and administrative burden rationalises the outsourcing of the 'asylum-issue' to non-

'rightful' presence. Whilst moments of becoming visible and active in the system triggered moments of interruption, the asylum seeker continues to be discursively and legislatively dislocated from any sites in which a 'place' based claim for support can be articulated.

Fundamentally, if neoliberalism's core proposition is of the free individual engaging with others through market transactions (Hall *et al.* 2013: 14), welfare nationalism, coupled with the residentialist bias in Western European states (Papastergiadis 2010) and the reification of owner-occupation as the ideal state of being (Sivanandan 2013), creates a disempowered asylum tenant that cannot be anything but an object in the market of others.

This is a political challenge for academics, the RAASS and for asylum seekers themselves. When asylum seekers do not have legal rights of residency and no legal rights as tenants, how can we begin to think beyond house as a temporary shelter (Phillips 2006: 547), service provision forever defined by emergency measures, and the experience of NASS housing another moment of discomfort in an increasingly restrictive system? Sustained by the everyday circulations of neoliberal and domopolitical governmentalities, the privatisation of housing for asylum seekers has further constrained our capacity to think *beyond* dispersal and *towards* alternatives.

In the words of Imogen Tyler, "we must repeat political calls for recognition but in ways that reject the constitution or constitutional basis which makes such gestures necessary" (Tyler 2006: 199). The discomforts of *being present* in a subjugating system can be challenged by *having presence* beyond the dehumanising and depoliticising figuration of the asylum-issue. Visibility is a pre-requisite to disrupt existent distributions of power (Darling 2013: 5), but having active, autonomous presence demands agency rather than recognition (Darling 2011a: 408). In this way, "individuals and groups articulate a claim to political subjectivity through assuming the very rights they are seen to lack" (Darling 2013: 11).

This is also serves as a warning. Whilst researching and writing this project, the UK government embarked on a pilot scheme to 'encourage' those who have overstayed

their residency permits to return to their respective countries of origin. From mobile advertising in Brent to stickers on the chairs of the UKBA waiting room in Glasgow, the message was clear: the unwanted visitor had overstayed their welcome; it was time to "go home." The domos is restless.

Rising house prices in London and the South East have clashed with severe cuts to Council budgets and a crippling lack of available social housing units. Councils such as Newham have begun to house homeless families, and those who are set to lose their accommodation through the introduction of the benefit cap, in bed-and-breakfast hostels as far away as Birmingham, Leicester, Southend and Northampton (Gentlemen 2013). As Serco admit that their involvement in the COMPASS contracts was to get involved in the "accommodation business" (Twinch 2013), the neoliberal governmentalities that rationalised dispersal in 1999 and COMPASS in 2012 may now have a different target in their sights. In ten years' time, the privately housed asylum seeker may seem an uncanny presence; the nation is fast becoming inhospitable and unhomely towards its own 'burdensome' nationals.

In order to radically conceptualise housing for asylum seekers outside of the rationalising logics of welfare nationalism and the neoliberalisation of the state, we need to think beyond operationalisation and towards justification. It is not just a case of reconsidering "social welfare entitlements on the basis of need rather than nationality" (Breen 2008: 611), but of a relational sense of social justice.

 I will give the last word to one of my research participants who articulated the discomforts and depoliticisations of NASS housing under COMPASS better than I ever could:

"You ask me

B bl ography

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Auto-Critique

Whilst the general subject and approach of my final research project was relatively consistent with my proposal, there were a number of diversions from this initial research design. Firstly, my original proposal stated that interviews would only be conducted with those currently housed under Section 95 in Yorkshire and Humberside. However, when experiencing the ethical and practical issues of doing research with asylum seeking communities, I felt that this participant criteria was both difficult to achieve and narrow in scope. Therefore, I decided to widen the remit of my research to include members of the Refugee and Asylum Advocacy and Support Sector in Yorkshire and Humberside, as well as any individual who had experience of being housed under the COMPASS contracts within the last 12 months, regardless of current legal status. Nevertheless, I still had difficulties with accessing the proposed number people within the asylum process for interviews. With more time in the field, I feel that I could have rectified this imbalance between the views of those in the RAASS and those experiencing the process of asylum.

Secondly, the methodological research design in my proposal was heavily influenced by Participatory Action Research, whilst the final project committed to smaller-scale moments of reciprocity in the research process. This change in approach was triggered by early experiences of gathering data in Yorkshire and Humberside, as I realised that the process of contacting participants was taking longer than expected. Equally, with the shift in the demographics of my interviews towards the RAASS, the time and personal-commitment advocated by PAR could not practically fit with the short-time scale of this research project.

Due to these changes, my research questions evolved into more organic concepts

which I aimed to investigate alongside an overarching concern with the 'event' of privatisation in the COMPASS contracts. Equally, the shift in focus away from solely those currently housed under S95 meant that a focus on these individual's sense of home and belonging had to be side-lined in favour of a more theoretically-influenced analysis of governmentality and neoliberalism.

Equally, although being heavily embedded in the research field in both political and personal ways can be useful, I also found at points that it threatened to distract me from the design of my research. Whilst I feel that this project was based in sound critical and theoretical frameworks, I also feel that the translation of lived experiences of asylum accommodation into 'academia' was often difficult. Nevertheless, whilst the tensions between a *politics* and a *practice* of research are evident in my project, I feel that they do not derail the value of the research.

Embeddedness in the subject and the region also meant that some of my research

Appendix I: **Letter to Refugee and Asylum Support Organisations in**
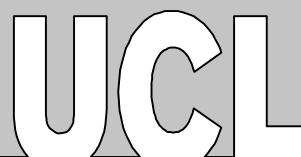
Secondly, I am also in the process of contacting asylum seekers and refugees themselves who have stories of asylum housing and NASS accommodation that they would like to share. **I would very much appreciate if your organisation were willing to pass on my details to any asylum seeker currently housed in NASS accommodation, or who has received refugee status in the last 6 months, who you feel may be interested in participating in the project.** I am happy to talk to or meet with individuals prior to any form of interview in order to explain the project fully. Consent will also be continually negotiated throughout the interview process. All interviewees will be offered reimbursal for their time through a skill-sharing activity – ie, a 30 minute interview would be reimbursed with a 30 minute English lesson, or help with an application. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funds, participants will have to speak 'basic' English. Again, I am willing to discuss different options and scenarios with the individuals concerned. I have also attached a small flyer detailing the research and my contact details, which can be distributed to interested individuals, at the end of this email.

My interest in this topic comes from living in Leeds for 4 years, whilst studying at the University and working with Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network on a project that worked with exiled refugee journalists in the city. I have also actively worked with groups in Sheffield, Kirklees and Leeds in order to campaign for better housing for asylum seekers in the region. Whilst this research project will contribute to my final MSc dissertation (MSc Global Migration at UCL), I am planning to write a report of my findings for all interested parties, so that any information gathered can be fed back into the institutions who need it most.

If you do have any further questions, comments or any general enquiries, please do not hesitate to get in contact with me
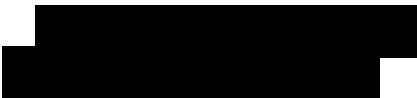
Best wishes, and thank you for your time,

Lorna Gledhill
MSc Global Migration

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY, UCL,
PEARSON BUILDING, LONDON, WC1E 6BT
Tel: +44 (0)20 7679 0500 Fax: +44 (0)20 7679 0565
L.Hollyman@ucl.ac.uk
www.geog.ucl.ac.uk

Appendix II: Informational Flyer Provided for Organisations and Asylum
Seeking Individuals

Appendix III: Template Consent Form for All Interview Participants

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Appendix IV: Interview Schedule for RAAS

<u>**Key Worker Interview Schedule**</u>

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW STARTS

Explain project: research into the lived experiences of NASS housing in Yorkshire and Humberside, both from the perspective of those in housing and those working to support the individuals that seek protection in the region.

Explain consent form: talk through key aspects of the consent form: audio-recordings, confidentiality, anonymity, data protection, voluntary participation, opportunity at the end of the interview for this to be reviewed and any information, participation etc. withdrawn if necessary.

[Double check concerning audio-recording – if consent given, start recording]

COMPASS and Housing Contracts
[Ask participant to briefly outline their role, and the relationship they have to the provision of housing for asylum seekers in the region]

1: In your role, what sort of contact have you had with the new contracts and housing provision?

2: Current set up – what's changed in the provision of housing for asylum seekers? How do you understand the current system of housing provision?
- *COMPASS*
- *Previous set-up / what was the transition?*
- *How informed do you feel about the contracts? How much do you feel you know about the current provision of housing?*

3: How would you describe the provision of asylum accommodation in Yorkshire and Humberside at the moment?
- *What kind of words come to mind?*
- *Why, could you explain your decisions?*

4: What did you think was going to happen when the TARGET (previous contract) contracts expired and the COMPASS contracts were awarded to a private company?

Do you feel that it happened?
- *Why / Why not?*
- *Why do you think it may have transferred from LAs?*

5: Do you think that the increased role of private contractors in the provision of asylum housing has had any direct effect on the quality/consistency/style of service provision?

Housing Issues and Experiences

1: Any problems with housing provision in the region/your area/your area of work? What kinds of complaints have you come across?
- *Are they any different to complaints prior to the contract change?*
- *Has any group (gender/age/nationality) seen the brunt of the problems?*

2: [If involved in direct advocacy work and have personal experience of supporting an individual in NASS accommodation] how did you deal with these problems/complaints?
- *Has the complaints procedure changed? Could you explain the complaints procedure?*
- *How easy is it to advocate on behalf of asylum seekers in terms of lodging a housing complaint? How well do you feel you understand the complaints process?*
- *Have you had any success in rectifying problems through lodging formal complaints?*
- *Have you seen any creative/non-formal processes of dealing with housing complaints?*
- *[if not in direct advocacy, but work with asylum seekers] Would you know how to lodge a complaint? Have you been made aware of the process?*

2: What are the main successes/positives you have come across in NASS housing over the last year?
- *What has been done well in the new contracts?*
- *Have you had any positive experiences in terms of seeking support from the contractors or general management company?*

3: What should NASS housing provide? What do you think are the most important factors to take into consideration? Do you feel that this is provided in the current housing set up?
- *What constitutes 'decent' housing? What kinds of factors? What's the most important?*
- *Do certain groups need special consideration? If so which groups?*
- *Do you feel that the current contracts provide sufficient support?*

work you do?
L   *Have you seen different problems, different complaints, or have things stayed*

Appendix V: Example Extract of Transcribed Interview (Interview L)

Some names of individuals, specific organisations, housing providers and locations have been omitted as to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the interview participant.

Interviewer: Mmm good and perhaps now in your own words could you just explain to me how you feel the provision of housing has changed through the introduction of the COMPASS contracts. So how it's set up, how it used to be – well – how it used to be set up, how it's set up now, and what that kind of means in your opinion?

Respondent: Mm mm. Well I think you'd expect wouldn't you, well we met Stephen Small from G4S he came to talk to us at the start of the campaign to put us right on some misapprehensions we had about G4S supposedly, it was very interesting ur and we let him talk. And during that speech he made justifying their involvement, he described how G4S were going to operate in the asylum market, his phrase, and another quote from him that their primary concern was to make a return for shareholders. Now, you know, fair play to them. They're a money-grabbing you know corporate capitalist business and that's their job. However, if they are your criteria for housing, then you're going to see changes in housing won't you. You'd expect to see quality going down, peoples' rights being diminished, peoples' human rights and liberty and anon4(Eap)-1(le)3(s)(ing)1(d)1((rp)-m [(ho)4(w)liminis)-5 , pee letee ing youim libm.

responsibility is that? Is it my landlord, is it Live Management, is it G4S, is it UKBA? And people were led on a merry dance between those, sometimes deliberately I think to try and obfuscate and obscure criticism, sometimes because I think the system just wasn't working and I think it's important to say you know even though I have utter contempt for companies like G4S and the subcontractors that do this that carry out these contracts, you know there are human beings you know working for them, there are some good people in there trying to do their best, some people who got transferred from the old council asylum teams for example. Urm and they just found it impossible to cope so I think at one point I think Cascade had one worker for 120 people in W Yorkshire which is just an impossible job to do. Target Housing they had two workers for 150 people. So the job became impossible, and in the desire to maintain that return for the shareholder, although we can discuss how big that was and could be in the future, things became compromised people were people were abused, for example lots of people from [city] were moved up to the North East presumably we were told it was temporary, but they're still there a year later. Urm, in [South Yorkshire town] a woman has her child – she'd be waiting a week for the G4S van to come – she'd had notice saying you'll move within the next week sometime – she's waiting, she's anxious – then G4S turn up – great – and tell her that she can't take all her kids' stuff with them, she can't take her kids toys in the van. So she stood there, she had to decide which of the kid's toys are going to Middlesbrough and Stockton. Kids are crying, she's distressed, she's moving house, she doesn't know, she doesn't want to go there in the first place! All her contacts, her life's back in [South Yorkshire town]. Urm, there's examples like that – you know kids toys being left on the pavement, it sounds like a small thing but that lack of respect for people whoever they are. You know, moving house is a stressful thing for anyone, but if you're seeking asylum then some extra sensitivity's needed, understanding that the people are leaving behind AGAIN everything they know, you might say that people are retraumatised by that experience, so in that context, not having a you know an efficient and effective and a sensitive, caring way of moving people – I mean I don't agree with moving them in the first place but if you are going to move em then do it that way – in the absence of that, a lot of upset and stress has been caused and things that are quite hard to measure you know in the box ticking sense, but you know anybody who's spoken to an asylum seeker who's been through that will feel it. Urm, lots of other examples of a woman who was moved from Bradford to Doncaster, put in an extremely small flat I went to see the flat myself and interviewed her, away from everybody she knew, away from sources of medical support, and legal representatives and obviously her community. Her and her baby in one flat, with one sink one sink about a foot wide to do all your washing in – personally washing, all your crockery and presumably for the baby as well – so utterly not on you know for anybody. So OK, so cost-cutting leads to bad quality, ur privatisation leads to a lack of accountability to get that bad quality sorted out. Over that, and perhaps it's straying a little bit from the question you asked me but I think it's relevant – you know a lot of us didn't think actually and I still believe this, that G4S maybe Serco, but G4S weren't expecting to make money out of the asylum housing contract, it was part of their portfolio. They're a privatising company, wanting to show they can do housing presumably without killing anybody that year, and then possibly going into social housing or whatever. So you know, they're very cagey and you will have seen the parliamentary enquiry where SS won't give any figures as to what they make ur. Serco said they make 21p a night off people, but I suspect that the margins of profit

Appendix VII: Graphs of Dispersal from Home Office Data

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Hartlepool, 75

Wakefield , 96

Doncaster, 106
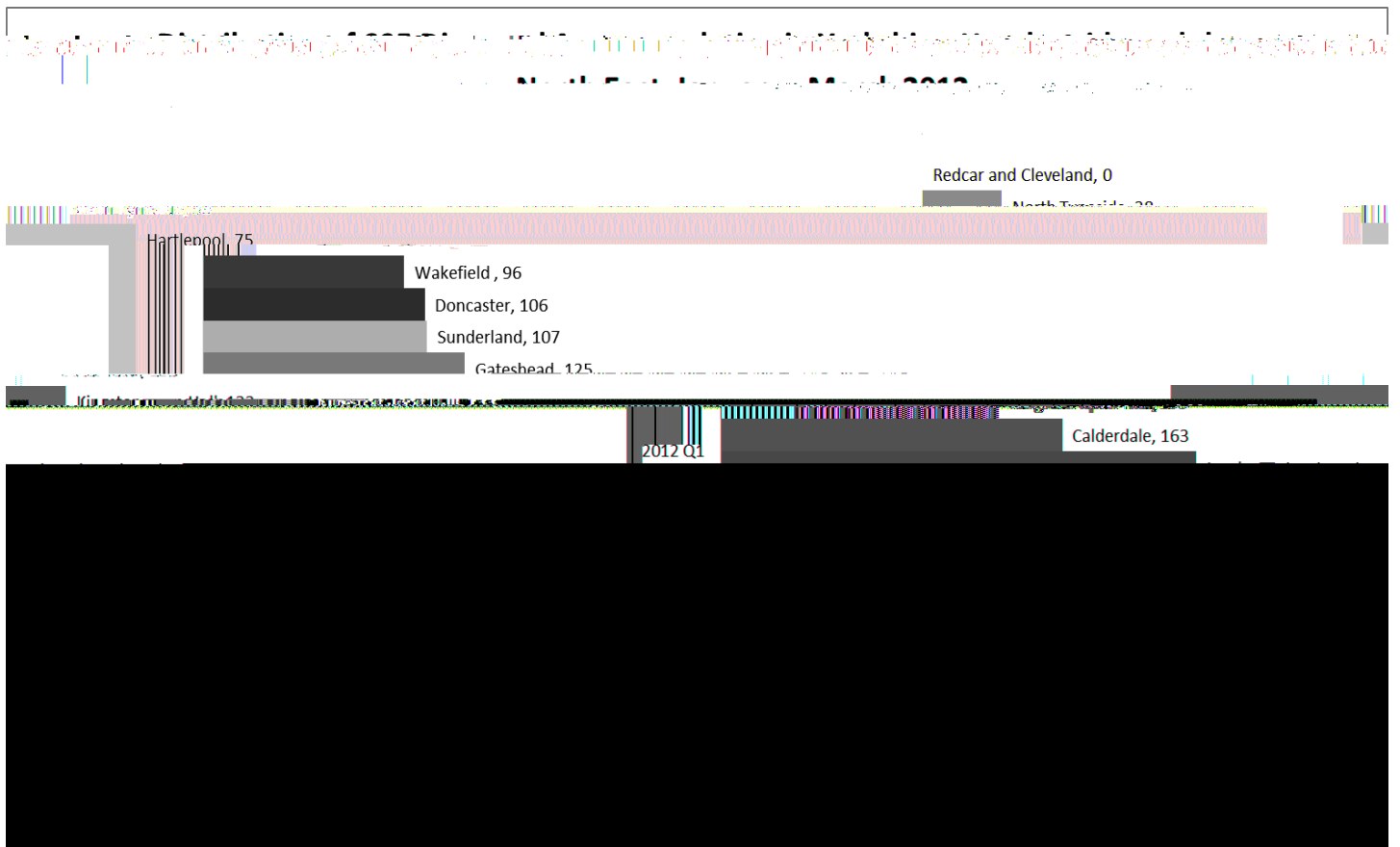
Sunderland, 107

Gateshead, 125

2012 Q1

Calderdale, 163

Figure 2: *Source Data*: Home Office (2013), Tables for 'Immigration Statistics, April to June 2013', available at:<www.gov.uk/government/publications/tables-for-immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2013> Accessed [30th

Figure 3: *Source Data*: Home Office (2013), Tables for 'Immigration Statistics, April to June 2013', available at:<www.gov.uk/government/publications/tables-for-immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2013> Accessed [30th August 2013]

Appendix VIII: Example of Mutual Agreement Document