Re-Locating Asylum Activism: Asylum Seekers´ Negotiations of Political Possibilities, Affective Borders and the Everyday

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how bordering is unfolding in the 21st century and how people most affected by these practices keep finding spaces of political possibility. My research comes out of my involvement in asylum activist communities in London and Berlin and brings together scholarship on activism, bordering and asylum, and affect and emotion to explore its entanglement. The research is based upon fieldwork conducted between 2015 and 2018, that I call *intimate ethnography* and draws in particular upon less formal and structured modes of engagement. My ongoing conversations with forty asylum seekers at protest events, demonstrations, activist group meetings but more significantly in my intimate relationships and the everyday, contemplated the construction of contemporary political spaces, the role of affect and emotion within them, and asylum seekers´ precarious positioning. It problematises the ways in which asylum activism is understood as public and organised politics and examines all its other manifestations in the everyday. Moreover, this thesis challenges the emphasis on action by looking into the role of affect and emotion.

Asylum subjectivity, as this work shows, is constructed affectively and emotionally, as a space of intense discomfort and depletion, and yet contains moments of political agency. My findings show how asylum activism is constantly remade through political negotiations of asylum seekers that are emotional and affective, complex, ambiguous and fluid, happening both inside and outside of formal activist spaces. These political negotiations aim firstly at extending, and by that *re-locating* asylum activism and secondly, are always in conversation with state bordering practices as these practices are constantly changing what the space of the political is. The findings of my research contribute to scholarship on everyday bordering and precarity by further exploring its emotional component. Moreover, my thesis offers numerous examples of political possibilities that cannot be located within a struggle over rights or membership, but rather within a politics oriented towards survival, hope, comfort and care.

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"Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground."

— Sara Ahmed —

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A Note on Terminology

In this brief note, I hope to share some thoughts that have led me to use the term "asylum activism" in this thesis. Moreover, I hope to give an impression of how complex, controversial and ever-shifting the conversation about terminology in the field of asylum is.

In the UK and Germany, state politics, the media and activism are increasingly preoccupied with the *Migration Question* (De Genova, 2016). Even though over eighty percent of the worlds 65.3 million displaced people stay in the so-called Global South, Western states deter, detain, disperse and deport the relative few that seek asylum in Europe (Fernando, 2016). The majority of asylum seekers and refugees in Germany and the UK are post-colonial subjects, which highlights that the *Migration Question* is always also a question about race and post-coloniality. Even though I do not extensively engage with literature on race and post-coloniality in this thesis, a project exploring asylum is always also a project exploring processes of racialisation as state bordering is a developed system of racial differentiation that naturalises fixed hierarchical power relations (Rodríguez, 2018). I use the term ***racialisation*** instead of *race* to speak to the processes and practices through which race becomes noticeable and important (Garner, 2007). The borders I am interested in exploring in this thesis are everyday constructions of borders, rather than "physical" borders of states that mark territoriality. The term ***bordering*** allows me thus to look at the everyday construction of borders. Borders are not simply given but emerge out of border-*making* or *bordering* that takes place in political and public spaces as much as in everyday live (Van Houtum & Van Naersson, 2002; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss & Cassidy, 2018)

In this note, I want to introduce some of my thoughts with regards to three terms in particular: the "refugee", "asylum seeker" and "migrant". In academic discourse, the

categories "refugee", "asylum seeker" and "migrant" are often used in sharply defined ways; whereby "migrants" have left their home by choice, "asylum seekers" and "refugees" were forced to relocate by political circumstances. Migrants are often portrayed as having economic reasons such as poverty and unemployment to move countries, while asylum seekers are forced to move through global conflicts, wars and political interests. This distinction disregards, however, that migratory movements, poverty and unemployment, are also driven by conflicts and global inequalities tied to post-coloniality. This shows how the division into “migrants”, “refugees” and “asylum seekers” is political in the sense that these distinctions are based on colonial histories and racialised immigration policies that label subjects migrating from the Global South (for a vast number of reasons) as refugees and asylum seekers, and subjects migrating (for a vast number of reasons) from the Global North as migrants (Rodríguez, 2018).

Legally, the term ***refugee*** refers to people qualifying under Article 1 of the 1951 UN Convention, as modified by the 1967 Protocol. A refugee is defined as a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UNHCR, 1951/1967). Many scholars have challenged the narrow understanding of political asylum, not considering people as refugees fleeing from structural violence and post-colonial economic inequalities (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016) and the effects of climate change (Berchin, Valduga, Garcia & de Andrade, 2017), which are according to Nixon (2011) and others, also unequally distributed amongst the Global North and South.

In practice, the term “refugee” is also negotiated, and therefore constantly remade in different ways. Self-organised asylum activist groups in Germany, made up of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, started using the word "refugee" in 2012 to express a unified position against the precarious situation of refugees and asylum seekers and to associate the word “refugee” with their struggle for freedom. In 2012, the situation of

refugees in Germany gained huge media attention through a movement that called itself "The Refugee Movement" (Refugee Movement, 2012; Langa, 2015). After the suicide of an Iranian refugee, Mohammed Rahsepar, a small group of Iranian refugees began a hunger strike in Würzburg ("Vierundzwantigste Pressemitteilung", 2012) followed by what they called "Refugee Tent Actions" ("Aufruf zum Aktionstag", 2012) in different cities in Germany.

Other asylum seekers in Germany and the UK have criticised the usage of the term "refugee", arguing that it would create a fixed identity that people cannot escape. The label "refugee", as asylum seekers explained to me, would always be associated with an excluded and disempowered population that traps people within a specific positionality ("Don´t call me a refugee!", 2015). Being labelled as "refugees" does thus not allow subjects the possibility to become other than a refugee. For these asylum seekers the term "refugee" is associated with feeling stuck, being kept in limbo, sitting around in camps, while their life is on hold. Some asylum seekers in Germany mentioned to me that if there needs to be a collective term at all, they would prefer to be called "newcomers".

Different solidarity groups in Berlin, mostly made up of German and European citizens, also criticised the term "refugee" (Flüchtling) arguing that there is no such thing as a homogenous group that can be called "refugees", while also rejecting the word because of its "-ling" suffix which means small, immature, or miniature. Other activists and the media picked up on that critique and started using the world "Geflüchtete" or "Menschen mit Fluchthintergrund" (people with refugee background). Both attach the "fleeing" aspect to the past and allow people the possibility to become otherwise.

The term ***asylum seeker*** legally describes subjects who have made a claim for asylum and are consequently in the asylum process seeking asylum. Similar to the term "refugee", the term "asylum seeker" is in practice far from its legal clear-cut definition. Subjects might have come to the UK or Germany, fleeing conflict and political persecution, without

knowing about the option of an asylum claim. These subjects would then be termed "migrants" even though they came for "protection" because of political persecution.

In Germany, a lot of asylum activist groups I was involved in criticised the terms "Asylbewerber*innen"[1] (asylum applicants), "Asylsuchende" (asylum seekers) and rather used the term "refugee" to challenge the purely legal understanding of the term. They also criticised the process character of the term "asylum seeker"; the "identity-in-waiting" and argued that everyone that comes to Europe to ask for asylum is always already a refugee, making the point that there is no need for a claim to be successful. According to them, the division between "voluntary" and "involuntary" is not helpful as subjects always have reasons to move, and in the Global South, these reasons are often tied to global inequalities and war, initiated by western countries.

In my experience, in London, most asylum seekers called themselves "asylum seekers", while during my fieldwork in Berlin, most asylum seekers described themselves as "refugees", making a distinction between whether a person had been granted asylum as a refugee, according to the Refugee Convention, or not. People in both countries used the term "asylum" to speak about their precarious in-waiting-position.

The term ***migrant*** is not only in practice but also in theory diverse and constantly negotiated. Unlike the terms "asylum seeker" and "refugee", there is no clear definition of "migrant" in law (Anderson & Blinder, 2011). However, there is often a distinction suggested between people that are subjected to immigration control, who need permission to enter or to remain in a country, and those who do not. At present, in the UK and Germany EU nationals are not subject to immigration control although they are often described as migrants. Commonly, the term "migrant" is used to describe a white

[1] The German word „Asylbewerber" is the plural masculine form of asylum seeker, while „Asylbewerberinnen" is the plural feminine form. I use a gender star „Asylubewerber*innen" here to indicate that gender is a spectrum rather than a binary.

middle-class person, such as myself, as much as it can describe a "refugee" that decided to use a student visa instead of an asylum claim to access the right to stay in the UK or Germany. As this shows, there is no consensus on a single definition of a "migrant". Migrants are sometimes defined by "foreign" birth, by "foreign" citizenship, by their movement into a new country or simply by fitting into the figure of racialised foreignness.

In the last five years in the UK, the detention and deportation of migrants on a student visa, who were in the UK legally, received much media attention (Dunt, 2016; Baynes, 2018). The randomness of these acts showed the extend of the “hostile environment” and created (successfully) an atmosphere of fear, caution and the constant possibility to become precarious for regular migrants (of colour), as much as for asylum seekers and refugees. This increase in students and regular migrants being detained moved discussions to the disappearing difference between migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Migrants whose nationality or regular status was supposed to position them safer had to experience that when not fitting the norm of a white western subject, their right to remain is always open for negotiation. Most recently, the treatment of the Windrush generation, of pre-1973 Commonwealth migrants to the UK, has shown how British citizen subjects can always be turned into migrants (Bhambra, 2018).

Some asylum activist groups, therefore used the term "migrant" to encompass all groups; migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and so hoping to unify political action challenging processes of bordering and racialisation. Other activist groups rejected the assumption "we are all migrants", emphasising the importance of the distinction between European migrants and asylum seekers. This distinction, according to them, is connected to a very different experience for post-colonial migrating subjects, compared to others, namely many more structures of inequality as well as everyday harassment.

Rejecting all three terms, “refugee”, “asylum seeker” and “migrant”, another refugee-led movement called “Refugee Struggle for Freedom” (“Asylum Seekers in Bavaria”, 2016) based in Munich, Southern Germany, started to refer to themselves as "non-citizens" to

emphasise their precarious position and the differentiation between citizen and non-citizen that regulates access to everything from healthcare, to the labour market to education. These activists argued that their struggle starts with the acknowledgment of them missing all citizenship rights which does not allow them to participate politically. So in order to change their precarious situation, their struggle must always begin with their precarious positionality outside of any legal framework, what they call the position of a "non-citizen".

This shows how complex terminology around asylum is. Looking at the three terms in more detail shows, how much they can overlap and become indistinguishable while at the same time cover important differences of experience with regards to race and coloniality. Describing people according to their legal or migratory status does thus not allow us to look at differences in how people are positioned differently within these categories. Importantly, I do not want to suggest here, that an irregular status does not provide an important marker of precarity, instead, I want to show how processes of bordering and racialisation are entangled and produce a very particular precarity for people in the asylum process.

As mentioned before, all asylum seekers I spoke to in Germany and the UK, used the term ***asylum*** to speak about their in-waiting-position that created a very particular precarity. Therefore, I will use the term "asylum seekers" in this thesis to describe the people that actively shaped this research. I am aware that the term "asylum seeker" is a "hugely diversive administrative category" (Garner, 2017) but, in contrast to the terms "refugee" and "migrant" it also allows us to conceptualise practices, emotions and affects that are particularly tied to being in the asylum process. Moreover, in my conversations with asylum seekers from 2015 to 2018, they often demonstrated the wish for a term that describes a process, rather than a fixed identity that does not allow them the possibility to become otherwise.

The term "asylum seeker" thus carries historical and social meanings and as Yasmin Gunaratnam (2003) has argued in her book *Researching Race and Ethnicity*, it is our responsibility as researchers to question and deconstruct these meanings and the processes of racialisation that has produced them. In this thesis, I thus also want to engage with the question of how can we produce knowledge about a specific ***asylum positionality*** that is caught up with specific histories and relations of power.

I will put forward the argument that within the range of precarities produced through processes of bordering, racialisation and post-coloniality, there is a very particular and irresolvable precarity of people in the asylum process. Research has attended to the precarity of asylum seekers as their lives are constrained and controlled by many practices uniquely tied to the asylum process (Waite, Lewis, Hodkinson & Dwyer, 2013; Griffiths, 2014; Schuster, 2003; 2004; Block & Schuster, 2002; Aumüller, Daphi & Biesenkamp). It is their often inhumane housing situation, financial problems and the stress and uncertainty due to their lives being on hold, on top of institutional and everyday racism, that asylum seekers have to negotiate on a daily basis.

As the kind of activism that asylum seekers and I involved ourselves in is aimed at making visible and changing this particular precarity of people in the asylum process, I call this form of activism ***asylum activism***. I use the term "asylum activism" to emphasise that all asylum seekers who have contributed to this research (1) do rely on activism and social relationships to support their asylum claim; (2) all engage in multiple activist groups, all organising around asylum issues; (3) are constrained and controlled by many practices such as money collecting[2], reporting to the Home Office[3] and what I call *everyday camp*

[2] Until spring 2017 asylum seekers in the UK had to collect their allowance in cash from a local Post Office, where they present their Application Registration Card (ARC) that confirms their identity and eligibility for support. Now their allowance is loaded onto debit cards (ASPEN card) each week, with which they can get cash from cash machines.

[3] Asylum seekers in the UK who are awaiting a decision on their asylum application are required to regularly report to the UK Visas and Immigration Agency, a division of the Home Office. How often they have to report is determined by the Home Office, however, most asylum seekers I have spoken to had to report once a week. A few only once a month.

life[4], that are uniquely tied to the asylum process; (4) have to negotiate precarity on a daily basis due to their housing situation, financial problems and the stress and uncertainty and (5) are marked as radicalised bodies resulting in experiences of institutional and everyday racism.

However, as the following chapters will show, the spaces of asylum activism are not discrete and the concept of who is an ***activist*** is contested and fluid as well as being connected to a regime of citizenship. I engage with this complexity by conceptualising ***activism*** as a practice rather than a demarcated space, activity or identity. I argue activism is constantly made and remade by interactions (encounters) between people inside and outside of these spaces, and their interactions with state practices. Following this, in this thesis I study asylum seekers´ negotiation of political possibilities and bordering practices through the concept of *becoming activist*.

The empirical elements of this thesis include personal reflections, participatory work within and outside of asylum activist groups in London and Berlin, in-depth conversations and friendships with people registered as asylum seekers.

[4] The term *everyday camp life* here refers to practices within asylum seeker camps in Berlin, such as constant observation, monitoring of asylum seekers´ behaviour, lack of privacy and safety, waiting and queuing that are producing a particular precarity for people in the asylum process.

1

Points of Departure

This thesis contemplates the politics of asylum activism by attending to the everyday, emotion, affect and bordered positionality of asylum seekers. The research came out of my activist involvement in different asylum activist communities in London and Berlin. Interested in social change, I went into spaces where people from different backgrounds were trying to challenge existing power structures impacting on asylum seekers' everyday lives. Asylum activist spaces are built to support people in asylum, and yet, all forty asylum seekers I became friends with in London and Berlin kept questioning what was "offered" as a space of asylum activism. I began to learn more about how political spaces are affectively and emotionally experienced by bordered and racialised bodies in asylum.

My ongoing formal and informal conversations with forty asylum seekers between 2015 and 2018 contemplated different understandings and forms of asylum activism, the construction of contemporary political spaces, the role of affect and emotion within them and asylum seekers´ social positioning. I have studied affect and emotion and bordered positionalities and what they do in the context of asylum activism at protest events, demonstrations and activist group meetings but more significantly in my intimate relationships with asylum seekers and the everyday. Through my intimate ethnographic fieldwork practice, I learned how the asylum subjectivity is constructed affectively and emotionally, as a space of intense discomfort and depletion, and yet still contains moments of agency that cannot be captured by the framework of political theory as we know it. My fieldwork has taught me the importance of unpacking the lived complexities

of these affectivities and their doings to learn how political spaces can be created that make everyone comfortable, particularly systematic-depleted asylum seekers. My work thus hopes to tells the story of the positioning of the asylum seeker and today´s dominant mode of political subjectification.

Motivations, entanglements and passionate positionality

This section on motivations, entanglements and passionate positionality hopes to make visible some of my personal entanglements with this research, acknowledging that my own shifting position cannot be separated from this research. My interest in asylum activism started in 2009 when I lived in the Netherlands. A good friend of mine worked for an NGO offering free legal advice at a local asylum accommodation centre and in spring 2009 asked me to come along. Shortly after, I started volunteering for the same NGO. My job was to read through substantive interviews of asylum seekers to check whether their stories meet four criteria that need to be met in order to qualify as "refugee": 1. Well-founded fear, 2. Persecution, 3. Reasons (race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion) and 4. Unable or unwilling, for fear of persecution, to seek a country's protection or to return there. In these interviews, asylum seekers thus needed to show why they qualify as a refugee according to the 1951 Refugee convention (UNHCR, 1951).

Through these four criteria the IND, Immigration and Naturalisation Service (The Netherlands), the Home Office (UK) and the BAMF, Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Germany), tries to separate the "genuine political refugee" from the "bogus economic migrant" (Neumayer, 2005; Holmes & Castañeda, 2016). All asylum seekers I spoke to, felt high levels of anxiety and stress before, during and after the interview. Their future and sometimes their lives depended on this one interview while interviewers were paid by the IND, Home Office or BAMF to meet rejection targets. Interviewers have to ask asylum seekers to repeat (in great detail) extremely traumatic experiences while they are paid to trick, corner and confuse asylum seekers often into deep despair and tears,

even post-traumatic stress disorders (Schock, Rosner & Knaevelsrud, 2015; Bögner, Brewin & Gerlihy, 2010; Lyons, 2018). Not remembering the name of their kindergarten teacher or the closest hospital in the village they grew up, might invalidate their story and reported identity. Both Home Office and BAMF have been criticised for the poor quality of their decision making that has been linked to a pressure to meet rejection targets (National Audit Office, 2004; Anzlinger & Auel, 2018).

In my time as a volunteer, I must have read over one hundred substantive interviews. These were powerful, strong and sad stories but the most challenging aspect was encountering the brutal, insensitive, racist and homophobic bordering practices of states that had been invisible to me as a white European citizen. Reading these stories and the disrespect people were treated with during the interviews, confronted me with how the institution of asylum, an institution allegedly designed to safeguard human rights, is a tool of racialisation, of differentiating populations (Rodríguez, 2018; Garner; 2007, De Genova, 20016). I read interviews in which people were stressed until they broke down, froze or said something that was then used against them and it was people's strengths to persist despite the racist system they were forced to encounter every single day, despite their financial precarity and the constant limbo they were kept in the hope that might prevent other asylum seekers from even trying, that stayed with me and brought about the wish and need to engage in the politics around asylum further.

Experiencing these hostile bordering practices brought not only pain, anger and many tears, it also made me aware about an unacknowledged connection in myself to these stories. It put my life and my position within life more generally, as well as my everyday activities (such as studying) in perspective. I felt I was connecting to how asylum seekers´ conditions are linked to my comfort, my privileged position as a white European citizen. I experienced how asylum policies not only create but also rely on a lack of human connection and I began contemplating what solidarity means and why it matters. In the following years from 2009 to 2015, I was involved in different asylum activist groups such

as NGO´s, self-organised initiatives and asylum seeker-led protest groups in different cities in the Netherlands and in Germany.

From early on, my activist involvement influenced my academic writing. It impacted upon the master's programme I picked, the course assignments and dissertation topic I chose. In the summer of 2014 I decided to study, in the scope of my master thesis, the increasing racist violence against asylum seeker accommodation centres in Germany. Protests against asylum accommodation centres increased enormously from 2012 to 2014 ("Gegen Asylbewerber", 2014), along with the number of asylum applicants (UNHCR, 2014). For the first time in years, asylum issues received massive media attention in Germany. The increase in violent protests against asylum seekers reminded of the racist attacks in the early 1990s, when a racist movement tried to burn down a central asylum accommodation in Mecklenburg Pomerania, a state in north Germany (Panayi, 1994). In 2014, similarly to the early 1990s, the German government responded to the increase in hatred and violence by further restricting the right to asylum (Borkert & Bosswick, 2007).

After handing in my thesis on these protests, I felt inspired to further explore this issue in a doctoral thesis. I moved to the UK in September 2015, with the aim to learn more about the growing racist movement in different European countries. However, my involvement with activist groups in the UK opened up other questions that I intended to explore at first. The longer I was involved, the more my interest grew for the experience of asylum seekers themselves and their everyday experience of asylum activism. A few months later after starting my PhD, I therefore, decided to change the topic of my thesis to explore political subjectivities of asylum seekers in and around asylum activist spaces in the UK and Germany.

New encounters, new directions

I started my ethnographic fieldwork on asylum activism in the winter of 2015/2016 by attending group meetings and events of five asylum activist groups in London. This

involvement was the starting point of many conversations and friendships with asylum seeking activists and with it my continuous documentation of thoughts and feelings emerging out of these relationships. In most group meetings, activists organised protest actions, mainly around detention[5]. When attending these meetings, I did at first not pay much attention to mine and others feelings, impulses and habits of relating within and outside of these spaces. The importance of attending to how activist spaces make us feel and what these feelings tell us about the construction of political spaces and the relationship within them only opened up to me with time and close friendships with asylum seekers.

A big turning point that signalled to me the significance of thinking about my understanding of asylum activism as well as the role of emotion and affect came with meeting Alan, Abi, and Dara on the 7th of March 2016. In spring 2016, I was involved in organising a *Transnational Day of Action Against Detention* supported by many activist groups in London. On Saturday, the 7th of May, simultaneous demonstrations were held across the UK and beyond, to protest against the existence of immigration detention centres and their widely criticised conditions (Osomar, 2007; Bulman, 2018; Sanghani, 2015). In the UK (and Germany) most detention centres are run by private security companies such as G4S, Serco, Mitie and GEO which has led to the development of an *Immigration Detention Industry*[6] that has only recently been conceptually linked (Doty & Wheatley, 2013) to a broader trend towards a Prison Industrial Complex (Davis & Barsamian, 1999).

In the afternoon of the 7th of May, I found myself on one of the many coaches we organised that would bring people to Yarl´s Wood detention centre in Bedfordshire, one of the eleven detention centres in the UK. In Yarl's Wood are more than four-hundred

[5] The UK has one of the largest immigration detention industries in Europe (Flynn & Cannon, 2009; Gibney, 2008).

[6] Doty and Wheatley (2013) define the contemporary immigration industrial complex as a "massive, multifaceted, and intricate economy of power, which is composed of a widespread, diverse, and self-perpetuating collection of organizations, laws, ideas, and actors" (p. 438).

people, mainly women*[7] and some families, detained. The detention centre has received much media attention because of the high number of reports of sexual violence against detained women* (Sanghani, 2015). Many protests have been organised right in front of the centre demanding the closure of all detention centres. I attended three protests in 2015, where I observed detained protesting women* showing their support with the "outside" protesters through tiny windows that could only be opened two or three inches, holding out shirts and toilet paper.

That same afternoon, I sat down at the back of the bus and two friendly, out-outgoing young men*, Alan and Abi, sitting next to me, soon introduced themselves. They were to become close friends over the next two years in the quest to understand some of the complex dynamics unfolding in asylum activist spaces. Alan and Abi both have been involved in the asylum activist community for several years, and as they said, have learned to form bonds with people "that the system can easily relate with" as that is what the British state, the asylum system, "wants me to do", as Alan phrased it. On that day in the bus, there was a pronounced sense of solidarity and fondness among all of us. A few hours later, when we arrived at the protest site, I was introduced to their friend Dara, a shy and warm-hearted young woman* from Cameroon.

Alan came to the UK ten years ago fleeing from Nigeria to claim asylum. In the last ten years, he has been detained two times and his asylum claim is still being considered. His first time in detention showed him the importance of asylum activism and he has been involved in many activist groups ever since. Abi came to the UK five years ago. He had to leave Bangladesh because of family issues that he had due to his relationship with a man*. Three years ago he joined different activist groups to have access to a social network, as he shared. Now he is much less involved in organising events as he is working

[7] In this thesis I add gender stars (the symbol *) next to the terms: men, man, women, woman, male and female to indicate that gender is socially constructed and involves more variety of gender identities than a man identifying as male or a woman identifying as female (cisgender). It is important to mention that during my research, when I identified a person as man* or woman*, it was sometimes my perception of a person´s gender rather than the asylum seekers clearly self-identifying themselves.

but he still attends activist group meetings and events regularly. Dara came to the UK four years ago from Cameroon. She came on a student visa until she was detained six months later. She submitted her asylum application in detention and is still waiting for a decision on her claim. Dara was at first not interested in asylum activism and came to her first detention centre protest because friends convinced her and she, as she put it, "just wanted to get out of the city for a while". However, attending the protest and feeling connected with the women* inside the detention centre, where she used to be, touched her deeply and after the protest she had a clear sense of "this is what I should be doing" leading to her further involvement in different asylum activist groups.

On the three-hour bus journey to Yarl´s Wood and back, the three of them shared with me how they experienced their involvement in asylum activism in London. They shared how their presence in formal activist group spaces such as meetings often made them feel "very uncomfortable". Moreover, Alan, Abi, and Dara told me many stories about acts of care, solidarity and hope[8] they exchanged with other asylum seekers in and outside of these activist spaces, in their everyday lives and friendships. These acts included listening, hugging, encouraging, sharing knowledge, support, hope and empathy. As discussed in more detail throughout this thesis, the majority of asylum seekers I was in conversation with were part of religious communities and social networks outside of the asylum activist group spaces I explored. Most of these networks were built around a common language, culture and/or religion and existed of asylum seeking friends, which they had met throughout their asylum journey; in detention centres, asylum accommodation or activist events and groups, extended family and friends and second generation migrants from similar cultural backgrounds. Within these networks all kind of different tasks (from child-care, to plumbing work to translations) and financial and emotional resources were exchanged that otherwise were hard to access. A few asylum seekers were involved in political activity relating to their home countries such as groups organising for public awareness of LGBT issues in Cameroon and Bangladesh. Listening to their experiences

[8] I will explain and unpack these acts of care, solidarity and hope in more detail in the following chapters.

and the intensity in which they described the discomfort they experienced during formal activist group meetings stayed with me and I wanted to learn more about it.

The majority of the acts they described to me happened outside of what I considered to be the "field" of asylum activism. Also, there was an emotional and affective dimension, a care, to their politics that made me question my understanding of activism and what it means to be politically "active". Our conversation on the bus brought about a big shift in my research focus and I began to consider the role of affect and emotions in asylum activism. Moreover, I started conceptualising asylum activism as a practice exceeding formal spaces of asylum activism such as group meetings and events. Soon we all become close friends and Alan, Abi and Dara introduced me to other people in the asylum process that joined our ongoing conversation about how we experience asylum activism in London. Our conversations and friendships made me reconsider what I perceived as the space of asylum activism and whom I considered as an activist; questions that I will explore in this thesis.

Asylum activism as an emotional and affective practice

Until that bus journey in spring 2016, I perceived activism as unconventional physical public activity, which was based on my involvement in different political groups as well as my theoretical readings about protest and social movement literature (e.g. McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996; McCharty & Zald, 1977; Della Porta & Diani, 2009; Opp, 2009). Activist agency is often portrayed as a self-aware and intentional act toward a particular end (Horton & Kraft, 2009). The idea of activist spaces as purely political, rational and action-based practices, free from emotions, sensations, intuition and power structures, characterises not only definitions of activism, but also politics more generally. Feminist scholars have argued for a long time how not only imagining politics, but also activism as resistance detached from the little everyday things, is how masculine spaces and rationalities are instantiated and validated (e.g. Harris, 2012; Nagar, Lawson, McDowell & Hanson, 2002; Wright, 2013). Emerging scholarship on everyday activism (McCarthy &

Zald, 1977; Abu-Lughod, 1990; Abrahams, 1992; Chatterton, 2006; Martin Hanson & Fontaine, 2007; Horton & Kraftl, 2009; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; and Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Zembylas, 2013) and the role of emotion in activism (Aminzade & McAdam, 2002; King & Flam 2005; Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001; Goodwin, Pfaff & Polletta, 2008; Gould, 2002; Holmes, 2004; Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Ettlinger, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Katz, 2004; Wilkinson, 2009; Ahmed, 2013) therefore attended to the everyday, the body and the sensory.

My conversation with Alan, Dara and Abi and their stories about what I perceived as a different practice of asylum activism did not only make me aware of the absence of the everyday in the formal political but also how everyday, affective bonds and acts also constitute political (asylum) activism. I learned that what we define as asylum activism does not depend not on what we see but how we look. In consequence, my understanding of politics and asylum activism shifted to a focus on the material, sensory and affective. In this thesis, therefore, I want to practice to listen to the everyday, affect and emotion in spaces of asylum activism to see what they can teach us about the politics of asylum activism.

I do not want to attend to asylum activism as a spatially bound space with subjects identifying as activists but rather I want to look at is as a process; a space that is constantly remade through what happens "inside" and "outside" of it. As *Chapter 3* will illustrate, the "inside" and "outside" of asylum activism are empty constructions as people carry the outside within and the inside without. State bordering practices and different subject positionalities are not left at the doorstep of these activist spaces, but rather, as *Chapter 2*, *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 5* will demonstrate, play into "inside" experiences. At the same time, what happens within these spaces, as *Chapter 6* and *Chapter 7* will show, also has the potential to transform larger structures and materialities. My intention is thus to unpack the notion of activism and the political throughout this thesis and show how they are constantly reformulated.

I conceptualise the everyday in this thesis as everything that is placed "outside" of what we call the political. The everyday thus includes day-to-day acts as well as what is not made political within formal activist spaces. This thesis will attend to the everyday in form of three different spaces: firstly, in formal activist group meeting spaces, here the everyday includes what is not made political: absences, submerged feelings, thoughts, practices, as well as displaced actors and agencies (*Chapter 4*). Secondly, I will attend to the everyday in the space of the asylum everyday. And thirdly, in the space of friendship (*Chapter 7*).

Alan, Abi, Dara and I started to meet up regularly to explore relationships in asylum activist spaces as well as our understanding of activism and politics. In the following weeks, Aazar, Yanelle, Emmanuel, and Justine began to join our conversation and a small group was formed which we called *Breaking Through Bars*. *Breaking Through Bars* was supposed to create a space for asylum seekers to discuss and exchange their experience of being involved in asylum activism in London. More and more people joined over the following months. Next to their emotional and affective understanding of asylum activism, the focus of many of our conversations was our different social positioning and how this impacted on our experience of asylum activism as well as our everyday lives. While *Breaking Through Bars* ran, I was still attending activist group meetings and events regularly and being in these spaces, I practiced listening to how different contexts, positionalities, and everyday lives affects bodies and relationships within them.

Asylum activism as a space in which different social positions meet

Sitting in over fifty activist meetings of different groups in London, I began to perceive emotion and affect as a language through which different positionalities in these spaces were communicated and negotiated. I observed and felt subtle discomforts that were repeating themselves whenever I sat in group meetings or attended events. I attended to these discomforts through paying attention to my observations, gut reactions, intensities of experience, bodily sensations, thoughts and conversations. In my research, meaning-

making happened through asylum seekers´ bodily reactions and mine, as well as our ongoing conversations that opened up the possibility for meaning-making across our different experiences. I will therefore not distinguish experiences of feelings and sensations that were non-discursive (often described as affect) but expressed in bodily reactions and sensations from those that were discursive (often described as emotions).

In the last decade, there has been an emergent emotional and affective turn in social sciences (discussed in more detail in *Chapter 3*). Much has been written on how to theorise the body, embodiment, affect, and emotions (e.g. Ahmed, 2004; Braidotti, 1994; Buter, 1990, 1993; Haraway, 1991, Sedgwick, 2003; Young, 2005). Scholars as for example Ahmed (2004), Tolia-Kelly (2006), Rose et al (1997), Kobayashi, Preston and Murnaghan (2011) and Barnett (2008) have emphasised the need to socially and culturally contextualise affective and emotional formations. Emotions and affect are imprinted with histories, values, and politics that impact upon our encounters and meaning-making of the world (Ahmed, 2004). My research hopes to contribute to this new research area by exploring how affect and emotion and the asylum positionality are entangled.

The many conversations I had with asylum seekers about their social positioning asked me to attend to how different contexts, positionalities and everyday lives affects bodies and relationships within activist spaces. Governments in the UK and Germany intentionally create a "hostile environment" to make people feel as unwelcome and as uncomfortable as possible. There has also been an increase in racism, hate crimes and street hostility in both countries and people being attacked on the basis of looking or sounding "foreign". However, even though these processes of racialisation, as the already mentioned Windrush scandal most recently has shown, impact on "citizens", "regular migrants" as well as "irregular migrants" and "asylum seekers", I want to give the positioning of people in asylum particular attention in this thesis, as within the range of precarities that is produced by the border, there is a very particular and irresolvable precarity of people in the asylum process. Asylum seekers´ lives are constrained and controlled by many

practices, such as money collecting, reporting to the Home Office and what I call *everyday camp life* (p.15), practices that are uniquely tied to the asylum process.

There has been a growing engagement in social science literature with asylum, migrant and refugee activism (i.e. Milllner; 2011; Rygiel 2011; Nyers 2015; Atac, Rygiel & Stierl, 2016; Bhimji, 2016; Zamponi, 2018; Nyers & Rygiel, 2012; Ilcan, Isin & Nyers, 2014; Gill, 2016; Tyler & Marciniak, 2013). Most of the literature looks at how migrants, asylum seekers and refugees strategically employ citizenship as a social practice that enables them to become political subjects. The concept of citizenship is considered as particularly relevant as the asylum seeking subject is constituted as counter to the citizen-subject (Nyers & Rygiel, 2012). This thesis wants to explore asylum activism and political subjectivities of asylum seekers beyond citizenship, acknowledging that not all political possibilities are oriented towards a what I call *becoming citizen*. As *Chapter 3*, *Chapter 4*, *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6* will explain in more detail, only attending to citizenship in the case of my research would have meant not hearing anything from the voices of those I have been speaking to. My conversations and friendships with asylum seekers asked me to focus on a politics beyond citizenship, politics otherwise unnoticed.

Asylum activism as *becoming activist*

As mentioned before, I want to look at asylum activism as a process; a space that is constantly remade through what happens "inside" and "outside" of it. As *Chapter 3* will explore in more detail, the majority of scholarship on activism focuses on broader social movements; they tend to understand activism and being activist as an "identity", a "mindset", and a certain "standpoint": In short: As a way of *being* instead of *becoming*.

In this thesis, I draw on Deleuze´s and Guattari's concept of *becoming*, as it allows me to look at activists and activism as constantly in process of being made rather than a fixed identity or space. Deleuze and Guattari´s philosophy of difference conceptualised subjectivity as a process of *becoming*, not a state of being (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988;

Deleuze, 2014). Deleuze describes *becoming* as a process in which something *becomes other* by bringing "into being that which does not yet exist" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 147). This happens through a practice of diversifying, multiplying and deconstructing existing norms and identities.

Understanding asylum activism as a practice of *becoming-other*, rather than a fixed identity or space, thus also allows for transformation and the recognition of possibilities beyond existing ones. The concept "practice" allows me to translate the idea of *becoming* into social empirical research. My intention is not to identify every act as activist, but to theorise how every act has the potential of being activist. *Becoming activist* thus opens up new ways to conceptualise political subjectivity and is an entry point to look at the transformation of power dynamics. In order to trace asylum activism diversifying, multiplying and deconstructing existing norms, practices and identities, we first must understand what the current norms, practices and identities of asylum activism are: the following chapter will explore this in more detail. *Chapter 4* to *Chapter 6* will then trace asylum activism as a practice of *becoming-other*.

As mentioned before, this thesis attempts to explore otherwise unregistered political agency by looking into the everyday, the role of the body, affect and emotion. I also want to pay particular attention to the politics of bordered and racialised bodies, their *becoming activist*. Conversations with asylum seekers who spoke differently about the construction of political space brings in whole new ways of thinking, speaking, feeling and acting "the political" which indicates something about the ways in which bodies, the everyday, and form of politics flow into each other as a *becoming activist*.

Locating formality within spaces of asylum activism

I will use the word "formal" to describe activist group spaces and events as they are an interesting space to explore the "formalities of politics" and what these formalities do. I also call activist group spaces and event spaces "formal" as they often follow established

rules and procedures compared to the messy, more informal, space of the everyday. Of course, these spaces cannot be seen as absolutely distinct from the everyday, but overall, I experienced a more formal doing of politics in these spaces; they were spaces in which more formal political subjectivities were practiced and reproduced.

Importantly, this thesis is not a work against formal spaces of asylum activism**,** but rather a reflection that aims at exploring the possibility of politics for differently positioned actors. Looking at asylum activist spaces as spaces in which different social locations and experiences meet, and paying attention to the emotional and affective doings of these different positionalities, is necessary, I argue, if we hope to recreate activism as a space in which everyone can feel comfortable. As I have learned from my conversations with asylum seekers between 2015 and 2018 feelings of closeness and mutuality are important for a *common politics;* a way of doing politics that can include everyone by considering different positions.

From my involvement, I know and want to acknowledge here, that asylum seekers get great support from what I call formal asylum activist groups. In the UK and Germany, asylum activist group and event spaces offer asylum seekers practical support, such as letter writing, access to legal support, one-on-one and group casework. Moreover, asylum seekers can meet others in similar situations, build friendships, exchange ideas and knowledge about how to survive in this system. For many asylum seekers I spoke to, after arriving in the UK and Germany, these groups were the only space that broke their constant isolation. The only space in which they could talk to others, share, and feel some sort of human connection. For asylum seekers, the possibility of human connection, of solidarity is actively and intentionally reduced to a minimum. People are shut away, isolated in camps or detention centres far out of the city centres and housing is organised to reduce social interactions with people outside of the camps. So my thesis is not intending to criticise these formal groups spaces of asylum activism that offer asylum seekers so much.

These formal activist group spaces were also what made this research, my friendships and conversations with asylum seekers possible. These spaces of organised politics are spaces of encounter, where different positions can meet. My research started in spaces of organised politics because that is where I met asylum seekers´ "everyday" suffering, where I encountered the space of friendship between very differently positioned bodies. The hidden hostility of the asylum system works through its invisibility to most of us, and therefore, we urgently need spaces where these separate and different lives can meet, share and balance. Most of us are not able to see people sleeping in asylum camps, waking up in the middle of the night full of fear and panic. Most of us are not able to observe an asylum seeking woman* getting up in the morning thinking "How will I get through my day without being sexually assaulted by security staff?". Most of us are not there when people are communicated to by their social worker, security staff or employees from the Home Office or BAMF that they do not matter, that they are not human. And most of us are not there when people are waiting for their registration or simply an appointment all day.

As I have come to know, this everyday structural violence produced by bordering practices is otherwise invisible to most of us. As I am not an asylum seeker and my body is not racialised, without encounters that makes other experiences visible I have been socialised to look away and feel uncomfortable about being confronted with other people's suffering caused by a system that I take part in reproducing. Formal activist spaces open up conversations, friendships and a seeing of people's everyday lives that goes beyond media reports, a formal interview or imagining how somebody in that situation must feel. It opens up a meeting of different everyday worlds that created a shared sociality of some kind. That is why my research started there and these spaces were such an important part of my journey.

Research questions

My research explores the following questions:

- **Spaces of asylum activism:** What and where is asylum activism?
- **Affect and emotion:** How are asylum activist spaces in the United Kingdom and Germany affectively and emotionally experienced? What are affects and emotions doing in these spaces of politics?
- **Contemporary political spaces:** What are constructions of the political in these spaces and what do they do? What do the entanglements between asylum, affect and emotion tell us about the construction of political spaces and political responses to this moment of bordering in the UK and Germany?
- **Asylum positionalities:** How are emotions and affects connected to different positionalities and the politics of activism? How is the asylum positionality constituted emotionally and affectively and what it does it do within the spaces of asylum activism?

Intimate ethnography

I explore asylum activist spaces through a practice I call "intimate ethnography" (drawing on Lerum, 2001; Waterston & Rylko-Bauer, 2007; Banerji & Distante, 2009). An intimate ethnographic practice is a practice that listens and is shaped by affect and emotions, the everyday and friendships. While the words *friend* or *friendship*, except in my description of my relationships with asylum seekers, do not appear often in this thesis, this research can, in its broadest sense, also be considered as a piece of work about friendships between very differently positioned activists. My intimate ethnographic approach is, in other words, an ethnography of friendship.

A large body of scholarship has attended to the sociology, anthropology and politics of friendship (Pahl, 2002; Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Bell & Coleman, 2010; 1999; Chowdhury & Philipose, 2016; Desai & Killick, 2013; Ahmed, 2013; Hewitt, 2986; Hey, 1997). While this ethnography took friendship, as I would say, as its epistemic basis, my writing more extensively engages with concepts such as intimacy, mutuality and solidarity. Asylum seekers seemed not to prescribe much importance to attending to different notions of friendship in their attempt to understand the politics of asylum activism but rather what

creates *real* solidarity, mutuality and closeness. Friendship, particularly in Western literature, is often described as a form of sociality made up of trust, closeness and empathy portrayed as stable purified category with clear boundaries (e.g. Reed-Danahay, 1999). Considering that all forty asylum seekers I spoke to paid particular attention to the shifts in activist solidarities and closeness, it becomes clear, why the concept of friendship seemed not a useful tool to understand and report inconsistencies and elusive discomforts.

My own usage of the word *friend* or *friendship* is consistent with my process approach throughout this thesis. I conceptualise friendship as a space constantly becoming rather than a stable sociality or category. *Becoming friends*, I argue, is a space of negotiation of the complexities of intimacy and distance that are inherent to every encounter between two bodies. Moreover, as this thesis will show, reflections on friendship (in my understanding) and shifting solidarities (in asylum seekers' understanding) are everything but private and personal but deeply political.

Intimate ethnography is not a practice that I read about and then took the conscious decision to apply. Rather, it is a form of relating, an "intimate knowing" (Lerum, 2001), that unexpectedly opened up through my friendships with asylum seekers. Lerum has explored the emotional detachment, the "academic armor", that is implicit in the standard scientific method (2001). Relating to others in a research context is often forced into "researcher" and "researched" relationships; positions that are filled with different levels of power. This is not to say that my position as a researcher did not position me differently, but that an intimate approach allowed for open conversations about the discomfort and distance created through our different positions.

According to Banerjia and Distanteb (2009) the quality of empathy implied in friendship and ongoing conversation, as part of the intimate ethnographic approach, allows for the possibility of power dynamics being recognised. Waterston and Rylko-Bauer (2007) also described a "critical intimacy" as a possibility to overcome rigid forms of relating. Many

scholars have explored how ethnographies that speak to agency, everyday resistance and the voices of those otherwise unheard locate political possibilities in the midst of precarity (e.g. Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Rosaldo, Lamphere & Bamberger 1974; Greenhouse, 2011). I want to argue that intimate ethnography is an affective and emotional practice that allows us to listen to different positionalities and their affective politics, and by that negotiate existing power dynamics.

The intimate approach thus means attending to emotions, affects and intimacy: attending to the question of what created closeness and distance in my fieldwork-encounters with asylum seekers. It was the momentary collapsing of distance between us that opened up the space for intimacy, an atmosphere of trust and understanding (Banerjia & Distanteb, 2009) that made this ethnography possible. The word *intimacy* also allows a looking at the affective dynamics that were circulating in these relationships as well as in other relationships in asylum activist spaces that are the foundation of this ethnographic project.

Much consideration and reflection went into the tension between my ethical commitment to participants' safety and anonymity and the limits this placed on the *thickness* of the ethnographic description I could offer in my thesis. My ethnographic practice was rooted in mutual ethics and a practice of care that put asylum seekers needs first, to bring about ease and relief and making sure no extra discomforts were created. This practice of care meant being in a constant negotiation with participants about what of our intimate encounters would come out in my work; what was safe and unsafe to report. Throughout the eighteen months of my fieldwork there was an ongoing back and forth between our conversations, my writings and asylum seekers' feedback on my writings. Anything that made them feel uncomfortable being included in the documentation of my research, I deleted. Most asylum seeking friends had lots of difficult, exploitative experiences with researchers and so I felt a strong need for a caring and sensitive research practice, in which they had agency to decide how things were communicated and represented throughout the whole process.

The decision to always put asylum seekers safety and anonymity first, however, was in tension with wanting to tell a *thick* description of the asylum experience. My activist event and participant description might come across as lacking in detail at times, but the point I want to make here is that it was my *thick* ethnographic experience of the violent asylum positionality that created the political and ethical necessity for a *thin* ethnographic description. In the context of asylum, what is usually considered as ethnography´s "richest offering" (Geertz, 1973) can easily turn into a traumatic harmful research practice. I therefore want to argue the necessity for a *reorientation* from a focus on the reader, and the academic contribution to knowledge to a research practice of care as epistemic basis and necessary priority for any research that aims to be critical, feminist and anti-racist; that wants to redistribute burden.

The question of a *thick* or *thin* description always already puts the focus on outcomes, its presentation - on the reader and academic impact - rather than how this contribution was made and what affects, emotions and reproductive harms were created along the way. Instead, I suggest here to shift the focus from the researcher and the research objective of understanding and appropriating the "other" to not creating any more burden or harm, particularly to subjects already exposed to disproportionate emotional harm. This calls for an urgent re-orientation from attaching greater value to the research product than the research relationship and emotions and affects it produces.

It was through my intense immersion-based approach that allowed me to not only experience asylum activism in the United Kingdom and Germany at group meetings and events, but to look and feel beyond the distinction between "public" and "private", into the entanglement of the political, the everyday and the affective. It created many observations, conversations and feelings about the material ways in which asylum seekers, as racialised and bordered bodies, are shaped and shape political spaces. Banerjia and Distanteb (2009) argue, that in the greatest proximity, the distance or difference of the other is most honestly encountered. Therefore, the space of friendship offers us productive possibilities to explore and negotiate the space between "self" and "other".

This is of interest to me, as intimacy did not only define the methodological approach of my project, but carried over as an inquiry into what allows for intimacy and connection within asylum activist spaces and what causes distance. The question of negotiating the space between different positions and what allows a common politics runs through this thesis. *Chapter 4*, *Chapter 5*, *Chapter 6* and *Chapter 7* will attend to this question by exploring different spaces of asylum activism: the formal activist space, the everyday and the space of friendship, always returning to the question of what allows for comfort and mutuality.

Much feminist scholarship on methodology has explored the complexity of relations in fieldwork (e.g. Stacey, 1988; Haraway, 1988; Gibson-Graham, 1994; Kobayashi, 1994; Nast, 1994; Nagar, 1997; Rose, 1997; Stanley & Wise 2002; Browne, Bakshi & Law 2010; Chattopadhyay, 2013; Fisher, 2014). My project was built on this research while being particularly attentive to my own body and its emotional responses. Therefore, I want to describe my approach to research as also auto-ethnographic (Spry, 2001; Ngunijri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010). In my research I turned the ethnographic gaze also inward, towards myself, to contextualise myself within a larger set of meanings and realities. I approached asylum activism through a bodily ethnographic practice that I experienced as a valuable entryway into a deeper understanding of asylum activism. Numerous scholars have highlighted the importance of paying attention to their own bodies, their own feelings and emotions as well as the bodies, feelings and emotions of those they research (e.g. Longhurst et al., 2008; Reich, 2003; Paterson, 2009; Bain & Nash, 2006; Longhurst, Johnston & Ho, 2009; Widdowfield, 2000; Bennett, 2004; Dyck and Mclaren, 2004).

Scholars in affect studies, feminist and emotional geography have explored different ways through which these bodily happenings can be explored (Anderson, 2005; Davies and Dwyer, 2007; Latham and McCormack, 2004; Longhurst et al., 2008; Thein, 2005). Bain and Nash (2006) explored how a researcher's own body can be used as a tool for data collection in the process of ethnographic fieldwork, by focusing on three moments within the research process: the preparation of researcher´s bodies, positioning their bodies

within the fieldwork spaces and interacting with other bodies during the fieldwork. Longhurst, Ho and Johnston (2008; 2009) also illustrated how the body is an important tool through which all interactions with others and emotions arising out of these encounters are produced and filtered. Similarly, Paterson (2009) and Crang (2003) both attended to the embodied researcher by focusing on bodily sensations and responses. Bennett (2004) understands emotions as language and ways of seeing that become meaningful through different signifiers and discourse.

However, an auto-ethnographic approach of attending to a researchers own feelings and emotions can also be found in the longstanding black feminist engagement with the "outsider within" standpoint (Collins, 1986; Lorde, 1980; Cohen, 2004; Hooks, 2000). Hill Collins (1986) wrote about the "creative potential" of the "outsider within" standpoint that opens up a space of research in which subjects "learn to trust their own personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge" (p. 29). Audre Lorde (1980) famously portrayed the voices and experiences women* of colour as the only true way of learning about oppression. Cathy Cohen (2004) argued in *Deviancy as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics* for a counter-narrative self-practice that challenges and negotiates established norms and rules through self-inquiry.

Similar to all of these scholars, my research understands emotion and affect as a language, as an access point that allows another perspective on asylum activism. I practiced listening to the language of affect and emotions in this thesis by attending to intensities. I conceptualise "intensities" as an experiential dimension of affects and emotions, a registered set of embodiment, that reveals what affect and emotion *do* in spaces of asylum activism.

According to many affect scholars, intensities are registered affects; "a sense that some kind of difference is in the making" (McCormack, 2013, p. 33). Intensities come in different degrees, which characterise affect in its "ability to affect and [...] susceptibility to be affected" (p. 61). While some affect scholars think of intensities as pre-discursive (e.g.

Massumi, Thrift, Brenning), other scholars (Butler, Ahmed, Wetherwell, and Blackman) have criticised the dichotomy between meaning-making of mind and body. Brian Massumi most famously theorised affect as ''intensity'', autonomic bodily responses that escape the mind (Massumi, 2002). In my fieldwork in asylum activist communities, intensities felt like an affective force circulating (Ahmed, 2004) through spaces, discourse and bodies of asylum activism. I observed them to be linked to both, meaning-making through the discursive and non-discursive. Asylum seekers´ experience of formal political spaces, for example, was made visible through their bodily reactions and mine, as well as our ongoing conversations.

The other registered set of embodiment I worked with (predominantly in *Chapter 4*) are emotional knots. "Emotional knots" I conceptualise as knotted intensities of experience. Intensities can tangle together to form a knot, I argue. It was my subjective embodied experience of these entanglements and accumulations, a personal feeling based on my long-term involvement, friendships and the observation of social norms and practices, that I took as an indication of intensities and knots which spoke for different positionalities and everyday lives. Again, I practiced listening to affect and emotion, intensities and knots, in three different spaces: formal spaces of asylum activism such as group meeting spaces (*Chapter 4* and *Chapter 6*), the asylum everyday (*Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6*) and the space of friendship (*Chapter 7*).

During my fieldwork, intensities were most often expressed in form of feelings of discomfort. Attending to discomfort seemed therefore as an important access point into opening up possible ways of understanding the politics, affects and emotions around asylum activism. Discomfort also assisted me in expanding my knowledge about the affects and emotions of everyday bordering and political space. I want to look at discomfort in this thesis as a complex set of emotions and affective resonances circulating between different bodies in asylum activist spaces. My understanding of discomfort extended and became more complex throughout this thesis. Asylum seekers expressed different emotions and bodily sensations to me such as anger, shame, worry, pain, fear

and stress; most often describing their bodily experience of these emotions as feeling "uncomfortable". Therefore, in this thesis I use the concept discomfort to group together depleting bodily sensations that decreased asylum seekers´ power to act.

Comfort and "feeling comfortable" are important aspects of corporeal experience. According to Bissell (2008), similar to "hope" (Anderson, 2006) and "joy" (Bennett, 2001), comfort can be described as a positive and desirable sensation, while discomfort - feelings of unease and pain - are far less desirable sensations. Other scholars have described comfort as a basic and fundamental human need (Malinowski & Stamler, 2002; Tutton and Seers, 2003), an important sensation through which a subject derives a sense of security. Considering that the asylum positionality is a social positioning of multiple precarity (*Chapter 5*) and constant insecurity, further stresses the importance to attend to dis/comfort[9] in research on asylum activism.

However, I am also aware of not wanting to create a binary of labelling comfort as "good" and discomfort as "bad". Looking at discomfort as only destructive and comfort as only productive does not account for the complexities of affects and emotions and their relationship to power and transformation. I also observed discomfort as being productive as it created, for example, our ongoing everyday conversations about political space. Moreover, it allowed asylum seekers to learn and make sense of existing power dynamics in political spaces and in their everyday lives by listening to their own feelings. In literature, discomfort is also not only described as something undesirable, as Bissell (2008) explores, to be or act outside one's comfort zone, is also associated with "thinking outside the box", progressiveness, independence and self-motivation. Moreover, the activist, the resistant subject, is often also portrayed as a subject in discomfort. A discomfort that allows for transformation, action and persistence. Subjects in comfort, on the other hand, are associated with complacency, in-action and a lack of sustained effort.

[9] I use the word *dis/comfort* in this thesis to refer to experiences of both comfort and discomfort.

I want to look at discomfort in this thesis as a deep emotionality of racialisation and bordering practices; the "felt" dimension (Gunaratnam & Lewis, 2001) of bordering that we need to unravel and learn more about in order to integrate it into a situated practice of asylum activism. Moreover, I will look at emotions in this thesis in form of their *doings* (Ahmed, 2004). In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed, similar to other scholars (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; White 1993; Rosaldo 1984; Hochschild 1983; Katz 1999; Collins 1990) engaged with the question of what it might mean to think of emotions as practices, rather than as states that exist inside a subject. Ahmed (2002) developed the term "affective economy" to speak to the movement of emotions, how emotions can stick to a body, circulate between them as well as stick subjects together. In Ahmed´s affective economies, emotions *do* things. Through the intensity of their attachment, emotions have the power to align individuals with collectivities and connect "bodily space with social space".

Thesis contributions

My thesis hopes to make theoretical, empirical and activist contributions. Firstly, as previously mentioned, this research brings together three emergent bodies of scholarship; everyday activism, affect and emotion and asylum politics, and by doing so adds to scholarship that emphasises the need to contextualise emotions and affectivities by exploring how they are entangled with the asylum positionality in the context of activism. It thus hopes to contribute to emerging literature that explores the visceral nature of racialised encounters and brings it in conversation with the construction of political spaces. This project explores what makes solidarity and *common politics* in the context of bordering possible.

By attending to the everyday, affect and emotion, I hope to offer another way to look at asylum activism in the UK and Germany that will tell us something about the entanglements of affect and emotion, the political and the everyday. I believe, asking for the location of affect and emotion in asylum activism in the UK and Germany allows us to

rethink "traditional" political spaces which we often think as demonstrations, protest events and activist group meetings. It helps to illuminate how affectivities, emotion and intensities flow through, cohere around, and act on bodies of asylum seekers in a structural condition of precarity and vulnerability.

Moreover, I hope to extend the discussion of precarity and political subjectivity by adding the dimension of affect and emotion that helps us to conceptualise modes of politics beyond citizenship. This study offers first research into the affects and emotions of an asylum positionality in the context of asylum activism in London and Berlin. Through conducting multi-sited research, I hope to be able to link contemporary bordering to activist practices and see how they are constantly responding to these shifting state bordering practices. My research hopes to unpack political responses to this historical moment of bordering in the UK and Germany and offers a critique of bordering practices in the 21st century.

Next to these empirical, theoretical and conceptual contributions to scholarship, my research contributes to activist discussion and put its findings at the disposal of activist groups. This project has also informed a number of workshops, outputs and collaborations that have emerged due to connections between academic and the asylum activist community.

Firstly, as already mentioned, in May 2016 a group of asylum seekers and I set a group and platform called *Breaking Through Bars*, which was supposed to create a space to discuss people's experience of being involved in asylum activist groups spaces in London. Together we mapped our thoughts and feelings through which we experience our activist involvement. Secondly, in May 2017, I helped to organise a five-day conference in Munich called "A migrant-led struggle?", which brought together activists, academics and practitioners to discuss power dynamics in migrant, refugee, asylum activism in Germany. Thirdly, I presented my work together with a group of asylum seekers at a three-day workshop in Berlin that intended to unite struggles of different asylum activist and anti-

racist actors. Fourthly, Mara, a thirty-three-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Syria, and I wrote a number of newspaper articles together that were published on oplatz.net and in a few local newspapers in Germany. The articles described the situation of asylum-seeking women* living in camp accommodation in Berlin.

My research has also been used in a number of public talks on asylum and bordering practices in the UK and Germany. I also presented my research at two conferences designed to bring together activists, practitioners and academics to exchange knowledge on how to transform and live with contemporary bordering practices. The first conference was the "International Conference on Migration, Irregularisation and Activism" at Malmö University from the 15th to 16th of June 2016. The second conference was called "Bordering Harms Conference" at Birkbeck University that took place from the 2nd to 3rd of May 2018. For both conferences, I helped to organise a panel and presented my research. I have presented my research on over ten conferences from 2015-2018, however, the impact of these two conferences seemed particularly relevant as they allowed a meeting of people interested in asylum activism beyond the academy.

Mapping the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, each exploring different aspects and terrains of the relationship between asylum, affect, the political and the everyday in the context of asylum activism in London and Berlin.

Chapter 2, SETTING THE SCENE: SPACES OF ASYLUM ACTIVISM IN LONDON AND BERLIN, contextualises my research by explaining the "field" of asylum activism in the two cities, in which my research took place; London and Berlin. The research encounter of this study includes multiple forms of engagement such as activist group meetings and events, conversations, writings and friendships. As this chapter hopes to show, my understanding of the space of asylum activism was constantly developing during my immersed engagement in these communities. Contemplating the question what and

where asylum activism is, *Chapter 2* illustrates how imagining asylum activism as a specific, demarcated space does not mirror my experience of asylum activism in London and Berlin. The formation of political space, of asylum activism, I observed to continually adjust itself to the reality of contemporary bordering practices as well as the lives and worlds of asylum seekers. Looking at asylum activism as "always in process of being made" allowed me to map socialities beyond the boundaries of "the political". Moreover, as bordering plays out in asylum seekers´ everyday lives in, for most of us, invisible, quiet and subtle ways, the everyday must also be looked at as a scene of possibility for politics, for asylum activism.

In *Chapter 3*, CONCEPTUALISING THE POLITICS OF ASYLUM ACTIVISM: CONNECTING ACTIVISM, AFFECT AND BORDERED POSITIONALITIES, I bring together three emergent bodies of scholarship; literature on everyday activism, the politics of affect and emotion and asylum activism, to illustrate the entanglement of the politics of activism, affect and emotion and the asylum. Looking at all three of them together, allows me to attend to what I call the "politics of asylum activism": The *doings* of different positionalities, affect and emotion in asylum activist spaces. In *Chapter 3*, I first discuss notions of the political and emergent scholarship on the everyday, affect and emotion in activism to show, how these accounts often do not look at different positionalities. I then speak to the literature on the politics of affect and emotion, and to how affect and emotions emerge from specific subject positions and contexts. Finally, I turn to the literature on asylum activism to show how its focus on claimed citizenship represents a very narrow understanding of political agency, a model of politics that is linked to the self-presenting speaking subject. Seeing citizenship as the only mode of politics depends on a particular physical comfort that excludes some bodies, such as bodies of asylum seekers, from appearing. Therefore, I attend to the question of a *politics of the unwell and unfed body* in spaces that are not perceived as political.

LISTENING TO INTENSITIES AND KNOTS IN THE FORMAL POLITICAL, *Chapter 4*, will trace some threads building knots in formal asylum activist spaces. In this chapter, I

explore what relationships in formal activist spaces tell us about what enables and disrupts mutuality - a common politics. It shows how formal asylum activist spaces work by trying to create mutuality and to build a knot that ties everyone in. Yet, disconnection and dissonance are created, because the space does not acknowledge the different kinds of everyday experiences, materialities and the physical exhaustion people bring to the room. As a result, without it meaning to happen, the space of formal solidarity becomes another space of depletion. I will attend to knots by observing intensities, the experiential dimension of affects and emotions that allowed me to feel, and by that observe, the possibility to *become activist*. I will also introduce a *becoming activist*, that for people in the asylum process means stepping out of the formalised *othered* situation of being a non-political, racialised, bordered *other*, not by becoming the formal subject of political rights, in which they are not able to fit anyway, but by *becoming-other-other*, a *new* subject of politics.

Chapter 5, LOOKING BEYOND FORMAL POLITICAL SPACES: THE AFFECTIVE VIOLENCE OF THE ASYLUM EVERYDAY, situates and further explores the politics of asylum activism by attending to the asylum everyday: the everyday lives of asylum seekers in London and Berlin. It describes the daily journeys through endless spaces of depletion and slow affective violence that shapes asylum seekers´ everyday lives and activist involvement. I consider the everyday in this chapter in the many ways it is unacknowledged, unheard, which means that it remains invisible to our senses unless we shift our attention. *Chapter 5* shows how intensities produced through everyday bordering experiences accumulate, build knots, stick to asylum seekers bodies and create a heaviness, which depletes asylum seekers´ lives. Stories about different spaces of discomfort such as the post office, gay clubbing, the camp space, friendships with non-asylum seekers and finally the space of the bed will illustrate how bordering works through creating discomfort expressed in worry, shame and fear, depleting asylum seeker by the intensities these sensibilities create, as well as by having to negotiate and manage these feelings in "public" and "private" spaces.

ATTENDING TO POLITICAL POSSIBILITIES: ASYLUM SEEKERS BECOMING ACTIVIST, *Chapter 6*, explores how asylum seekers, despite the positioning that never allows them to be comfortable, *become activist*. This chapter brings together the formal space of asylum activism and the asylum everyday, to illustrate how a *becoming activist* can be found in both spaces: in formal asylum activist spaces, where asylum seekers negotiate established ideas of the political and in the everyday, where asylum seekers perform practices of what I call "radical hope" disrupting the emotional structures of everyday bordering. Following up on previous chapters, this chapter further explores the question of a politics of the unfed and unwell body. In both spaces, asylum seekers use techniques to negotiate affect and emotions produced in their encounter with asylum activism, non-asylum seekers and their everyday lives that reformulate what political space and political subjectivity are.

The last chapter, *Chapter 7*, TRACING MOMENTS OF CLOSENESS AND DISTANCE BETWEEN ENTANGLED, FLUID AND AFFECTIVE POSITIONS, zooms in on the concept of positionality to show how encounters of different positioned bodies can create comfort and discomfort. I will enter the conversation about positionality through reflections on language, whiteness, veganism, religion and *hipsterism*. Using slightly different access points than the commonly explored race, class and gender, I hope to show how practices of language, whiteness, veganism, religion and *hipsterism* are valuable access points for us to understand the affective doings of particular positions and identities that must be looked at in the context of different histories, politics and positions of power. Moreover, they are valuable access points to learning about political possibilities for asylum seekers.

2

Setting the Scene: Spaces of Asylum Activism in London and Berlin

In this chapter, I hope to contextualise my research by explaining my different field encounters in the two cities in which my research took place; London and Berlin. The ethnographic encounters of this research included multiple forms of engagement such as activist group meetings and events, conversations, writing and friendships. In this chapter, I will introduce what became meaningful as my doctoral project continued and with it my understanding of what constitutes the "field". Moreover, this chapter attends to the different practices of asylum activism in London and Berlin and the interesting historical moment in which this ethnography is done.

In Germany, the 2015 "refugee crisis" (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016) has led to the development of a massive *asylum state machinery* that has only been emerging in the last few years. I conceptualise *the asylum state machinery* as an asylum system of interconnected structures and processes of border-*making* in institutional spaces, political spaces and everyday life. The asylum state machinery is designed to create a "hostile environment" that naturalises currently existing power relations. Parts of the asylum machine change according to current events, politics and asylum activism. The asylum machinery does not, as I will show in the following, only exist of the bodies of state authority themselves, but has increasingly become run and enforced by private companies and agencies during the last decade. The asylum machinery´s activity, structure, functions, and everyday construction of borders-*making*, reveal its role in

racially differentiated populations. In Germany, bordering practices have greatly shifted what political space is. However, as this chapter will also show, the high concentration of people and the moment of "crisis" also enabled a massive network of asylum activism.

Even when my project is about a textured analysis of human relationships, it is at the same time an analysis of state processes, as bordering penetrates the most intimate interactions of asylum seekers´ lives. As my friendships with asylum seekers have shown, bordering practices impact upon their activism, emotions, bodies, homes and friendships. The different contexts in the UK and Germany show that human relationships in the context of asylum activism cannot be thought, felt or sensed without thinking, feeling and sensing the role of the state.

The last five years in Germany, I believe, marked a significant historical moment that can tell us something about how states remake what political space is and can be. My fieldwork in The UK and Germany has shown me that *doing* politics means something different in both countries as changing state bordering practices impact on the possibility of asylum activism. Despite obvious differences, inherent in their geographical location, in which the UK is an island and Germany having nine bordering countries; different histories but also recent developments have led to different political responses to this moment of bordering. My research is not comparative in nature as that would require a more in-depth and textured analysis of specific groups in the asylum activist community. However, the two case studies of London and Berlin offer insights into rapidly changing state machinery and how this machinery in different ways affect asylum seekers´ everyday lives, but also inadvertently remake what political life is and can be. Thus this chapter also hopes to offer a snapshot of this moment of bordering in the UK and Germany, which sets the scene for the following chapters of this thesis.

Methodology

This project comes out of my involvement with diverse asylum activist groups in London and Berlin. It draws upon material that is collected during a thirty-six-months long empirical research project between 2015 and 2018 into asylum activism.

I draw on memory, observation, hundreds of pages of field notes and recorded bits of conversation with forty asylum seekers during my fieldwork in and around different spaces of asylum activism in London and Berlin between 2015 and 2018. Initial contact was made through my involvement with London and Berlin´s activist network. Conversations with asylum seeker activists before, during and after activist group meetings were the starting point of this exploratory research. In January 2016, I become friends with around ten asylum seekers in London and one year later, in May 2017, with seven asylum seekers in Berlin. These asylum seekers then introduced me to friends and acquaintances interested in joining our ongoing conversation about a situated politics of asylum activism. In an average week during my fieldwork, I attended two group meetings, different events organised by asylum activist groups or informal social gatherings with friends.

All asylum activists knew from the beginning about my positionality as a researcher. I conducted forty interviews varying between twenty minutes and three hours over a time span of eighteen months. Most of these interviews were informed by informal conversations in larger groups of asylum seekers. Most of my participants did not feel comfortable signing a written consent form or with me recording our conversations, as it generated high levels of fear and an unnecessary risk for them. The majority of them had also experiences that lead them to distrust researchers. In order to respond to their needs, I only recorded some conversations while I reconstructed most conversations from my fieldwork diary. Some asylum seekers agreed to "replay" conversations that came up in larger group discussions but most of my data came out of my own observations, reflections and notes I took.

Everyone articulated the wish for the recorded conversations to happen in a safe space; such as a quiet spot in the park, their home or my home. This flexible approach felt important as it enabled asylum seekers to play a more active role in setting the research agenda so that it answers better to their needs and respects their concerns and precarious positionality as asylum seeking subjects. In doing so, it helped to build trust and allowed a more in-depth conversation. The bits of conversation I recorded will be kept for twelve months and then destroyed. I used *MAXQDA*, a qualitative data analysis software, to transcribe, organise and analyse my data.

Twenty-four of the forty asylum seekers I was in conversation with were attending formal activist group spaces regularly, while about sixteen of them retreated from the "visible" asylum activist network. On average, the asylum seekers I have interviewed spent fifteen to thirty hours per week going to events, group meetings or gatherings with friends to discuss, share and find support for their challenges. In this thesis, I want to look at everyday gatherings and friendship as a space of activism as much as attending activist group meetings and events.

While in most groups the majority of activists were white and European, I attended some groups that had a majority of people of colour. However, despite this majority, most often meetings and events were held and organised by the white minority, showing how even in spaces of solidarity, whiteness and privilege are practiced. Twenty-one of the asylum seekers I interviewed identified as women* and nineteen as men*. Most asylum seekers I become friends with were in their thirties, however, I also interviewed asylum seekers in their twenties, forties and fifties. The forty asylum seekers I interviewed were from (see Appendix A): Uganda (7), Nigeria (6), Iran (4), Cameroon (3), Afghanistan (3), Somalia (2), Syria (1), Iraq (2), Pakistan (1), Bangladesh (1), Ivory Coast (1), Mali (1) Serbia (1), Gambia (1), Egypt (1), Eritrea (1) and Albania (1). All of them came to the UK and Germany for very different reasons; sixteen asylum seekers came because of LGBT reasons. Sexual identity forces people disproportionately into the asylum system, particularly from African and

South-Asian countries, where identifying as LGBT is illegal. In some countries such as northern Nigeria and southern Somalia there are death penalties for identifying as LGBT.

Being aware of the capacity that my research might cause unintended harm to the interviewed asylum seekers through disclosure of identities or other personal information, all conversation was anonymised. I decided to do this to respond to participants fear of harm, potential stigmatisation of individuals or activist groups and to prevent misuse or misrepresentation of the findings. As my work is not an analysis of asylum activist groups but an analysis of contemporary political spaces, I decided to describe groups in this thesis as different actors instead of offering individual group descriptions. While the main field site of my work was alongside and outside of activist groups and networks, the dynamics I am interested in exploring could have happened in many different group spaces. Not naming groups, however, is mostly done to protect activists and their important work, particularly asylum seeking activists that might be identifiable if group names would be revealed as the asylum activist community in London and Berlin is small. In the results chapters I only make explicit whether the interview and fieldwork diary data was collected in London or Berlin when the context felt essential in order to understand what was said. While I certainly do not claim that this study is any way representative of the asylum seeking position within activist spaces in London and Berlin, I hope that this research may act as an invitation to begin to discuss some of these issues in greater depth.

A first beginning in London

The first eighteen months of my research took place in London. My involvement in asylum activism started in September 2015. A couple of weeks after arriving in London a friend invited me to a "No Borders Night" organised by different activist groups mobilising around migration and bordering. That night I met people from different activist groups mainly campaigning around asylum and detention centres that particularly interested me for the reason that more than eighty percent of their members were people who went

through or still are in the asylum procedure. From my previous involvement in activism around immigration and asylum in Germany, the Netherlands and other cities in England I was left with much discomfort around solidarity groups that discussed and generated knowledge on issues they were not directly affected by.

After the "No Borders Night", I began to attend group meetings and events regularly, which was the starting point of many conversations and friendships. Many of the group meetings revolved around organising different protest actions. In these first few months of my research I was involved in a fairly wide range of online and offline activist communities, all based in London. I was involved in different solidarity networks, social, legal support groups and self-organised initiatives as well as groups that described themselves as political movements. While some of the groups were made out of a majority of white British and EU citizens (mostly solidarity groups and some self-organised initiatives), I was mostly involved in groups where the majority of members were asylum seekers from different African and South Asian countries. Some of the groups were set up in the 1990s, responding to the change in asylum legislation. Other groups were initiated around the "European refugee crisis" in 2015 (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016).

Some groups had members monitoring and leading long-term objectives, others are run based on consensus decision making or according to anarchic principles. About thirty percent of the groups were organised according to a party model, emphasising their ideology and political objectives. About twenty percent were smaller social networks coming out of different communities, offering emotional as well as practical support. About forty percent were self-organised by asylum seekers, together with migrants and refugees. Sixty percent of all groups called themselves "feminist" and forty percent as "direct action groups". Most groups communicated via social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups, next to weekly meetings that members are expected to attend in order to be an "active" part of the group.

For the first six months I attended two group meetings and one to two events every week. In total, from September 2015 to April 2017 I attended over one hundred group meetings and about fifty events in London. Next to this more formal engagement in the form of group meetings and events, I met asylum seeking friends outside of these spaces to share our experience of the asylum activist community and practices, often just to have a cup of tea and share how we are doing. Some asylum seekers I usually met on their own, others in larger groups.

Many asylum activist groups wanted to be welcoming and accessible to everyone, particularly, of course, to people in the asylum system. Their horizontal structures were supposed to allow anyone to be involved. While the asylum activist community is a network made up of many different activists, groups and activisms, the boundaries between groups and group identities seemed often rather fixed. Some events I attended and helped to organise united different politics and activisms around issues such as anti-racism, no-borders, feminism, queerness and anarchism momentarily. However, despite some collective event organising, most people identified strongly with one group only, which meetings they attended regularly.

I am conscious about not wanting to reproduce an image of activism as one-dimensional: activists are, as I will explore in *Chapter 3*, often presented as part of a social movement presenting one and only one issue. This image does not acknowledge the complex forms of activisms people are involved in and the multiple spaces they inhabit.

The asylum activist community in London seemed smaller than in other countries I have lived in, which is as I believe linked to Britain's dispersal system. The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act (The National Archives, 1999) removed asylum seekers´ freedom to move and introduced a national system of compulsory dispersal. Even when asylum seekers require health care access, have family members or friends in a specific area, they do not get to choose where they want to live. Asylum seekers are accommodated in twelve designated areas in the UK, mostly in regions with a lower demand for housing than

London and the South-East of England. Therefore, asylum accommodation is concentrated in deprived areas such as Yorkshire, Humberside and North-East of England (Lyons & Duncan, 2017; Phillips, 2006; Carter & El-Hassan, 2003).

The dispersal system, together with the massive UK detention system, makes connections as well as solidarity difficult. Most asylum seekers I have met at activist events or groups meetings either lived very far out of central London and therefore could not afford the journey into London very regularly or they "sofa hopped"; moving from one person they know to another, staying on floors, and sharing beds to not have to leave London. Having access to the asylum activist community is important to them as it means, as they explained to me, access to support and a platform to meet other people in similar situations. Research from the Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside (2002) and the Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium (2003) has shown that about half of asylum seekers that have been housed in regions such as North-East of England, Humberside and Yorkshire moved away after dispersal, most often to London (Phillips, 2006). Asylum seekers, both inside and outside London, make up a large number of the homeless population and practices such as "sofa hopping" reveal the hidden nature of this homelessness.

Seeing the everyday of asylum activism

Over the following year, I engaged intensely in what is referred to as "observant participation" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Musante & DeWalt, 2010), while deeply immersed in asylum activism in the United Kingdom. This meant organising events together, standing at protest events together in the rain, sharing blankets and raincoats, many conversations in and outside of group meetings and events, accompanying asylum seekers to their substantive interviews at the Home Office, sharing meals in my home, sitting around fires in my garden, spending Thursday afternoons at a local community garden, listening together to podcasts and exchanging books, while the "asylum" was constantly with us.

The "asylum" showed up whenever we walked past the police, or the police ask my asylum seeking friends during protest events for their details. It was with us when I invited them over to my house for lunch and one of them was not able to come because they were running out of money. The border showed up when asylum seekers told me they were not able to attend a demonstration because they could not afford the journey. It was visible in the discomfort I could see in their faces whenever I paid for something or offered them money.

Financial problems were always following them. Many scholars have pointed at the increasing financial precarity asylum seekers find themselves in (Waite, Lewis, Hodkinson & Dwyer, 2013). Starting with the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act (The National Archives, 1999) welfare entitlements for asylum seekers were further and further reduced. Section 55 of the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (The National Archives, 2002) allowed the British state to deny any support in the form of housing or state benefits to asylum seekers, who have submitted their claim for asylum more than seventy-two hours after arrival. Half of the asylum seekers I have become friends with were not aware of the possibility of applying for asylum when entering the UK. Only a few asylum seekers I spoke to made their claim in less than seventy-two hours after entering the UK, some ten years later. The UK Asylum and Immigration Act 2004 (The National Archives, 2004), further increased the financial precarity of asylum seekers by no longer providing them with backdated benefit payments but replacing them with "integration loans[10]" (Refugee Council, 2005). Currently, asylum seekers receive only £36.95 per week per person, which includes food and travel expenses. Additionally, most asylum seekers are not allowed to work and in consequence are often forced into the informal economy, where they frequently experience severely exploitative working conditions (Waite, Lewis, Hodkinson & Dwyer, 2013). My friendships with asylum seekers have shown me how all of

[10] The integration loan replaced the right to apply for backdated benefits but unlike backdated benefits, asylum seekers have to pay these loans back.

them rely on financial support from family and friends that do not have any financial means either but share the little they have. Many of them exchanged care work with other asylum seekers to ease financial burden.

The asylum showed up when we organised trips to the countryside, which were only possible for a few days to make sure that everyone was able to report to the Home Office in time and read their mail. I often open my mail days later, sometimes weeks later, but for people in the asylum process, opening a letter a few days later might determine matters of life and death. The asylum showed up when people told me about their housing situations. Some of my friends had to share a room with three to four other asylum seekers. The constant tension they experienced as a result of their housemates (also in the asylum process) being so afraid to do anything that might risk their right to remain in the UK that they called the police three times a week to inform them about everything that was going on in their home.

As mentioned before the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act introduced a centralised system of housing support for asylum seekers (The National Archives, 1999). This centralised system is managed by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) of the Home Office who increasingly contracted asylum accommodation to large private companies. This private rental housing has repeatedly been criticised for being far below acceptable standards (Phillips, 2006). This illustrates how preventing people from accessing safe and secure housing, is an implemented structure and process of border-*making* that creates a "hostile environment" and thus intentionally makes asylum seekers uncomfortable.

The asylum always being with us meant many tears, exhaustion, depression, constant worrying and trying to cope with the precarity provided by their social positioning as asylum seekers. It gave me an insight, although not an embodied one, into how bordering works. It works by making, shaping every moment of asylum seekers´ everyday lives, never leaving their side. It works through the body by making people uncomfortable

wherever they go, whatever they do. These everyday experiences that all asylum seekers shared, did often not allow them to appear in formal asylum activist group spaces; spaces that I first perceived as the only *real* space of asylum activism. Some did attend group meetings and went to events, most however, did not have space, time, money or emotional wellbeing to travel to meetings and events.

Our conversations, however, also brought about something that felt, compared with all the other things, like moments of connection, of comfort; it brought about an ongoing conversation about our experience of activist spaces. Half of us continued our involvement in asylum activist groups. We attended weekly group meetings of two groups in which we met other asylum seekers, organised smaller and bigger events, as well as two transnational days of action in a group collective made out of different asylum activist actors. More asylum seekers became friends and joined our conversation outside of the formal groups and event spaces. Although the space of these groups; meetings and events; was a big part of our involvement, it was the space of the everyday that became the main focus of this dissertation. It was in the space of the everyday where we shared our experiences of our activist involvement and the, hard to pin down, emotional and affective practices of asylum activism we observed and felt, but were not always able to put into words.

Most of us had a very similar experience of activist group spaces. All the people I became friends with experienced asylum activist spaces as "uncomfortable" and it was in us having this ongoing conversation about discomfort that brought us closer. Despite our very different everyday experiences, it felt like a space of understanding opened up between us. The sharing space we created outside of the formal activist group spaces opened up a process of politicisation of their discomfort; of their everyday bordering experiences. It was the politicisation of these emotions and affects that allowed us to make meaning of asylum seekers embodied experience. My research journey followed our interest in exploring our shared as well as different physical and emotional reactions to this discomfort. The group of asylum seekers I was close to slowly grew to around

twenty people. Some of us spent a lot of time sitting in the living room of my house-share drinking tea and sharing about how political spaces make us feel. Others we only saw once to twice a week as they had a job and family or felt uncomfortable in my white house-share.

Reflecting now about my fieldwork in London, the first eighteen months of my research, I can trace how it made me reconsider my understanding of activism as well as the political. It opened up the space of the "field" by showing me that asylum seekers encounter the border everywhere. This everywhere does not only extend across different physical spaces but also across different dimensions of experience: the physical, the emotional, the social and the mental. Simultaneously, when border-*making* is everywhere, there is also always the possibility everywhere for asylum activism and people in solidarity to negotiate these *borders-in-making*. My encounters with asylum seekers in London thus confronted me with the fact that the space of activism cannot be bound to particular groups or a particular physical space but rather is an open space, always in the process of being made. It is a relational construct (Massey, 2005) that can appear in the everyday as much as in activist group and event spaces.

After beginning to understand the significance of the politics of the everyday as well as the pervasiveness of bordering, I left London at the beginning of May 2017 and moved to Berlin to continue my exploration of asylum activism there. While my fieldwork in London has made me contemplate the narrowness of my understanding of political space and the importance of the everyday, affect and emotion**,** my time in Berlin further confronted me with the pervasiveness and affective and emotional workings of today's mode of bordering. Moreover, it illustrated how different state bordering practices produce different spaces of asylum activism. The multi-sited nature of my research (Marcus, 1998) allowed me to trace and connect bordering practices across different social and cultural spaces.

Another beginning in Berlin

Settling into Berlin happened quickly as I had lived there before and was previously involved in the asylum activist community. My engagement there started with a friend catching me up on the recent developments in Berlin. Much had changed since I left Berlin in September 2014 to move to the UK. Since 2009 the number of asylum seekers coming to Germany and Berlin, has been increasing (BAMF, 2013). The number even further increased between 2012 and 2015; what was then labelled as the "refugee crisis". In 2015, Germany received 442.000 asylum applications while the UK in contrast only received 39.000 applications (BAMF, 2017). While the number of asylum seekers clearly marked a historical moment, rather than a "refugee crisis", it was a crisis of the bureaucratic machineries in Germany that showed the unwillingness and incapacity of one of the richest European states to provide basic needs to asylum seekers due to years of cuts in social housing and the increasing usage of political consultancy that costs billions originally allocated to providing language classes and education for asylum seekers ("McKinsey gibt Merkel", 2016).

As already briefly mentioned, the German government responded in 2015 similar to the early 1990's with further restrictions on the right to asylum. In October 2015 and March 2016, the so-called Asylum Packages I and II were passed (Deutscher Bundestag, 2016). The packages suspended family reunification for asylum seekers with subsidiary protection status for a period of two years decreased their monthly benefits and established a new federal police unit to help with replacement documents so asylum seekers could be deported faster. Most publicly criticised was the section that declared Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro as so-called "safe" countries[11], which means asylum applications from people from these countries followed a new fast-track procedure not

[11] A "safe" country (UNHCR, 1991) is a country in which, according to the EU or one specific EU-country, human rights are respected and hence there is no risk of persecution. Asylum requests from people from "safe" countries are generally presumed to be invalid, and in consequence, their claims do not receive an in-depth examination on the grounds of persecution.

guaranteeing access to a fair asylum process. It also enabled authorities to deport asylum seekers who had committed crimes and only allowed asylum seekers that were registered in to them assigned reception centre access to benefits. From my conversations with asylum seekers, I know how many end up homeless and in poverty (not receiving benefits) in order to stay in Berlin instead of living in the assigned reception centre that could be anywhere in Germany, usually in very remote areas. Staying in Berlin allows them often to be close to family and friends, social networks, legal and medical help and work.

As mentioned before, In the last few years in Germany, a huge asylum machinery was developed in quick response to the rise in numbers. Alongside and in response to this machinery, massive political negotiation of bordering practices was enabled through the particular context in Berlin. Berlin, with a population of 3.6 million, was temporarily housing around 70.000 asylum seekers in early 2017 (BAMF, 2018). According to Flüchtlingsrat Berlin (The German Refugee Council), in 2015 and 2016 about eighty-five percent of asylum seekers in Berlin were housed in mass shelters, structured like camps (2016). Only fifteen percent were able to stay in private flats.

Most camps were located in former hotels, gyms, sports halls, schools and airports. These mass shelters were supposed to only be a temporary solution, however, in December 2016, one year after the peak month of November 2015 when nearly 10.000 asylum seekers arrived in Berlin, around 2.800 asylum seekers were still living in sports halls and other emergency shelters. These camps did not provide any privacy as most of these buildings were composed of one big hall. There were no adequate toilets and showers due to a lack of sufficient water connections. Sometimes around two-hundred asylum seekers lived in one hall, where bunk beds or field beds were arranged next to each other. People had to eat, sleep and live all in one big room. Similarly, to the UK this shows how the German state uses precarious housing as a tool to border and differentiate bodies of asylum seekers and *problematic* bodies.

The inhumane living conditions at the camps and the high concentration of people, however, also opened up spaces of solidarity and self-organisation that led to a huge asylum activist community. Out of frustration and anger with conditions in the camps asylum seekers organised several protests between 2015 and 2017 (Mai, 2017). The fact that most of these mass shelters were located in the centre(s) of Berlin allowed for networks to emerge between self-organising asylum seekers and the local activist community.

From the beginning of May 2017 to September 2017, I was deeply immersed in asylum activism in Berlin. This meant organising events together, attending two to three group meetings in an average week, having long conversations with about twenty asylum seekers about their everyday lives. It also meant writing newspaper articles together with asylum seekers to raise public awareness about their living conditions, helping asylum seekers to find a place to stay after they had been thrown out of a camp (in response to speaking up about the unacceptable conditions) and sharing many meals as well as tears together. As in London, the “asylum” was constantly with us. Due to the massive private asylum machinery that was set up in Berlin, asylum seekers´ everyday lives seemed even more regulated and controlled than asylum seekers´ lives in London.

As mentioned before, to avoid the negative consequences that the naming of groups might bring about, I will describe the groups in this thesis as different actors instead of offering individual group descriptions. In Berlin, I will name one network, the "O-Platz movement" (Refugee Movement, 2012; Langa, 2015), to describe the genealogy of asylum activism in Germany. This movement marked the beginning of a massive refugee movement out of which many activist groups all over Germany emerged. Naming this movement, however, does not allow for the identification of asylum seekers participating in this research.

Similarly to my fieldwork in London, the main field site of my work was alongside and outside of activist groups and networks. However, compared to London these boundaries

appeared more fluid to me. Even though there were groups, that were organised similarly to groups I was involved in London, the space of asylum activism seemed to exceed these "formal" group spaces. Groups appeared and disappeared depending on the need for particular group structures for projects or for example a press conference. Some groups could not be distinguished as they were made up of the same people, had similar objectives and members did not identify with any group identity. I point at these differences not to make any kind of evaluation, but because it shows how states and historical moments create different political spaces. The asylum state machinery in Germany and its interconnected structures of border-*making* has changed so often and fast in the last five years, that, as activist explained to me, asylum activism that wants to be in conversation with these ever-changing bordering practices needed an equally fast and pop-up nature.

The high concentration of people, the moment of "crisis" in Germany, produced horrible living conditions and the depletion of asylum seekers and people in solidarity, but it also enabled a strong, resourceful and very diverse asylum activist community. It was the high concentration that allowed asylum seekers to self-organise, that broke down the dispersal system of the German state that was set up to disable any kind of solidarity.

I was involved in different networks, self-organised initiatives as well as groups that described themselves as political movements. Some of the groups were made out of a majority of white German and EU citizens, others had a majority of asylum seekers. Some of these groups were set up in response to the earlier described "refugee movement" of 2012 to 2014. Again, it was in 2012 when, for the first time, the conditions of asylum seekers in Germany gained huge media attention. In 2012, an Iranian refugee, Mohammed Rahsepar, hanged himself in a lager[12] for asylum seekers in southern Germany. After Mohammed´s death, asylum seekers together with other activist groups started to organise protests to draw attention to the horrible living conditions of asylum

[12] The asylum activist community in Berlin uses the German word "lager" in order to emphasise that asylum shelters are structured like camps.

seekers. Shortly after Mohammed´s death, in March 2012, a group of young Iranian asylum seekers began a hunger strike in Würzburg, during which they sewed their lips (Przybilla, 2012). The images of the asylum seekers with sewed lips received much media attention and when other asylum seekers in Germany saw them, they organised similar actions in other cities.

Noticing the increasing political movement of asylum seekers all over Germany, they decided to use the momentum and march together from Würzburg to Berlin as a form of collective protest. In Berlin, they then decided to occupy the Oranienplatz, a square in Berlin´s district Kreuzberg, to continue their protest and raise more public awareness. Out of this movement and the occupation of Oranienplatz, a network "O-Platz movement" was born (Refugee Movement, 2012; Langa, 2015).

In October 2012 the same movement occupied the Gerhart-Hauptmann-Schule, an old school building in the same district. The district's administration allowed the asylum seekers to temporarily stay in the school. Over the following months, the asylum seekers organised many events together with other activists. From the 26th of February to 20th of March 2013, for example, the collective organised a "Refugee´s Revolution" bus (Refugees Revolution, 2013) that toured through twenty-two German cities with the objective to build a larger movement. After the camp at Oranienplatz was evicted in 2014 the collective continued to organise smaller actions and raise awareness about the living conditions of asylum seekers. Numerous groups all over Germany were set up in response to this movement. I was involved with three groups that grew out of this series of protests. Some of these groups were only made up of women* activists or people within the movement who identified as LGBT in order to discuss the entanglement of bordering, race, gender and sexuality.

Other networks, groups and initiatives I was involved in were formed around the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015, responding to the bad conditions in mass shelters and the amendments to asylum legislation that had followed the racist mobilisation and violence

against asylum seekers. Activists that have previously been involved in other groups and networks around issues such as anti-racism, anti-fascism, gentrification and housing activism started a new network of groups that connected these issues to bordering and asylum. Most of these groups refused to work together with local authorities and focused on building relationships with asylum seekers living inside of camps to organise actions together. The work of these groups changed when most temporary mass shelters were closed in early spring 2017. The asylum seekers that lived in these camps (schools, sport halls and airports) were then, as I witnessed during my time in Berlin, moved from central areas to districts further out and so into even more isolation. However bad the situation in these mass camps were, most of these temporary shelters were located in Berlin´s city centre(s) and thus embedded in an active support network consisting of volunteers and NGOs who were engaged within the camps offering German classes, child care and various activities, something that asylum seekers, as well as camp administrations, strongly relied on. Asylum seekers living in these more centrally located camps benefited from a more diverse environment with politically active groups and shorter pathways to support structures and institutional facilities.

Series of container villages, accommodation in metal containers, so-called "tempohomes[13]" (“Senat plant”, 2018), were built in the outskirts of the city in districts such as Lichterfelde-Zehlendorf, Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Lichtenberg and Reinickendorf.

The third group that made up the asylum activist community in Berlin were grassroots initiatives that were not initially motivated by "political" considerations but what comes often to be called "humanitarian" or "solidarity” work and by that separated from the “political” work done by other asylum activist actors. Due to the lack of support offered by local governments and NGO´s in Germany, asylum seekers were lacking food, water, accommodation, access to language courses and health care. In response to that grassroots initiatives, run by volunteers, started to set up support structures to

[13] “tempohomes” is what Berlin´s administration calls temporary state-owned lightweight housing with a limited lifespan, usually containers.

compensate for the states inability and unwillingness to adequately assist asylum seekers in Berlin. Volunteers distributed water, food, medical and legal support, taught German and English and assisted asylum seekers with finding a place to live. These grassroots initiatives created websites to sign up for projects and also experimented with different creative political responses. While these initiatives at first did not identify as political, being confronted with the harmful bordering practices weeks later many of these activists started to demand a change of asylum policies and a more humane treatment of asylum seekers in Germany.

As this illustrates, the visibility of the "crisis" in central Berlin opened up the space of activism to a lot of people that were not interested in politics around asylum issues before. They got involved as their direct neighbour was lacking basic needs or because of public images of asylum seekers waiting in lines for days for their registration at the State Office for Health and Social Affairs (LaGeSo).

It was the central location as well as the scale and intensity of the "crisis" that shook up the formal activist spaces of politics in Germany.

The increase in asylum seekers also led to a huge private market[14] benefiting from the "crisis" (Knight, 2016; Pfahler, 2015; Soos & Siebert, 2015). Since 2012, the federal state of Berlin commissioned an increasing number of non-state actors, such as private companies and charity organisations to provide asylum housing. In 2015, half of all asylum accommodation in Berlin was managed by private companies such as Gierso or "European Care".

Many of the companies who then began to manage asylum accommodation had no knowledge about the asylum procedure or experience and neither did the state provide training, their objective was purely profit driven. Companies got allocated a fixed amount

[14] Many asylum activist groups in Berlin called this private market "lager industry" (camp industry) referring to immigration industrial complex.

per person a day, in Berlin that was between seven and fifty Euros per person per day (Knight, 2016; Pfahler, 2015; Soos & Siebert, 2015). The state had no control over how money was allocated. As result, companies often offered accommodation in which thousand asylum seekers had to share four to five bathrooms. While the standard of housing was inhumane, these private companies made Billions of Euros out of asylum accommodation. Cleaning, security and catering were also, in the majority of the cases, sub-contracted to private companies with similar exploitation and profit-driven structures.

As my five months of fieldwork in Berlin has shown me, this increasingly private asylum machinery regulated every moment of asylum seekers´ lives, and thus every moment I shared with them. It decided where they could go, what they could eat, whom they could meet and most importantly, it impacted on how they felt. Camp spaces in Berlin are highly regulated and controlled spaces, leaving most asylum seekers I spoke to in a constant state of fear, stress and powerlessness. The seven women* I became close to told me often about the constant tension they felt in their bodies. Most of them had experienced sexualised violence at some point in their lives and living in a camp space, as they shared, meant constantly being watched by around fifteen male security guards. During the day, these women* were in constant fear of being sexually harassed and at night they had difficulty falling asleep as they felt unsafe in their own rooms not being able to lock their doors.

Becoming close to these women* meant hearing many stories about the complete lack of privacy and safety in Berlin´s camps. It brought me closer to an understanding of what it means, and how it feels like to be constantly at the border: Waking up in the morning and being scared, going to the bathroom and being scared, trying to shower as quick as possible while always looking up if someone is watching and constant worrying about money and food. Most asylum seekers I spoke to live in camps where food is provided by catering firms. Food was served at fixed meal times and going to a doctor’s appointment, meeting a lawyer or attending an activist group meeting meant missing one or two out of three meals a day. Constantly being at the border means having no agency in deciding

on what you want to eat and when. Sometimes asylum seekers went back and forth two times a day just to make it to their set meal times. Most of the asylum seekers I met became at least once sick from the food that was served. The camp administration receives around two-hundred Euro per person per month for catering, that I heard cannot always be eaten, due to products being in bad condition, sometimes expired, sometimes cooked too spicy, especially for young children or women* who breastfeed.

In the five months in Berlin, I have heard numerous stories about people having Diarrhea, throwing up or having to go to the hospital because of the food that was served. Parents were worried about their children getting sick because of the food being too spicy. The asylum machinery was even infiltrating on women* breastfeeding their children. A forty-year-old woman* from Serbia called Marija, I became friends with, had a four-month old child. She was worried about the bad food she was eating but felt some comfort knowing that at least her child would get her "quality milk". However, a few weeks later her child started to get sick from drinking her breast milk. According to the doctor, it was due to the spicy food she was served at the camp. When I spoke to her a month later, Marija was heartbroken and in tears because her child stopped accepting her milk. When she told me the story she looked at her child and started crying.

> "You know it is really hard. Everything was ok before we moved into the camp. He would drink. But then he stopped" (Marija, 2017).

Tears were running down her face. She held her breasts and said:

> "I stopped to produce milk, I think it is because of the stress as well... and now he can't drink my quality milk any longer, he needs to drink this powder" (Marija, 2017)

pointing at the Nestle milk powder box on the table in front of us.

The stories asylum seekers shared with me, such as Marija, were stories full of worry, fear and pain. Stories of great discomfort that further confronted me with the materiality of

bordering. My response to hearing these stories was always emotional, of course, it was one of discomfort and rage. Being at the border meant for these women* that their most intimate relationships were being infiltrated by private companies and profit maximisation. Being at the border meant having to constantly worry about whether your basic needs were being met. It meant, as I learned, language barriers and not knowing whom to trust. It meant constantly feeling worried, helpless, depleted and angry - all at the same time.

As in London, these everyday experiences that all asylum seekers I met shared, did not allow them to always appear in formal political spaces. Some did, others did not have space, time, money or emotional wellbeing to travel to meetings and events. Most were scared that the camp administration would find out about their political involvement and throw them out of their "home". Particularly for mothers and fathers it was nearly impossible to travel anywhere in-between appointments, chasing social workers and regulated meal times. In consequence, the focus of my fieldwork moved even further into the everyday. In Berlin, conversations in the everyday, as well as conversations during group meetings and events, mostly moved around state-funded spaces such as camps as they represented such violent, emotional and psychologically abusive spaces of bordering. The space and body of the irregular migrant, the asylum seekers, felt completely managed in Germany. This unlivability[15] (Butler, 2006) produced by the *everyday camp life*, the complete management of asylum seekers´ lives and bodies, is a state actively produced and maintained, by governments in Germany to create a hostile environment.

A group of ten asylum seekers and I started writing reports addressing newspapers, asylum camp management and politicians/representatives to change the devastating conditions under which they were living. Close friendships developed over the first two months mostly with women*, who have lived in different camps sharing their stories about

[15] An „unliveable" life for Butler (2006) is a life that is at risk of violence, death, starvation, incarceration, and deprivation. A life not worth protecting, sheltering, or sustaining; a disposable life.

sexual violence, harassment and control through security guards and social workers. From the beginning, I observed how, contrary to London, much of the asylum activism grew out of these camp spaces. The space of the camp and the sociality growing out of it illustrates how everyday spaces can be turned into political, public spaces by reclaiming the space´s purpose. These spaces were constructed to "store" and isolate asylum seekers and yet, asylum seekers reclaimed these spaces as spaces for resistance. Asylum seekers held meetings, hunger strikes and other protest actions in these spaces. They were turned into spaces of connection, of solidarity, and by that reconfigured the materiality of this hostile space.

Conclusion

This chapter explained my fieldwork encounters in London and Berlin and illustrated how my understanding of the space of asylum activism was constantly developing during my immersed engagement in these communities. Throughout my fieldwork, I was, again and again, returning to the question of what asylum activism is. I learned that where and how I looked at asylum activism determined what political agencies I noticed. Bordering processes effect asylum seekers in London and Berlin in similar and yet also different ways and therefore the possibility of asylum activism must also be located in different spaces. Whereas in London, formal asylum activist group spaces were the spaces that often connected people and offered a social network, in Berlin, because of the housing arrangement set up in response to the increase in asylum seekers, camp spaces were spaces where asylum seekers connected and organised politically.

This shows how contextual and relational asylum activism is. Firstly, different possibilities for asylum activism arose out of different bordering practices in the UK and Germany. Secondly, it revealed that the space of asylum activism, in both cities, is a space of encounter, of relationship. A space in which asylum seekers come together and share their experiences, whether that is in formal activist spaces or the everyday in the UK, or in and around camp spaces in Berlin.

Only locating the possibilities for asylum activism in specific physical spaces such as asylum activist groups or events thus means not noticing and acknowledging the political possibilities outside of these spaces. Moreover, bordering practices impact on people's capacity of being involved in formal political spaces, and thus only locating agency within these spaces means attending to a very narrow model of politics. In other words, only looking at formal activist spaces means not being able to listen to the voices most affected by bordering practices. This further reinforces the importance of looking at asylum activism as a process, a *becoming activist*, rather than a specific space, action or identity. My fieldwork has shown me that beyond the distinction of "inside" and "outside" of asylum activism, in the sense of particular activist groups and event spaces somebody is part of or not, there is something to learn about how political spaces, affect, emotion and the everyday flow into each other to produce the space of asylum activism.

Looking at asylum activism as nuanced and "always in process of being made" allows me to map socialities beyond the boundaries of a narrow understanding of the political. It also makes possible to look at how ever-shifting structural and institutional processes of bordering affect asylum seekers in different and similar ways. As this chapter has shown, the possibility of asylum activism always emerges in an encounter; either between different asylum-seeking subjects, asylum and non-asylum seeking subjects and also where particular bordering practices and asylum seeking activist subjects meet. Current research, however, often only focuses on the space of solidarity; where asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers meet.

3

Conceptualising the Politics of Asylum Activism: Connecting Activism, Affect and Bordered Positionalities

In this chapter, I want to situate the politics of asylum activism, by bringing together three emergent bodies of scholarship: literature on activism, affect and emotion and asylum. I want to illustrate how looking at their entanglements in the context of asylum activism allows a more textured and situated analysis of what I want to call here the "politics of asylum activism": the *doings* of different positionalities, affect and emotion in asylum activist spaces. I am first discussing notions of the political and emergent scholarship on the everyday, affect and emotion in activism to show, how these accounts often do not look at different positionalities beyond gender and the question of who does what in organisational structures of big social movements. I then attend to the literature on affect and emotion, to show how affect and emotion emerge from specific subject positions and contexts. I will then, finally, turn to the literature on asylum activism to explore how its focus on claimed citizenship represents a very narrow understanding of political agency.

Literature on asylum activism does often not focus on the everyday and how affect and emotion becomes a language through which different positionalities in these spaces are communicated. This literature review creates linkages between feminist and emotional geographies, affect studies, citizenship studies, sociology and political theory and in doing so extends the discussion of the coming together of activism, asylum, emotion and affect.

My fieldwork encounters in asylum activist communities between 2015 and 2018 inspired me to contemplate the question of how we can explore and map activist communities with a focus on the complex *doings* of affect, emotion and the asylum positionality. Asylum activist communities are often portrayed as utopias of multicultural practice and solidarity, however, as *Chapter 3* to *Chapter 6* will show, exclusions and differences are also reproduced in these spaces. Looking at asylum activism as spaces in which different social locations and experiences meet, confronts us with the important question of how we can connect to each other across these differences. This question, I will argue, is particularly relevant in the context of asylum activism as the asylum experience is marked by practices based upon the exclusion and differentiation of radicalised bodies.

My thesis wants to contribute to this scholarship by asking the following questions: How are asylum activist spaces in the London and Berlin affectively and emotionally experienced? What are affects and emotions *doing* in these spaces? How are emotions and affects connected to different positionalities and politics? What does the entanglement between asylum, affect and emotion tells us about the construction of political spaces and political responses in this moment of bordering in the UK and Germany?

I am interested in what asylum activism *does* - what emotions, affects it produces and how these emotions and affects are entangled with different politics and positionalities. As already mentioned, my engagement with the politics of asylum activism happened over time in form of an ethnographic and theoretical journey. My theoretical engagement happened inspired by and alongside the learning through observations, gut feelings, emotions and conversations with asylum seekers. It was through friendships with asylum seekers that unexpected frames for the study of asylum activism emerged that inspired conceptualisations beyond well-established theoretical ones. The theoretical journey, I will try to map in this chapter, thus happened in conversation with my field encounters and hence cannot be explained without it. Therefore, this literature review will not be a theory chapter in the traditional sense but show the connection between theory and

practice in my research and how both shaped each other. By turning towards both my field journey and literature journey and their entanglement, I hope to lay open their relationality and its affects, which in research is often presented as the *background* (Ahmed, 2006).

My fieldwork has demonstrated that we can better capture the *doings* of different positionalities in activist spaces when we pay attention to affect and emotion. As the previous chapter has tried to show, my understanding of asylum activism is not tied to specific spaces, actors or acts but is found in relation, as a space always in process of being made. I want to look at the workings of different positionalities in these spaces as emerging in relationships, the everyday; the intimate part of activism. As already outlined in the previous chapters, my research and activist journey began with what I call a turn towards the everyday.

Turning towards the everyday

When I started my research in autumn 2015, I thought of asylum activism as everything that happens in spaces of organised "politics"; group meetings, protest events; in other words anywhere where people come together to speak about and act towards changing the asylum system. My picture of activism was rooted in images of public protest events and large-scale collective action of asylum seekers as well as people in solidarity. This impression was formed by my experience as an activist over the last ten years and my theoretical readings of protest and social movement literature in which activism is often portrayed as unconventional physical public activity (e.g. McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996; Della Porta & Diani, 2009; Opp, 2009). These scholars portray activism as a joint public action such as a demonstration, street blockage, assembly or direct action that is part of one single social movement (McKay 1998; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006; Crossley 2003; Chesters and Welch 2004). At the heart of these traditional representations of activism is the subject as an independent and rational agent governed by logic and reason (Butler, 2015). The act of activism is generally considered as a planned and

intentional act; the outcome of hours of organisation and planning to achieve a certain end or aim (Horton & Kraft, 2009). As such, what happens before and after these staged events, is rendered as not important.

When my engagement in asylum activism started, I paid attention to group activities and events, which I understood as the “field". The asylum activist community appeared to me as a more or less formally organised space consisting of different terrains. With formally organised space I mean coordinated group spaces in which people met to organise public protest events such as demonstrations, pride parades or blockades. I refer to "formal" activist spaces in contrast to the other spaces of asylum activism I explore in my research, such as the everyday and the space of friendship. There was also a regularity to most of these formal activist spaces. All groups had weekly meetings and the meetings were structured in similar ways: Usually, they started with a quick update on current events, followed by a reflection on recent protest actions of the group. Afterwards, there was time for the organisation of future actions. Some groups did readings on famous activists and/or political theory. The last ten to thirty minutes were kept for questions and other inputs. Attending meetings and events of two to three asylum activist groups in London, my research was focused on exploring political subjectivities by looking at big public events such as protest actions and demonstrations. At that time, I understood an "activist" as a person who appeared in these organisational spaces and self-identified as an activist.

Months later, in spring 2016, it was my deeper engagement as well as friendships with asylum seekers that brought me to expand my notion of activism and the political and turn towards the "everyday". A lot of asylum seekers did not frame their involvement as "political" and often eschewed the realm of official, organised politics. In media and social movement literature activism is understood as a "politics in action" or a "political way of life" (Ranciere, 2011). The assumption that there is a political way of life, however, always comes with the idea of "the political" as a specific sphere, separated from a non-political life: the everyday. My conversations with asylum seekers turned my attention

towards this "non-political life"; what happens alongside and outside of these activist group spaces I was involved in, as well as what happened inside them but went unnoticed.

Asylum seekers shared many stories about little acts of care, of solidarity, of hope they exchanged with other asylum seekers that seemed to transform their lives in significant ways. All of these little acts of care, of solidarity, of hope I observed and was told about, however, happened outside of these formal spaces of political organising and were not framed as political actions. Hearing these stories inspired me to contemplate and reconsider my notion of activism and engage with literature that critiqued a more traditional understanding of political activism. In the following months I began to understand these spaces of the "alongside", "outside" and "inside but unacknowledged", the spaces of the everyday, as not only relevant for making a "politics of action" possible, but also as carrying the possibility for asylum activism in itself. I hence want to use the term the "everyday" in this thesis for everything that is placed outside of what we call the political, including day-to-day acts as well as what is not made political within formal activist spaces: for example, affect and emotion. The space of the everyday did thus not only open up outside of the formal political but also within it.

From the 1960s, an emergent body of literature on activism tried to decentralise traditional understanding of activism as grant actions in public space and to politicise the everyday (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Abu-Lughod, 1990; Abrahams, 1992; Chatterton, 2006; Martin Hanson & Fontaine, 2007; Horton & Kraftl, 2009; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; and Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Zembylas, 2013). Most of these scholars argued that the prioritisation of particular types of activism produces a very narrow understanding of activism, manifesting in the acknowledgment and recognition of only "dramatic, iconic, totemic, glamorous and heroic" forms of activism (Keith & Pile, 2013) such as large public demonstrations and other "staged" actions to the exclusion of a range of everyday life activities. These scholars, therefore, argued for an expansion of what counts as "activism", to take small and personal forms of activism into consideration. According to

Martin, Hanson and Fontaine (2007) everyday acts of activism are often what touches people most deeply and motivates them to address social inequalities.

In the last two decades, scholars in the social sciences increasingly paid more attention to "alternative" versions of activism, such as for example; *everyday activism* (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010; Stephenson-Abetz, 2012) or *implicit activism* (Horton & Kraft, 2009). Implicit activisms are "activisms which are politicised, affirmative and potentially transformative, but which are modest, quotidian and proceed with little fan-fare" (Horton & Kraftl, 2009, p. 21). Others (e.g. Ruddick, 2004; Keith & Pile, 2013) have referred to debates around the potential of every act to possess activist qualities and effects. All of these scholars criticised the way in which everyday acts are often overlooked.

While reading this scholarship on everyday activism was helpful to understand what I was encountering in the field, it was not just these acts of solidarity, care and hope that I was observing, and the "boundaries" of traditional activism, of a politics in action, they were crossing, it was also their caring, emotional, embodied nature that made me aware of the naturalised inattention to feelings and emotions in spaces of asylum activism. Understanding the role of emotion in asylum activism, however, did not only seem to be important because of the emotional nature of these acts, there were also other dynamics present during activist meetings and events that played out on an emotional, embodied level. Some were expressed in sitting in silence or falling asleep during group meetings. Most often it was an absence, a withdrawal of action, speech or participation, that marked it next to a subtle, sometimes intense feeling of discomfort. It was the elusiveness of these discomforts that captured my attention. These emotions were repeating themselves whenever I sat in group meetings or attended an event.

Through my ongoing conversations with asylum seekers in London and Berlin, I began to conceptualise these emotions as a language through which different positionalities in these spaces were negotiated and communicated. All forty asylum seekers I was in conversation with were interested in exploring the question of how asylum activist spaces

made them feel, what affects and emotions were produced in this spaces and how they are linked to their social positioning as asylum seekers. It was a turning towards the "felt" dimension of asylum activism what gave asylum seekers and me a more detailed understanding of the dynamics we were observing and feeling. While I could feel their discomfort during and outside of group spaces in form of gut feelings, discomfort and shame in my own body, it was mainly our many conversations about our different relationship to this discomfort that allowed us to attend to the social and cultural practice of discomfort in these activist spaces.

Turning towards emotion, affect and the body

Alongside the exploration of everyday activism and the attempt to consider acts in everyday life as activist acts; acts with political relevance, there has also been a growing interest in the role of emotions in activism (Aminzade and McAdam, 2002; King & Flam, 2005; Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2009; Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001; Wright, 2010; Askins, 2009). Scholars have attended to the "interior" dimension of activism by exploring activism as relational, corporeal and emotionally laden (Brown & Pickerill, 2009). Others have illustrated how social movements activate emotions in others such as fear, anger, and shame to mobilise collective action (Gould, 2002; Holmes, 2004). Feminist scholarship on witnessing has attended to the role of emotions in creating political communities (e.g. Ettlinger, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Katz, 2004) and the political possibilities of work performed on the basis of compassion, friendship and love.

Emotions are political and can be used to sustain certain power structures rather than being individual, subjective responses to external factors (Wilkinson, 2009; Illouz, 1997; 2007; Ahmed, 2013). Black feminist and queer scholars and activists in particular, have famously explored how emotions are entangled with racism and can only be negotiated when being attended to, explored and contextualised (Lorde, 1981; Munt, 2007; Collins, 1986; Cohen, 2004; Hooks, 2000). As scholars have illustrated, states mobilise politics of fear (Ahmed, 2004; Zembylas, 2011; Hopkins & Smith, 2008), anger (Lorde, 1981;

Zembylas, 2007; Bell, 2009) and shame (Munt, 2007; Ahmed, 2004, Zembylas, 2008) to uphold existing power structures.

Butler (2015) has also attended to corporeal materiality of resistant subjectivity. In her work, she engages with the body as a space of resistance. In conversation with Arendt´s notion of the political (e.g. Honig, 2010), she rethinks her ideas of a political subject constituted by action and speech and argues that we need to think the performativity of politics beyond speech and acts to include actions of the body. Here the body is a site of struggle, a space where inequality and social order is negotiated. She argues: "the concerted action that characterizes resistance is sometimes found in the verbal speech act or the heroic fight, but it is also found in those bodily gestures of refusal, silence, movement, and refusal to move" (p. 218).

Feminist scholars laid the ground for this "emotional turn" in scholarship on activism and politics. Over the last hundred years, feminist writers have over and over again challenged epistemology, rationality, objectivity as well as the duality of the political/public and the private (e.g. Collins, 1986; Cahill, 2007; Haraway; 1988; Jaggar, 1989; Butler, 2006; Harding, 1987; 2008; Wright, 2010; Illouz, 1997). Next to these scholars, outside and inside academia, feminist activists have mobilised around issues such as reproduction, domestic violence and racism to show that the personal is always political (e.g. Lorde, 1978; Hook, 2000; Fine; 1992).

Alongside with this emotional turn in critical and feminist literature in the last decade, there has also been an emergent affective turn in social sciences (Clough, 2008). This scholarship is mainly inspired by Deleuze, the philosophy of Spinoza, Whitehead and Bergson (e.g. Massumi, 2002; Wetherell, 2013; Blackman, 2012; Thrift, 2008; Ahmed, 2004; Tolia-Kelly, 2010). According to these scholars, affect draws attention to the ways in which bodies shift into new formations through their encounter with other bodies. A body in this context refers to any "body" in the world; human or non-human, animate or inanimate: a body of sound, an idea, linguistic corpus, or a social body or system.

The emergence of the "affective turn" (Clough, 2008; Kim & Bianco, 2007; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010) in the humanities and social sciences has been questioned by feminist geographers of emotions (e.g. Boler & Zembylas, 2016), amongst other feminist writers (Ahmed, 2004), who have drawn attention to the feminist scholarly genealogy (as discussed before) that predates recent theorisations of affect.

While some affect scholars think of affect as pre-discursive, with the possibility to disturb norms and existing power structures (e.g. Massumi, Thrift), others (e.g. Butler, Ahmed, Wetherwell and Blackman) have criticised the dichotomy between discursive and non-discursive, emotion and affect. Brian Massumi most famously theorised this key conceptual antagonism: the separation of affect from emotion. While he derived his theorisation from Spinoza, Massumi draws the line between affect and emotion more sharply than Spinoza did in his writing. Massumi describes affects as an intensity of experience; an arousal that is registered on a physiological rather than conscious level and suggests looking at affects as "pre-subjective", "visceral" and autonomic bodily responses that espace our mind. Massumi speaks of an "emotion", when a sensation makes it into our conscious awareness and there is a reflective acknowledgement of the experience. An emotion is "a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal" (2002, p. 28).

According to Massumi, emotion is qualified intensity, "the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativisable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognised" (2002, p. 28). Massumi (1996) thus draws a thick line between bodily movements or forces and social meaning-making. Bodily affects, resulting from encounters with other bodies, are according to him generative (and potentially radical) while emotions and discourses are no new formations; they are heavily culturally shaped and therefore rather conform existing power dynamics (Hemmings, 2005).

Countering Brian Massumi´s argument on the autonomy of affect, Sara Ahmed argued for the impossibility of telling apart affect from emotion in any clear manner. Therefore, she uses them interchangeably. I will follow Ahmed (2004) and others (e.g. Brennan, 2004; Barad, 2007; Thien, 2005) and a growing tendency in research to try to go beyond the ontological dichotomy between cognition and bodily affects. I use emotion and affect as synonyms as my field work revealed how affect and emotion are linked to meaning-making through both the body and the discursive. Asylum seekers´ discomfort in formal political spaces was made visible to me through their bodily reactions and how they affected me, as well as our ongoing conversations that created the space for our different relationships to specific feelings to be acknowledged and politicised. Our conversations, as I will argue, were what made the affects, emotions, gut feelings and observations powerful - in the sense as they provided spaces to attend to, and to share, and by that *feel-common*. Asylum activism as affective emotional practice, in my experience, thus folds together bodies and meaning-making.

Most importantly, my fieldwork showed the importance of looking at what conditions shape the experience of affect and emotion. The many conversations I have had with asylum seekers about our intense bodily sensations such as discomfort, shame, fear and anger, pointed at our different relationships to these emotions, which in turn came into conversation with our different histories, positionalities and everyday lives. There has been a growing scholarly engagement with how affect and emotions emerge from specific subject positions and contexts. According to Ahmed, emotions are imprinted with particular histories, cultural values and politics, and orient our ways of encountering and making sense of the word accordingly (2004). Affect and emotion thus always emerge from their specific context as well as they have the power to generate meaning through the histories and contexts that they invoke. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) also remarked that a body's capacity to affect and to be affected varies according to the shifting conditions of a particular situation or position. Movements through particular affective states may be more or less accessible for differently positioned bodies.

Affect scholarship, however, often ignores the social and cultural context of affective formations. Tolia-Kelly (2006) and Rose (1997) for example have argued that theories of affect neglect how affective experience is "a cumulative, and therefore historical, process of interaction between human beings and place" (quoted in Kobayashi, Preston & Murnagham, 2011, p. 873). Divya Tolia-Kelly (2006) described affect geographies as "ethnocentric" as "underpinned by universalist thinking" as most scholars do not contextualise encounters historically as well as do not take existing power structures into consideration. Similarly, Barnett (2008) argues that a missing social and historical contextualisation of specific affects "suggests a mute attunement to place bereft of political, social, and cultural orientations, limiting peoples agency, expectations, habits, and objectives". Although conceptual conversations on affect, race and encounter have been initiated by for example Ahmed (2007, 2010), Saldanha (2007), Thrift (2004; 2010; 2016), Tolia-Kelly and Mike Crang (2010), and many more, research that weaves together theoretical and empirical insights is just emerging. In the following, I want to illustrate the importance of contextualising the affects and emotions experienced in asylum activist encounters.

Turning towards emotional labour and its entanglements with bordering practices

A concept I will keep returning to in the following chapters is the concept of emotional labour as it helped me to put into words some of the complex emotional and affective *doings* of different positionalities encountering each other in activist spaces. Hochschild (1983) and James (1992) originally developed the concept of emotional labour to theorise unpaid and unrecognised emotional work typically performed by women* in the home as well as wider labour divisions in capitalist societies. Both linked these gendered differences to existing divisions between the "public" and the "private" as well as to women's primary role as care-givers. However, the concept has been expanded ever since. Gunaratnam and Lewis (2001), for example, add to the concept in their work on *Racialising Emotional and Emotionalising Racialised Labour.* In this paper they further developed the concept of emotional labour by looking at racialised divisions of labour

instead of the usual focus on only gendered divisions. As they argue, the "separation between emotion and rationality is a gendered-racialised separation" (p. 138). Similar to these scholars, I want to use the concept of emotional labour in this work to attend to the entanglement between emotions, structural inequalities and social practices (in my case, activist practices). This also links to scholars such as Audre Lorde and her work on the *Uses of Anger* that explores the emotionality of racialisation practices.

While my following engagement with the concept of emotional labour draws upon these important contributions by Gunaratnam and Lewis (2001), Hochschild (1983) and James (1992), what I observed in my fieldwork required further extension and a different focus of the concept.

After I started to pay attention to the role of affect and emotion in asylum activist spaces, I observed that the majority of my conversations with asylum seeking activists in the first few months of my fieldwork were a dialogue around emotional labour and its entanglements with bordering and racialisation**.** Our conversations before and after group meetings and events in early 2016 revealed the importance of paying attention to the entanglement between building and maintaining affective relationships within asylum activist spaces and bordering practices. In a group conversation after a meeting in central London in January 2016, a thirty-year-old woman* from Cameroon called Lylie shared:

> "There are times, when you are so stressed because of your case, people should just come together and eat sandwiches. Being an asylum seeker is so stressful. One day a month (not every week) we could just eat sandwiches instead of talking about politics. That's also how you come to know people as one. But if we come every week and you just sit and then you go, again you don't even have the chance to know me and how I´m doing" (Lylie, 2016).

When visiting my house-share in March 2016, a thirty-seven-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda called Charles, told me about the missing care-work at two meetings we had recently attended together:

> "The truth is us, we asylum seekers, we need meetings where people come together to eat and drink, to relax. To tell their story, how they are, and others are just listening" (Charles, 2016).

In another group conversation, in a local park in May 2016, a fifty-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Nigeria called Margaret shared about the lack of care and emotional work in asylum activist spaces:

> "After a stressful week, you just want to sit and chat, tell everyone how you are. You want them to listen and be kind" (Margaret, 2016).

These conversations with asylum seekers ask us to attend to emotional labour as *sociality* (Ahmed, 2004) instead of an individually, usually female*, performed social practice. The emotional intensity I witnessed among asylum seekers sharing about their experience with regards to care and emotional labour, reflects how acts of care; from offering tea and food, to asking how you are, comforting and listening are, for asylum seekers in the context of bordering practices, the emotional core of asylum activist spaces. Our conversations thus spoke to different needs with regards to emotional labour in the context of bordering practices and what commonalities and distances these different needs produce.

For a long time, social reproduction, care and emotional work, has not been given much attention in the literature on activism (Thorburn, 2017). There is a tendency in activist theory, as explored in more detail earlier, to focus on visible and staged work: tactics, public appearance, media presence and its impact on established political discourses. But insofar as emotional labour nourishes people's capacity to form, sustain and actualise activism and its emotional bonds, this labour is also an animating force behind political action. As discussed earlier, not only do these small acts of care constitute activism, they can also be described as unrecognised acts of reproduction - the domestic sphere of activism that creates and sustains it. This labour is what makes staged actions such as demonstrations possible, which links to everyday activist scholars understanding of care

as a form of everyday activism (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010), implicit activism (Horton & Kraft, 2009).

Only recently scholars started to explore the role and distribution of unpaid work such as emotional labour in activist spaces (Bosco, 2007; Pratt, 2009; Oliver, Cadena-Roa & Strawn, 2003; Bosco, 2006; Wright, 2009; Feigenbaum, Frenzel & McCurdy, 2013; Halvorson, 2015). Some feminist scholars have highlighted exploitative relationships that can merge even within well-intended activism. Feigenbaum, Frenzel and McCurdy (2013) work on protest camps examined its domestic infrastructures while paying particular attention to how existing power dynamics get reproduced within these spaces. Similarly, Halvorson (2015) pointed in his study on *Moments of Rupture and Everyday Life in Occupy London* to a gendered division of practices of reproductive labour.

However, this literature did not quite capture what I was encountering in my conversations with asylum seekers. Unlike research on emotional labour, my conversations with asylum seekers about care and emotional labour did not revolve around the division of the means of care; or the question of who does what, but much more around asylum seekers´ expression of an additional and different focused necessity of care within the asylum activist community that is resulting from asylum seekers´ social positioning as bordered, racialised subjects and the depletion and exhaustion with which they entered these formal activist groups spaces. These conversations asked to situate asylum activism better and look at the different contexts, histories and embodied everyday experiences with which people enter activist spaces.

As mentioned in *Chapter 2*, a large number of the forty asylum seekers I interviewed, retreated from activist group spaces as they did not feel that their additional and different focused necessity of care within the asylum activist community was taken into consideration. All asylum seekers I have spoken to are part of social networks outside of asylum activist group spaces, in which asylum seekers exchanged acts of hope, solidarity and care (I will explore this acts in more detail in *Chapter 6*) with other asylum seekers.

These social networks, I argue, are expressions and responses to this additional and different focused necessity of care.

A lot has been written on how the body of asylum seekers is subjected to countless striations through state regulations and institutional forces. There is so far no reflection in literature, however, as to how these striations influence people's need and capacities to look after themselves in a collective practice of reproduction such as in spaces of asylum activism.

Moreover, the politics of different positionalities and contexts are barely discussed in scholarship on activism beyond newly emerging writings on gendered, sexed and racialised divisions of labour (Bosco, 2007; Pratt, 2009; Oliver, Cadena-Roa & Strawn, 2003; Bosco, 2006; Wright, 2009; Feigenbaum, Frenzel & McCurdy, 2013; Halvorson, 2015). These studies, however, focus on the tendency of racialised, feminised and minorised bodies to do the *background* work (Ahmed, 2006). While this is an important area of research, my focus here is slightly different. The scholarship on gendered, racialised and sexed care work, asks the question of who does the *background* work. It asks to include more activist acts (such as care work) as political work and shows how not doing so is making the *background* work invisible, and by that is making the work of racialised and feminised bodies invisible. The focus of my conversations with asylum seekers, was however not so much the distribution of specific activist labours but rather the different needs of emotional labour within the context of bordering practices and what commonalities and distances these different needs produce.

Therefore, I hope to extend the concept of emotional labour further in his thesis by particularly attending to: (1) the entanglement between emotional labour and bordering practices, as another dimension of structural inequality, (2) the management of asylum seekers own emotions in the context of bordering practices as well as the production of commonalities and distance within asylum activist spaces, (3) emotional labour as *sociality* (Ahmed, 2004) instead of an individually, usually female*, performed social practice, and

(4) different needs of emotional labour in the context of bordering practices and what commonalities and distances these different needs produce.

As this brief journey through the concept of emotion labour has shown, in order to understand the *doings* of affect and emotion in asylum activist spaces, in which different positions meet, we thus need to attend to the precarious asylum positionality produced by bordering practices.

Turning towards precarity and asylum

Turning towards precarity and asylum in asylum activism means turning towards the histories, politics and positionality of asylum. It means turning towards asylum seekers as racialised others in a post-colonial context. As the *Note on Terminology* has shown, the majority of asylum seekers and refugees in Germany and the UK are post-colonial subjects, which highlights that asylum is linked to racialisation and post-coloniality. Asylum seekers´ bodies come to matter precisely as markers of border and race (Rodríguez, 2018).

The asylum positionality is precarious in multiple, and reinforcing ways. *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 5* of this thesis will show how bordering practices effectively and affectively produce "unlivable" lives (Butler, 2009). During my fieldwork in asylum activist communities in London and Berlin, I witnessed endless moments, in which bodies of asylum seekers were subjected to harm. Asylum seekers cannot escape these bordering harms as they *stick* (Ahmed, 2004) to their bodies. Feelings, emotions and affects that are produced through this precarity are not left at the doorstep when entering asylum activist spaces, these different contexts, positionalities and everyday lives affects bodies and relationships within activist spaces.

Judith Butler (2015) has explored how precarity and the body are linked to political action. She argues that only the sustenance of the body in the private allows the actor to

appear publicly; only the "well-fed body speaks openly and publicly" (p. 206). Having your basic needs (such as adequate housing, rest, education) met, are according to Butler, not only necessary requirements of a livable life, but also for political involvement, of action: "Living and acting are bound together in such a way that the conditions that make it possible for anyone to live are part of the very object of political reflection and action" (p. 44).

Butler distinguishes precarity, a historical condition whereby some lives are rendered more insecure, unequal, or destitute than others, from a vulnerability we all share as human beings (Butler in Lloyd, 2015, p. 214). Precarity, in contrast to this general vulnerability, signals for Butler a politically generated condition of heightened risk and threat for specific populations; the "political condition of unequal distribution of exposure to harm" (Butler, 2015). According to Butler, precarity is a result of an "established set of measures for the differential valuation of life itself" (2012, p. 10). In her essay *Can one lead a good life in a bad life*, she argues that in order to be recognised politically, a subject has to make sense according to existing norms. Subjects that fall outside of these norms such as asylum seekers cannot be recognised as subjects and as a result have no "place" in politics or society (Butler, 2009, p. 208). Their lives are not worth protecting, sheltering, or sustaining; not "livable" as Butler characterises it.

When I started my fieldwork, I was looking for angry politicised asylum seekers that are able to fight violent state practices, however, most asylum seekers I came to know better, were not involved in direct action politics but just trying their best to get by. A narrow understanding of activism would frame my encounters as encounters with non-political subjects that "fail" to resist. However, instead, I want to ask how we can learn to listen to the politics of those who are just getting by. A reformulation of political space and political subjectivity is necessary, I argue, in order to create a possibility for wider politics including precarious asylum seekers.

What I want to attend to now is the question of a politics of the unwell and unfed body, the body in discomfort, in spaces that are not perceived as political space?

"New" Subjects of Politics?

Alongside a growing media coverage of critical voices from asylum seekers, migrants and refugees who protested the deteriorating conditions for asylum seekers, there has been a growing engagement in social science literature with asylum, migrant and refugee activism (e.g. Milllner; 2011; Rygiel 2011; Nyers 2015; Atac, Rygiel & Stierl, 2016; Bhimji, 2016; Zamponi, 2018; Nyers & Rygiel, 2012; Ilcan, Isin & Nyers, 2014; Gill, 2016; Tyler, 2013). Tyler (2013) explored how the asylum activist movement has become a significant political force, bringing together asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and people in solidarity, to challenge for example the enforced dispersal system, detention and deportation. Ilker Atac, Kim Rygiel and Maurice Stierl (2016) looked at the contentious politics of refugee and migrant protest as well as solidarity movements. Bhimji (2016) researched the ways in which refugee activists attained visibility within the public sphere while they contested, resisted, and helped transform multiple spatialities as part of their movement in Germany. Nyers and Rygiel's book *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement* (2012) investigated how restrictions on mobility are not only generating new forms of inequality and social exclusion, but also new forms of political activism and citizenship identities.

With the emergence of what is in traditional political and activist literature perceived as a new political actor; "the migrant", "asylum seeker" or "refugee": "the non-citizen", a growing body of literature looks at how the division between citizens and non-citizens is tied to our understanding of political subjectivity (Nyers & Rygiel, 2012; 2008). The literature looks at how migrants, asylum seekers and refugees utilise citizenship as a social practice that enables them to become political subjects, what I will call in this thesis: to *become citizen*. The concept of citizenship is considered as particularly relevant as the asylum seeking subject is constituted as a counter to the citizen-subject.

According to Redclift (2013a; 2013b), questions around political subjectivity are in essence always a struggle to define who an agent is, and how agency itself might be recognised. In the context of the democratic nation-state model, citizenship, as legal status, is the well-established reference point in conversations about legitimate and recognised political agency (Nyers, 2006). It is a mode of politics, of political participation, that is inherently exclusionary.

Redclift argues moreover that seeing the possibility for political action only in the citizen-subject produces the assumption that only a citizen can be an agent (2013a). As a result, political actions by others than citizens (for example asylum seekers, migrants; non-citizens) are perceived as illegitimate or not recognised as political acts (Nyers, 2006). Non-citizen-subjects are accordingly not prescribed political agency for as long as they are not *becoming citizens*: by either achieving official citizenship status or by reclaiming it as social practice. Therefore, such a framework always implies that asylum, migrant and refugee activism must if it wants to be understood as political action, be expressed in terms of an aspiration to citizenship status.

Moreover, using the framework of citizenship also always implies a political subjectivity that is given, handed over to subjects, something external, rather than being an inherently social mode. While it is important, I believe, to investigate political subjectivity emerging around the contestation of citizenship, here I will argue that understanding political subjectivity beyond this framework will add important insights to current critical scholarship on migration. As Delanty (2000) argued, no understanding of citizenship can ignore that it is a system, originally developed to subordinate and exclude people. The existence of the concept thus relies on the exclusion of others (Zamindar, 2007). De Genove (2004) and Schinkel (2010) have also stressed that the concept of citizenship always reproduces social inequality as it was innovated to racially differentiate populations. Current scholarship on citizenship deals with the exclusionary privileges and rights attached to the concepts of citizenship by employing a more pluralistic definition of

(active) citizenship (Cakmakli, 2015) and the detaching of national identity to right claims through multiculturalism (Joppke, 2007; Kofman, 2002, Kymlicka, 2011).

There is now a considerably large collection of work exploring citizenship as an inherently exclusive mode of political subjectivity (as listed in Hindess, 2004): From critical migration studies (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Papadopoulos, Stephenson & Tsianos, 2013), to gender and queer theory (Roseneil, Crowhurst, Santos & Stoilova, 2013), to research on bordering (Muller, 2004, Nyers, 2009; Guillaume and Huysmans, 2013) and post-colonial studies (Rigo, 2005). Basham and Vaughan-Williams (2015) attended to the legal and normative meaning of the concept of citizenship and argued that the citizen has been invented as a white, liberal, bourgeois and heterosexual man, which produces powerful hierarchies and justifies the securitisation and bordering of others. As other scholars have shown, the exclusion of citizenship in the context of asylum must be linked to larger processes of de-humanisation and racialisation, exemplified in the figure of the "deportable" asylum seeker reduced to a form of "bare life" (Edkins, Shapiro & Pin-Fat, 2012; Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007; Rygiel, 2008; Doty, 2011; Vaughan-Williams, 2015).

Agamben's (2005) concept of the "state of exception" has been used within critical migration and bordering studies to explore contemporary forms of "encampment". Regimes of citizenship that justify massive bordering machinery in the west to control the migration of undesirable bodies, trap asylum seekers in the space of "the camp" within wealthy western states (Redclift, 2013b; Diken 2004, Diken and Lautsen 2006, Ek 2006, Walters 2008). This body of scholarship draws attention the "zone of indistinction", in which many asylum seekers find themselves in, neither fully "inside" or "outside", of a particular social or legal order and must be placed, therefore, always in both. Agamben´s (1998, 2005) concept of "bare life" received much criticism due to not providing those who are trapped in camps with political possibilities (Walters, 2008). His presentation of "naked life" presents asylum seekers and migrants as rather flattened subjects, devoid of agency. Redclift (2013b) also criticises Agamben's binary between "political life" and "bare life", arguing that it "relies on a similarly crude and one-dimensional reification,

which naturalises citizenship" (p. 309) as it still involves a normative commitment to citizenships as an empirical weak but yet ultimately inclusive project. It also draws on the idea that there are clearly demarcated spaces of "inclusion" and "exclusion", rather than, as I will support in this thesis, the idea of a constant negotiation of power.

Whilst there is a radical potential in much of the existing literature in citizenship studies, it is also important to consider political subjectivities and acts which are not subsumed by right claims. Exploring asylum activism in this way means turning towards those political possibilities which are not orientated towards a *becoming citizen*. Only attending to citizenship in the case of my research would have meant not registering any political possibility within the asylum seekers I have been speaking to. Attending to the politics of these subjects meant, instead, focusing on a *becoming political* beyond citizenship. Rather than turning toward the concept of citizenship as the ultimate model of politics, I argue, in order to understand how these different positionalities and everyday lives play out in political spaces, we need to ask again what political space is? How can we understand a politics that is not enunciated in speech or formal political intervention?

A *becoming political* beyond citizenship

Ranciere's work, for example, turns to expressions of the political that are traditionally not perceived as political. He engages with a notion of the political that involves questioning seemingly given borders beyond established forms of the political. Refusing the citizen-subject as the subject of politics, Ranciere´s writing contemplates the possibility of politics for those who have no rights. According to Ranciere, the subject of rights is not a fixed subject – one dependent upon a conferred legal and political status (such as the citizen) - but the ever-fluctuating subjects of politics. He argued: "politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part" (Ranciere, 1999). According to Ranciere, the space of activism is thus not a specific physical space that structurally excludes some subjects from appearing, but it opens up whenever the "order of things" (Foucault, 2002) is interrupted. Thinking the political

through Ranciere means, thinking through exclusion and ruptures - the part that "has no part" has the ability and power to disrupt.

Ranciere´s thinking resonates with my experiences of asylum activism. The question of the possibility of politics in the context of asylum activism, thinking with Ranciere, becomes the question of the possibilities of disrupting bordering processes and ideas of the political that excludes some from participating. In consequence, asylum activism can be found in both; formal asylum activist spaces, in which asylum seekers question established ideas of the political (discussed in more detail in *Chapter 4*) and in the everyday, where the encounter with the border also brings the possibility for asylum activism (discussed in more detail in *Chapter 5*).

Other scholars have highlighted how asylum seekers reconfigure the materiality of hostile spaces by turning them into spaces of connection, of solidarity, and therefore constitute them as public (Butler, 2011; Rygiel, 2011). Rygiel, for example, reflects upon social solidarities formed in camp spaces, which "decompose" traditional understandings of citizenship. Asylum seekers´ struggle over the meaning of these spaces is essential, as it puts social relations back into these spaces of exclusion and by that create a "rupture" (Ranciere, 1999) in the "order of things" (Foucualt, 2002). This shows how even within spaces that are often portrayed as spaces with no political life, political negotiation can always happen within them.

Butler also opens up our understanding of political agency by saying that subjects excluded from the formal space of politics such as public demonstrations, the politics of the squares, become political by breaking into these formal spaces and by that disrupt their order. Not embodying the norm, as such, contains political possibilities; the potential to re-do the norm in unanticipated ways or even, in some unspecified circumstances, to un-do the norm and thus to "disrupt" existing categories, ideas, structures of emotions and subjectivities. According to Butler, the assembling of subjects in resistance, simply the appearance of their bodies might be "saying" something

(without relying on speech). This can either happen through the embodied, visible disrupting of norms or because the assembly happens in opposition to "differential forms of power that qualify who can and cannot appear" (p. 50). In other words, simply the presence, the appearance of a part that "has no part" can disrupt a social order as it is an embodied critique of who is allowed to appear in public space. When asylum seekers that are erased from communities and public spaces, bodies that are made invisible and disposable, appear despite these conditions, they are challenging the social order. As Butler said, "only through an insistent form of appearing precisely when and where we are effaced does the sphere of appearance[16] break and open in new ways" (p.50).

Butler does not attach the political to specific spaces that excludes some bodies, but sees its appearance in precarious and vulnerable bodies gesture to "the right to have rights", and by that, to become "part". Bodies are not only able to resist despite their precarious and vulnerable lives, but *because* of these conditions. It is their collective gathering in public space, these bodies lay claim to that space, and by that, they constitute it as public. According to Butler, public space as such does not exist. Public space is anywhere, where bodies "reconfigure the materiality of public space" (Butler, 2011).

However, Butler´s focus lies on the political space of the squares, of the public. My research, on the other hand, looks at spaces that are not public in the same sense, in which the non-citizen subject is a necessary audience, in fact, the object of politics. Butlers engagement with a politics of the precarious body, of the *unfed body*, implies an intervention in formal political space not a locating of political possibilities beyond these spaces, which my research focuses on.

The emotional and affective dynamics and political agencies that I have observed in asylum activist spaces between 2015 and 2018 require, I argue, a different conceptualisation of political space to Butler's theorisation. In fact, they require a

[16] Butlers engagement with the "sphere of appearance" is based on Arendt´s work *The Human Condition* (1959). For Arendt, political space, which she calls the space of appearance, is not based on an actual physical location but a space in which people come together in speech and action and by that "appear" in public.

reformulation of what political space and political subjectivity is, encompassing a range of things; a gesture, subtle feeling, to a speech act. The following chapters thus explore what reformulation of political space and political subjectivity is necessary in order to situate the politics of asylum activism and by that register a politics of the unfed[17] body. As discussed in this chapter, seeing citizenship as the only mode of politics depends on a particular physical comfort that excludes some bodies such as bodies of asylum seekers from appearing.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, asking for the location of affect and emotion in asylum activism in the UK and Germany allows us to rethink "traditional" political spaces which we often think of as demonstrations, protest events and activist group meetings. Turning towards affect and emotions allowed me to look beside, below and beyond what comes to be called asylum activism to register dynamics that cannot be fully understood using perception and cognition but also not without them.

In my research I approached asylum activism through a bodily ethnographic practice that I experienced as a valuable entryway into a deeper understanding of asylum activism. The subtleties and physical, emotional changes I observed drew me to working with affect and emotion as a necessary tool to unravel some of the dynamics causing them. Tracing the feelings and sensations that I observed and experienced is not only important to get a better understanding of asylum activism, but also to map the construction of political spaces in the context of asylum in the 21st century. Feelings are, as Audre Lorde put it, "our most genuine paths to knowledge" (Lorde, 1978, p. 6-7). In asylum activist spaces, I observed affect and emotion becoming a language through which different positionalities within these spaces are communicated. Registering political possibilities in asylum seekers is thus a matter of learning to hear the voices, to attend to expressions of the political that is traditionally not perceived as political. This requires what Les Back has called the

[17] According to Butler´s writing on the relationship between the body and political action, only the "well-fed body speaks openly and publicly" (p. 206, 2015).

crafting of sociological attention, "a mode of thought that works within and through a democracy of the senses" (Les Back, 2007, p.25).

Next to a turn to the everyday, affect and emotion, this chapter described how turning towards emotional labour and asylum precarity can tell us something about the deep emotionality of bordering practices and their relationship to political action. The chapter described the importance of a situated politics of asylum activism that can allow everyone, even subjects that are made precarious in multiple, reinforcing ways. As I argue, in order to situate the politics of asylum activism, as I learned, we thus need to ask: what allows us to register the doings of different positionalities and politics in their affects and emotions in these spaces of asylum activism in their constant *becoming*? How can we attend to the situated politics of asylum activism in all its subtleties; in its background, emotions and feelings and relationships? How can we attend to political expressions of a *becoming activist* of asylum seekers when they traditionally escape our senses?

I then introduced a necessary focus on a *becoming activist* beyond citizenship that located political possibilities not in a specific space, activity or actor, but in a *becoming-other*. Drawing on Ranciere (1999) and Butler (2005) I explored some ways scholars attended to political possibilities as diversifying and deconstructing existing norms, practices and identities. The following chapters will explore asylum activism as a practice of *becoming-other*. This focus, I believe, will help us to reformulate political space and political subjectivity in ways that register a politics of the unfed body.

4

Listening to Intensities and Knots in the Formal Political

Thinking of asylum activism as an affective and emotional practice of *becoming-other*, I am interested, in this chapter, in what relationships in formal activist spaces tell us about different political possibilities and what commonalities and distances these understandings produce. As my research showed me, asylum activist spaces are spaces in which differently situated subjects and their different emotional attachments meet. I begin my journey of exploring these attachments by looking firstly at interactions within group meetings and events and later began to include conversations I have had with asylum seekers outside of these formal spaces. Through my observation of feelings, giving attention to both my own and asylum seekers´ intensities, I will show what I learned about the political possibilities within formal activist spaces and the importance of attending to the experiential dimension of affect and emotion in allowing this to be possible.

I hope to show how looking at emotional knots gives us a more nuanced understanding of how political space and the activist subject is constructed and what material consequences these processes have on the racialised and bordered bodies of asylum seekers. I extend previous analyses of how constructions of "the political" shape processes of subjectification to further explore the emotionality of social and political practices.

As outlined before, analysing what enables and disrupts mutuality is particularly relevant in the context of asylum activism as the asylum experience is marked by practices based

upon the exclusion and differentiation of radicalised bodies. The chapter reveals how researchers and activists are not able to attend to the politics of different positionalities in asylum activism when not paying attention to the most intimate level of experience; bodily sensation. Voicing individual expressions of discomfort and depletion these different positionalities spoke to me in formal meetings, silent negotiations, in our ongoing conversation and friendships outside of formal meetings. Discomfort; feelings of unease and pain, and depletion; feelings of deep exhaustion, emptiness and heaviness, I define in this thesis as a complex intensity of experience circulating between bodies that lowers a person's power to act. These intensities as I will show, can form an emotional knot. According to Spinoza (2001) emotions are modifications produced in a body (including the mind) by encountering other bodies (a subject, system or environment), which increases or diminishes a person's power.

Emotional knots

From the very beginning of my involvement, I observed an intimacy of some bodies and unease of others that bound together individuals through that shared experience of connection and disconnection. The concept of emotional knots allowed me to narrate the experiential and embodied dimensions of these commonalities and differences. As explained in the introduction of this thesis, I will look at emotions and intensities in the form of their *doings* (Ahmed, 2004). Thinking emotions as practices can help us to understand what commonalities and differences they produce through the intensity of their attachment (Ahmed, 2002). The term emotional knot, in my understanding, describes the intensity and meaning of this attachment.

While the term "emotional knots" was first introduced by Thrift (2008, p. 206) to describe how urban spaces are knitted together through emotional bonds; relationships of maintenance and repair. I want to argue here that only looking at space in terms of what connects, misses the complexities and ambiguities of social space.

Usually, in literature knots are perceived as something to describe what holds people together and creates connection. In activist literature, there is also a focus on knots representing mutuality and connection. However, the results of this chapter will show the importance of attending to the gaps; to what disconnects and creates distance in order to build a knot (in Thrift´s understanding) that ties everyone in.

This chapter is an attempt to explore a common ground. My data has shown that in order to understand how solidarities are created in these spaces we need to also look at what disconnects. In this chapter I will trace the knotting of intensities and the meaning of their attachments, though in a significantly different way to Thrift´s usage of emotional knots. I use the term knot as a tool to describe an accumulation and entanglement of intensities around specific attachments.

As the attempt to trace affect remains an elusive task, I found the term emotional knots helpful in telling the story of my visceral experience and those I observed among asylum seekers, even though I completely rework its meaning. Using the concept of emotional knots helped me to get hold of some of the threads that make up the knot. Throughout this chapter, I contemplate the questions: What threads produce the knots I was observing? What does the knotting of intensities tell us about what enables and disables mutuality in asylum activist spaces?

Sensing emotional knots and their formation

As mentioned before, from the very beginning of my involvement I felt and observed much unease – an elusive discomfort that I will try to explore in this chapter by using the concept of emotional knots. I found this discomfort everywhere; at activist meetings, at and around protest events and in almost every interaction I observed between racialised bodies in the asylum process and bodies with citizenship rights (particularly white bodies including my own). As I argue, asylum activism, as any social space, relies on intimate

relations of recognition and mutuality and what enables and disables these relationships needs attention when we want to learn about *the politics of asylum activism*.

My fieldwork showed how all asylum activist groups I was involved in wanted to offer a space of encounter, a coming together of different people that is based on safety, trust and recognition. Groups actively tried to position themselves differently than the old social movements on the Left that were criticised for being unable to deal with different personalities within, leading to the reproduction of power hierarchies. However, despite all these good intentions, from the beginning, I experienced how the majority of asylum seeking people when attending these meetings felt "out of place" and "uncomfortable". The consensus decision-making mechanism in place often felt more like a formal procedure than an honest encounter and conversation about different opinions and positions. Different positionalities *were* negotiated, however, in less visible, verbal ways.

While I observed and felt discomfort at group meetings it was my close friendships with asylum seekers, who felt comfortable enough to share their experiences with me, that allowed me to explore and situate these feelings. These friendships grew out of exactly that discomfort; a shared sense of care and concern about 1) less and less asylum seekers taking part in weekly group meetings 2) our observation that asylum seekers were not participating equally as well as the fact that decision-making was, in practice, restricted to a narrow range of similarly situated people that all had citizenship status in the UK and Germany and have not been through the asylum process themselves.

As the meeting space can be seen as the kind of mandatory part of the involvement, it is an interesting space to explore the "formalities of politics" and what these formalities *do*. I describe these group meetings as *mandatory* because in order to be part of a group, people were encouraged to attend meetings regularly. If people missed more than two meetings in a row it was often communicated to them that they are expected to attend these meetings if they want to be part of the group as the meeting functions as foundation and background for all public actions and organising. I call activist group

spaces and event spaces as formal as, compared to the everyday, I overall observed a more formal practicing of political subjectivities.

As already mentioned in the introduction, my thesis is not intending to criticise these formal group spaces of asylum activism that offer important practical support as well as access to a social network for asylum seekers. Instead, in exploring what connects and disconnects bodies in these spaces I hope to open conversations about how asylum activism can become a space in which everyone can feel comfortable.

In the following, I want to share my story about sensing these knots first. This takes us to the first meeting of an asylum activist group in London I joined in December 2015. The group was set up in the 1990s responding to the change in asylum legislation and the majority of its members are asylum seekers from different African and South Asian countries. Its members get together every Sunday in a university lecture room in central London to share knowledge and organise protest events.

When I walked into the meeting room for the first time, in December 2015, I saw about ten people sitting in a circle waiting for other people to arrive. Nine out of the ten people were people of colour and there were significantly more people that appeared to me as women*. While a woman* of colour, who, as I learned later, was born and grew up in London prepared her laptop for the meeting, a white middle-aged woman*, that also seems to be part of the group facilitating the meeting, passed around fruit and cookies. There was an uncomfortable silence I felt immediately. Most people were leaning back in their chairs and had their eyes closed. Everyone looked very tired. When I sat down, I tried to break the uncomfortable silence by starting to talk to the person that sat on the chairs next to me; a fifty-seven-year-old woman* from Uganda called Lynda. I asked her how she was. She shared how difficult it has been for her to come to the meeting as she lives very far out and that she feels very tired. Travelling is very expensive, she shared, but she hopes to get some of the money back at the end of the meeting so she could buy herself a train ticket back. She told me that she would try to come every week but how

difficult it has been. Sometimes she does not have enough money to be able to afford a train ticket home so it always feels like taking a risk, hoping for everything to work out. While she was talking people around us opened their eyes and nodded, saying "yes, it´s a risk". About fifteen minutes later the meeting started.

The person facilitating the meeting spoke about recent political events, the “dangers” of the new (2015/2016) immigration bill, political parties and the last protest actions the group had organised. An older white man* who also seemed to have been part of this group for a long time shared another summary of previous political events. Some people were nodding, however, most people looked at their phones or had their eyes closed, almost it seemed disappearing in their thick winter jackets. The room was cold. After he finished his thirty-minute-long presentation he asked if there are any questions, no one looked up, no one raised their hand. The woman* of colour who facilitated the meeting said “thank you” to the older white man* and shared her opinion on some of the recent events mentioned. She spoke about how important it is to know "these facts" in order to formulate a political response; maybe in form of a protest letter or an event. She then looked around, smiled and asked "any questions. I mean is this clear?". Again no responses. Just an uncomfortable silence. So uncomfortable that I considered saying something but then kept quiet after reminding myself that I had made the decision to only observe this time to get a picture of how things usually happen.

Then one person of colour raised their hands asking "I´m here for the first time and I heard I can get some advice on my case…?" Suddenly many people sat up and opened their eyes, looking at the person who asked the question. The person who held the meeting responded to the question quickly, saying that there will be time at the end of the meeting to ask questions about specific cases. Then the person of colour next to me went outside to take a call. The meeting continued with us reading a book chapter of an African political activist about what it means to resist structures of power. We read two pages out loud. People are taking turns, it is the same two to three people; all men* of colour, who volunteered after the facilitators were repeatedly asking who would feel

comfortable to read out the next section. I looked around and saw at least four people having their eyes closed, falling asleep. We took a little break. Some people started chatting with their neighbours or going outside to take or make a call. Three to four people went to those who seemed to be the organisers of the meeting and asked questions about their case or cases of people they know: "So I have received a letter from the Home Office about my case, but I don't understand…", "I have my first interview coming up and I don't know what do, can you advise me what to do?", "My friend had their interview four months ago and still hasn´t heard anything…". All of the organisers replied: "there will be time later to ask these questions". The people sat down again in silence.

The meeting continued for another thirty to forty minutes. The facilitators talked about events the group had organised in the last few weeks and future demonstrations. The facilitators said three times how important it is for everyone to come and be there and asked people to raise their hands if they can make it. Two people raised their hands. Another four people raised their hands, after being asked why they can not come and another three people share when being asked, that they can not make it because they have to work on that day.

In the last ten minutes, people have time to ask questions about their cases and the facilitators answer some question about the asylum procedure and the legal grounds and asked some people to contact them after the meeting to answer their questions. In these last ten minutes, everyone in the room seemed very alive; people chatted, shared their experience. I looked around and saw all eyes open. The meeting ended with people saying thank you, hugging each other, saying goodbye.

This story is exemplary for my experience sitting in many activist meetings over the last three years. Many asylum seekers I spoke to felt that they had to be in these spaces as

they needed the assistance of the group in form of legal support letters[18] but also their formal engagement would help them with their case. Particularly the ten asylum seekers who identified as LGBT emphasised the difficult situation in which they found themselves in; feeling the burden of proof that forces them into these public group spaces of asylum activism and furthermore, finding that these groups not giving enough space to issues that feel important to them. Many of the asylum seekers I spoke to, mentioned in our conversation that they are forced to "perform" a visible LGBT identity in order to be considered worthy candidates for asylum. Joining formal LGBT activist groups in London and Berlin is a necessary step towards increasing the chances of their case being approved as their involvement shows their wish to live their sexual identity openly. Being involved in activism for them means to appear in public space and produce evidence of their involvement in form of pictures that then, will be distributed through social media, building evidence for their case. This illustrates the distinct precarity of LGBT asylum seekers exposed to the particularly confusing and harmful practices of a hetero-normative asylum system. Therefore, it is not surprising that a high number of them look for support in formal asylum activist group structures, that can provide them with the required visibility and support.

After months and many conversations with asylum seekers attending this and other meetings, I started to get more insights into the complex dynamics that produce these intense feelings of discomfort. I began to pay attention around what moments these “knots” tightened or loosened. I could then better place the uncomfortable silence, the turns in people's attention during the meeting; from almost falling asleep to attentive listening. In the following, I want to explore what allowed and disturbed a sense of solidarity in these spaces.

Different solidarities were created in the way many activist group meetings were structured. The space and time practical questions about asylum cases were given,

[18] Legal support letters are letters that activists, NGO´s, churches and friends write to support someone´s asylum claim in court.

reflected what was valued, what belonged (and consequently what was devalued and "misplaced") in these spaces. Asylum seekers requests to get advice on their case regularly got postponed until the end of the meeting. This happened, I believe, to avoid the entirety of these meetings to be filled with people asking questions about their cases. But the fact that it easily could become the whole meeting, shows what brings many asylum seekers in these spaces: to get practical and emotional support. While their requests were given about ten minutes at the end of the meeting, most asylum seekers were told that they have to get in touch personally outside of the meeting or attend smaller case study group meeting to get more help. In most formal meetings I observed, personal advice and people's everyday experience of being an asylum seeker was not given enough space. It was often presented as "the everyday stuff" in the way of doing "politics".

What was spoken about and what was prioritised, was the analysis of political events, the organisation of protests and "learning"; reading political theory together. That was what was articulated and presented as "doing politics" while, for example, the conversation I had had with Lynda, the fifty-seven-year-old woman* sitting next to me during the meeting, about how she was not able to afford to come to the meetings more regularly, had happened in a one-on-one conversation in-between. The real political work was perceived as action and theory.

It was later that I learned that asylum seekers experienced their everyday problems being devalued and not given enough space. The story also shows how the previously distanced, disconnected bodies, suddenly connected when Lynda shared how attending an activist meeting feels like taking a risk, as she was not sure whether she would have enough money at the end of meeting to make her way home. When she shared her life-reality, the unnoticed, unrecognised difficulties she was facing as a result of being in the asylum system, other asylum seekers around us open their eyes and nodded, engaged and connected to our conversation.

This short analysis illustrates how political spaces have the capacity to connect and disconnect bodies within them. Different understandings of what should appear in these political spaces created emotional knots in bodies producing both distance and solidarities. However, looking at social spaces in the form of one group who are excluded and one group that belongs does not account for the complexities I was overserving in these spaces. What I observed and experienced was a different geography than simply some people becoming mutualised and other people becoming excluded. Connection and disconnection happened within these spaces in rather non-dualistic ways. As the story shows, people who mutualised around formal politics (through the control of what received attention and space during the meeting) were also excluded from a solidarity in the room; which is the solidarity of resistance in relation to them. This illustrated the philosophy of *becoming* I want to apply in this thesis: power structures are not stable, they constantly change, and regimes of domination can be challenged and subverted. Looking at the doings of affect and emotion also shows how an encounter of these different bodies in these meeting spaces does both: restrict and empower.

The story of the meeting also shows the performativities of silence and non-action. It shows how simply listening to the conversations during the meeting fails to register some voices in the room. The otherwise silent voices of asylum seekers that negotiated (actively) what political space is and what belongs in it. In these formal spaces of asylum activism, these negotiations often escaped language, I observed them with my eyes, but mostly with an inner feeling of discomfort. Without any coordination people´s silence; their closed eyes, falling asleep (retreating from a space of interaction) created a collective political negotiation, a parallel space or sociality.

This illustrates the importance of rethinking our privileging of Arendt's political subject[19]; constituted by speech and acts (1959). As explored in more detail in the last chapter, a

[19] Arendt´s political subject is the citizen. Many feminist scholars have criticised the political space of the polis that Arendt´s thinking draws upon, because it is built on the exclusion of large groups of people such as women* or non-citizens (Honnig, 2010).

politics that only registers voice and action as its only mode of communication makes invisible these knots and how they are in conversation with a reformulation of politics. Hearing these voices requires a reconsideration of what political space and an activist subject is. Sitting in over one hundred meetings between September 2015 and September 2017, I learned how in these spaces affect and emotion can become a language we need to attend to in order to register how different political possibilities are negotiated.

In the following, I want to explore the emotionality of these knots and asylum seekers different practice of politics. According to Butler there is a relationship between the body and political action: only the "well-fed body speaks openly and publicly" (p. 206, 2015), I will introduce the term *politics of the unfed and unwell body* to speak to a *becoming-other* of asylum seekers. Attending to emotional knots shows how the intensities are a way in which asylum seekers reformulate what political space and the activist subject is. In order to do that, I bring together meaning-making through the body and the discursive: asylum seekers´ discomfort in formal political spaces was made visible to me through their bodily reactions and mine, but it was our ongoing conversations that provided us the space to express our different attachments to this discomfort. Therefore, I want to argue that the space of these sharings are also a *becoming activist* as they create a rupture (Raniere, 1999; 2015) in the existing understanding that there is only one way to be political. Our ongoing conversations questioned this narrow conceptualisation of politics as well as making the space for a reformulation of politics.

Attending to political attachments

All asylum seekers I spoke to emphasised the importance of distinguishing "solidarity groups" from "political groups". According to them, most asylum activist groups have a "political agenda"; or very specific way of "doing politics" that firstly, creates a norm that they do not (and do not want to) fit and secondly, that feels out of touch with their everyday struggles. The "solidarity groups" they described, in contrast, as less formal

spaces of politics that seemed to be more in contact with their everyday precarities. Asylum seekers´ sharp distinction drawn between politics and solidarity, as well as the emotional intensities attached to "doing politics" or "being political" as opposed to practical solidarity caught my attention and was the starting point of this exploration of emotional knots. My focus and interest in this chapter therefore lies in asylum seekers´ experience of groups that they perceived as "political" and the intensities and distances created through their attachments to the concept of "politics". A thirty-one-year-old man* from Uganda called Solomon described his experience:

> "There are certain things you don't feel you are a part of, that concerns me: the political stuff. Because most people just come to the meeting to receive help with their asylum process... but sometimes the asylum process is done and they ... some of them won´t come back because they´re just fighting for racism, they are just fighting for…" (Solomon, 2016).

In describing what happens when the practical need to attend groups, to get support, is gone, Solomon attends to the underlying dissonance of what asylum activism is and in his eyes should be. Importantly, his argument is not an against "fighting racism" but a critique of the disconnection of this "fight" from his everyday reality. Paying particular attention to the word "just", it becomes clear that Solomon critiques a form of politics, activism, that is does not connect racism as a structural condition of inequality to asylum seekers everyday precarities. Solomon also describes the (experience of) disappointment many asylum seekers shared with to me, when realising that the asylum activism "offered" is not what they need, which is support with their asylum claim.

Similarly, a forty-two-year old asylum seeking woman* from Cameroon named Yanelle spoke to me about her experience of being involved in political groups, while feeling she is "losing contact" with what she is "fighting for". According to Yanelle:

> "Activist groups have their objectives, have their cause. Most groups objective is not solidarity, its politics. Sometimes I have no idea what we are doing. What I am doing there" (Yanelle, 2016).

Solomon and Yanelle and all other asylum seekers I have been talking to did not, however, argue for practical solidarity as a better tool to support asylum seekers than political activism. Rather, they questioned the duality of the two, criticising the lack of what they called "real" solidarity in these political spaces but also the missing political framework to look at practical solidarity in the everyday. In their experience the political is constructed through an absence of care, of real solidarity, of empathy; an absence of an understanding of the impact that everyday bordering has on asylum seekers´ everyday life and their involvement in asylum activist groups. Many activists experience activist groups "political agenda" as conflicting with their own needs and interests and describe a great divide in between their needs and interests "which are down here" and the group's objectives "which are up there". *Real* solidarity for them, therefore is a practice of care that attends to the materiality of bordering; inside and outside of the space of formal politics.

As shared before, when I started my fieldwork in autumn 2015, I was looking for an asylum seeking political agent who challenged bordering practices publicly and loudly, however, most asylum seekers I came to know better over the last three years were just trying their best to survive. It would be easy to read these subjects as non-political subjects. However, as the following will show, asylum activism also happened through the questioning of the boundaries of established forms of politics and the activist subject. The following exploration shows how for most asylum seekers, asylum activism becomes, despite its good intention, a space of discomfort and depletion. Despite the felt discomfort in these spaces, there are moments in which asylum seekers step out of the formalised non-political, bordered *other* and become a *new* subject of politics.

Attending to asylum precarity

Many asylum seekers described to me how uncomfortable they felt about the fact that activist groups do not consider why they are not always able to come to meetings and

protest events. A thirty-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda called John described his experience to me:

> "You have to remember I´m not allowed to work. You have to remember that I live far – now I am speaking for me, I have people that support me financially, most people don't. You have to remember that I sometimes don't even have food in the house. You have to remember that sometimes I have to take a bus instead of a train because it is cheaper and then… the journey that used to take me thirty minutes takes me three hours. You have to remember… " (John, 2016).

John´s words speak to how the asylum precarity plays into asylum seekers´ involvement in formal political spaces. Asylum seekers do not simply leave their everyday lives at the doorstep of political spaces; the asylum-everyday affects their capacity to appear in these spaces, but also how they appear within them. Asylum seekers "enter" activist spaces with an embodied precarity that plays into activist interactions. Listening to stories of everyday struggles is thus important to interrogate how the asylum system enters the sphere of "politics", how political spaces are already lived and felt differently by those subjects whose bodily survival might be at stake. Listening to the asylum everyday hence matters for a collective politics; for creating *common ground* (Ahmed, 2004)

While asylum seekers are always aware of their precarity as the emotionality and affectivity of bordering following them wherever they go, other activists with more secure status do not share that experience. These different contexts, positionalities and everyday lives affect bodies and relationships within activist spaces. Asylum seekers often expressed their frustrations with activists with the more secure status seeming not to understand the intensity of their stress and the discomfort they find themselves in:

> "No one understands, because they are not in your shoes. No one wears that shoes. I only get thirty-six pounds a week, and what can you do? Sometimes you need to travel... You are the one with the pains. No one understands… It´s so hard honestly" (Henry, 2016).

These frustrations speak to an emotional distance from non-asylum seekers as well as a closeness to other asylum seekers, who are in the "same shoes" and thus illustrates how knotted intensities produce commonalities and distances. While asylum seekers communicate the missing empathy of what it means to live a life that is constantly *at the border*, they also express how the shared experiences of being precarious creates solidarity with other asylum seekers.

I had at least fifty conversations with asylum seekers about asylum precarity as well as the deep emotionality they experienced, attached to the precariousness of their lives not being registered in activist spaces. I began, therefore, to explore what the unheard asylum everyday *does* in this formal spaces of asylum activism.

First of all, the unheard everyday seemed to speak to the stronger set of implications that the de-prioritisation of care has for asylum seekers, who emphasised over and over again that when looking at political agencies, everyday realities must be considered:

> "for someone to do politics, you need to feel comfortable".

One thirty-five-year-old asylum seeking man* from Nigeria called George put it this way:

> "It´s like telling someone who is unwell, let´s go running. Most people are here for six months or a year and then get deported. That is typical for most people in the process. Most of us are just busy surviving" (George, 2016).

Butler has emphasised how everyday lives and political action are bound together (2015); to be adequately fed, sheltered, rested, educated, etc. are all necessary requirements not only of a livable life but of action. As *Chapter 2* has shown, asylum systems in the UK and Germany are structured in a way that renders asylum seeking subjects as disposable populations. Bordering practices work by making its effects invisible to most of us. According to all asylum seekers I have spoken to, asylum activism, therefore, needs to

attend to these differences and make the effects of bordering and how they play into political subjectivity visible. The "politics" and "political agenda" of activist groups they are criticising are thus a space that does not attend to these effects and by that does not consider different capacities to appear in these spaces. In not considering the different capacities to appear, the practice of asylum activism becomes exclusionary in that it reproduces the political power of citizenship as technology of bordering and racialisation (Genove, 2004; Schinkel, 2010; Redclift, 2013a; 2013b).

Not registering these different implications and needs for emotional labour also invokes a lack of care as a symbol of power, illustrating the entanglement between emotional labour, bordering and activist practices. As in this chapter and *Chapter 3*, asylum seekers articulated a different necessity for care and emotional labour in the context of bordering practices. Here it becomes clear again that intensities are produced through the non-registering of the asylum everyday. As mentioned before, I felt a strong sense of disappointment in many conversations with asylum seekers about their experience of asylum activist spaces, spaces, where they hoped to find solidarity, connection and support. Despite the best intentions of all these activist groups, what they found was another space they could not fully enter, another space that felt *bordered* and uninhabitable.

Moreover, these segments of conversation with asylum seekers also show the draining work of having to remind, explain and make visible, different positionalities. The unheard everyday puts asylum seekers, the subjects most depleted by their everyday lives, in a position where their depletion will only be registered if they do the necessary work of making them visible. The burden of showing the affects of the asylum system is on the shoulders of those who are most drained by the system. This links to my previous discussion on racialised emotional labour in *Chapter 3*.

One of the most intense negotiations of the missing registering of the doings of different positionalities in asylum activist spaces and the burden of making visible, I remember

observing in a group meeting in Berlin, in August 2017. Activists from different groups met to organise a protest event together with a group of women* living in different camps in Berlin. The conversation started with a discussion of what rice to offer at a future protest event and then turned, as so many conversations I observed, into a discussion about different positionalities and white privilege. Lynn, a thirty-six-year-old German woman* based in Berlin, suggested offering a particular kind of rice, when Amina, a forty-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Iran, said that she would prefer if the women* living in the camps could make the decision. She explained that choosing the right rice would be essential as people from different countries have different rice preferences and not considering that and simply choosing a German rice would be a "white choice".

The conversation then turned into a bigger discussion of asylum seekers disproportionate involvement in protest actions, particularly of women* living in camps, whose involvement was largely missing. A group of asylum-seeking women*, including Amina, then began to speak to Lynn and other white German activists about their experience that Germans and Europeans, "white people", often get to make decisions (not just about food) without considering their privileged position and the power they inhabit in decision-making processes. When Lynn responded that despite the fact that she has a German passport, she would not consider herself as privileged as she has children, is fighting to keep her job and had experienced sexual violence in her life, the conversation turned into a heated discussion. According to her, she had only used her nationality to support asylum seekers and now, as she shared, she felt her nationality being used against her by calling her privileged. This is one example of at least fifty I can remember, in which asylum seekers had to make visible the difference produced through their asylum positionality as well as manage the intense emotions these conversations produced in themselves and others.

Asylum seekers withdrawal must in this context thus also be read as not always being able to do the emotional work that their presence in formal activist spaces requires. Peoples silence, their closed eyes, falling asleep (retreating from a space of interaction) is thus

linked to their depleting everyday lives as well as the uneven distribution of emotional labour in activist spaces.

Asylum seekers´ previously mentioned expressions such as "that doesn't concern me", "not part of" and "losing contact with what you are fighting for", thus also challenge a notion of politics that structurally excluded them from participating. Moreover, considering the labours of making visible and managing the emotion that come with confronting privilege, expressions such as "does not concern me" must also be looked at as a form of *pragmatism of survival*: a method of creating a healthy distance and boundaries of what they are able to do and what not, in order to survive. I will explore these techniques in more detail in *Chapter 6*. Setting clear boundaries, the refusal to perform emotional labours, felt like a reclaiming of the right to *not* resist. This "passivity" can be seen as another kind of action, a stepping out of being a non-political subject by not becoming the formal subject of activism, a politics of speech and action, but in becoming a *new* subject that reclaims passivity and non-doing as necessary and political action to survive.

This shows that asylum seekers´ *becoming activist* is not, in fact, a *becoming-other* but a *becoming-other-other.* The *becoming activist* in which asylum seekers engaged here was not a stepping out of the formalised othered situation of being a non-political, racialised, bordered *other* in order to become the formal subject of political rights (the singular *other*: *becoming citizen*), instead asylum seekers became a *new* subject of politics: the *other-other*. Their *becoming activist* seemed like a practice of *othering* the formal *other* by those who are not immediately captured or legitimated by the available norms. Instead of *becoming citizen* or the formal subject of politics they become depleted, pragmatic and passive.

Asylum seekers´ stories also reveal how they are in a conversation with themselves, with the internalised formal political subjectivity, that tells them that they ought to do more, that they are useless unless they speak up and fight in public space. This speaks to the

emotional labour performed by asylum seekers that goes into managing their own emotions in the context of bordering as well a narrow understanding of political agency.

Attending to the politics of time

As I learned, asylum seekers´ subjectivities are also not overly affectively invested in being "political" as the political subject is constituted as rational, theoretical, ideological and future-oriented. In their experience, emotional, embodied, and other politics are being delegitimised and invisibilised in formal activist spaces. A thirty-one-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Nigeria called Grace shared her experience at one protest event in March 2017. She was asked to share her position within asylum activism and refused to speak about "political stuff":

> "I was saying: I won't say what you want me to say. I cannot say what you want me to say. I can only say how I feel right now. They want me to tell me this political stuff but I will tell my story, how I feel. I just want to say my own things, and how I would say it in my own words" (Grace, 2016).

This describes the perceived subjugation of her voice based on embodied experience and emotions through ideological ideas. Her story produces a critique based on embodied and emotional knowledge rather than rationality. In conversation with a narrow model of politics, she negotiates to speak from her own position, her everyday experience of encountering borders, racism and state violence.

All asylum seekers´ stories I have heard in the course of my research speak against a verbalised (not embodied) form of political action. Theoretical discussions within asylum activist spaces, they felt, disconnected and devalued their embodied experience in not recognising the value in learning about the material consequences bordering had on them in the present. My conversations with asylum seekers all articulated internalised ways of knowing and being political. They spoke to a politics that is embodied and

mediated in what exists. Their understanding of "politics" alters the parameters of what it means to be an activist (big events, visibility, rational actors and outcome based). It demands and opens up a political with an orientation towards the now and what's possible (I will further expand this notion in *Chapter 6*).

Ideology and political theory is abstract and its investment goes into thinking and discussing a better future. Most asylum seekers´ lives are in constant uncertainty, not knowing what the future will bring, if they will be detained or deported tomorrow. Therefore, the possibility of politics opens up in the present moment, through asking what is possible and in our power to do right now. Their engagement with the politics of temporality challenges a politics exclusively invested in the future, in a hope for a better future, that is ultimately built on the idea that everyone has the same capacity to decide and anticipate their future (Munoz, 2009; Edelman, 2004). As "politics" is constructed as something that does not include or recognise them, they perceive most activist groups´ objectives as not relating to them:

> "they have nothing to do with the challenges of the people they are using but has a lot to do with the political agenda" (Alan, 2017).

"Politics" focuses on institutions, structure and a better future, it is not rooted in the present moment; in peoples struggle to survive today and how inequalities are expressed in and through everyday interactions. The politics of temporality (Halberstam, 2005; Dinshaw, Edelman, Ferguson, Freccero, Freeman, Halberstam & Nguyen, 2007; Halberstam & Halberstam, 2011) seems therefore also essential to their reformulation of politics. Asylum seekers´ politics happens in the present moment so that it can learn through practice how to change the way power is unfolding right now.

Speaking about the abstract and future based engagement with politics within formal activist spaces, a thirty-seven-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Iran called Mina told me in a conversation:

> "I think they are targeting the wrong group with the wrong problems. I have enough problems already" (Mina, 2016).

In her critique is a reminder that there are different capacities for being able to opt out of the present, depending on how a subject is positioned. As other asylum seekers pointed out to me, a preoccupation with the future in asylum activism means not being able to attend to the present, in which life and social inequalities unfold.

Asylum seekers, instead, affectively invest in the promise of "practical" political activism, such as stopping deportation flights. The promise of activism lies in doing little practical things that change their situation. They open up the field of activism to everyday life, the routines, activities and emotions of being an asylum seeker through which power structures and social inequalities are reproduced. Asylum seekers suggest the enactment in the present moment of a transformed future world which they propose to bring about by finding tangible moments of intervention. This again felt like a form of *pragmatism of survival*; that allows the uncomfortable asylum-seeking subject to get by.

Sarata, a twenty-nine-year-old woman* from the Gambia, for example, imagines a practical politics, I have heard many asylum seekers describing:

> "Why are we protesting against borders? Even in my country Gambia, you don't allow all people in. That's never going to happen. Why are we protesting this? This is the question you start asking. You cannot just say open all the borders, that's never going to happen, that's just realistic. I´m just saying if you make objectives, then make objectives that are realistic that is going to attract people to you. But if you make this abstract, these abstract objectives that's never going to happen. People don't know what they are protesting for. And people get tired. Is it really possible to just open the borders? You lose contact with what you are protesting for. I´m for it, I´m for open borders honestly. But... it´s just like... if you tried to narrow it down and you keep going on with that... For instance, if you are saying that people who are already in are allowed to stay. But if you just like open the borders for everyone, that's never going to happen" (Sarata, 2016).

Importantly, Sarata´s story is not an argument for borders but a critique of the hidden politics of time. She asks for a politics, for action, that can be realised right now and could bring about tangible change. Sarata believes in open borders but that idea does not feel tangible enough for her at this moment. The conversation I had with her about bordering felt like a call for urgency and the acknowledgement of the horrific effects of everyday bordering practices on asylum seekers. It also speaks to how her positionality, as bordered subject, produces a necessary focus and need of surviving in the present moment and a political response to bordering that bring about change now. Again, these are smaller, everyday changes:

> "I´ve heard people going to the airport and stopped a deportation flight. I was so proud of this people honestly. That's something people should be doing. But going to talks and demonstrating... flights leave anyway" (Sarata, 2016).

Sarata also calls for a form of activism that has immediate outcomes for people most affected by the bordering system:

> "We knew the (deportation) flights were leaving on that day. What are we doing? They should have gone to local communities saying this (deportation) flight with Nigerians leaves on that day in that place... everyone that has a British passport; come! There was this guy, who was supposed to get deported and he got help. If you get people whom you tell when exactly you will be deported they call the airline. The airline has information about every flight, about the flight attendance and the pilot. And all these people´s number you can get. So this guy was calling the pilot telling him that this person will be deported and what he has been through. And the pilot has a right to know and in this case, he refused to deport him. It is happening! You see? That´s what we need to do" (Sarata, 2016).

In asking "What are we doing?", Sarata speaks to points of dissonance in the space of asylum activism. A dissonance that is accompanied by feelings of anger, fear and frustration. Sarata calls for another form of activism based on direct action around what will tangibly change the immediate outcome for the people who are made most

vulnerable through everyday bordering practices. A space that does not recognise or address the immediacy of asylum precarity, cannot be *real* solidarity in her understanding.

Attending to possible risks and harms

The unheard everyday also makes invisible the possible risks and harms of activism for asylum seekers. A sense of "I cannot risk to be political", a fear and discomfort about the possible risks and harms of activism was communicated to me in most conversations with asylum seekers. Next to that, I observed the physical absence of bodies at public protest events that spoke to the different implications political involvement has on bordered, racialised bodies of asylum seekers.

In the two years of my fieldwork, I heard much about the dangers of political spaces. George, a thirty-five-year-old asylum-seeking man* from Nigeria told me:

> "I don't really want to get into politics because when you are starting messing with it you need to be very careful" (George, 2017).

Another story that stayed with me also spoke about the different consequences political involvement can have. It is the story of a twenty-five-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Afghanistan called Afshaneh:

> "You know I worked with political initiatives for more than six months and some of them make very big mistakes that are tremendous for the women, asylum seekers, but for the activist – oh I made a mistake, I´m human – but for the asylum seekers. Like one time a complaint was sent to an organisation (I´m not going to name the organisation) and that complaint was sent to the representatives of the camp and it turned out that these emails are controlled by the social workers of the administration. So they reported the women. So a small mistake can ruin a life. It is always like that. Even social workers say oh small mistake, I forgot to give you your mail - for another woman this means deportation because she didn't show up to the appointment; and then a woman and

> her children get deported to Afghanistan and killed. And the woman says "oh sorry, I have had a really bad day today" (Afshaneh, 2017).

These experiences tell the story of how everything from attending a public demonstration to working with political initiatives are moments in which "little mistakes" form a potential risk and harm for asylum seekers. It also speaks to a lack of acknowledgement of these material consequences of political engagement within asylum activist groups. It shows how an insufficient and unembedded understanding of how bordering works, endangers asylum seekers. Moreover, it illustrates how the pervasiveness of bordering makes asylum activism nearly impossible, which further emphasises asylum seekers´ demand for a situated asylum activism. Activists that want to help in solidarity are caught up in either complete paralysis, when acknowledging the structures and what is possible, or doing something that might have tremendous consequences for asylum seekers. Although this should definitely not be an argument to end asylum activism, the restraints, possible risks and harms need to be acknowledged. According to these voices, the asylum activist community needs a greater reflexivity as the attempt to resist within the space that is given to them by the state too easily replicates these structures.

Similarly, a thirty-four-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Egypt called Faareh described her worries that her political involvement could be negatively impacting upon her asylum case to me in July 2017:

> "I always ask myself: What if it is going to be used against me in my case? I know it´s your democratic right to express yourself in public but that doesn't matter when you are black, when you are an asylum seeker. Telling people just speak up doesn't work if this is not considered. One organisation said to me every woman should come and resist. You know a woman like me, a student, I have a master degree in engineering. And you know there are women who have five children, who are afraid for them. She is afraid for herself, she can't read or write in her own language. Why do you want to force these women? Why should not I, people who are political, who have experience, give our help to her? Sacrifice, this responsibility! You put yourself at risk but you know inside of your heart that you are strong, that you have friends that support you. So you can resist with them. But these women who have five children

> dependent on them, or even one child depending on them. She is afraid and doesn't know what to do... Why do you ask them to come and resist? I´m not saying these women are not political, they run away from their country and took the responsibility themselves for their children. That is political. And they try very hard, they complain every minute to the lager administration, to the Home Office, to the Jobcentre" (Faareh, 2017).

Faareh´s story also calls for asylum activism that considers different positionalities, histories, politics and risks. It imagines another ethic of care within asylum activism. A notion of the political that emerges in relation to these conditions and a more conscious division of labour according to different legal statuses.

My conversations with George, Afshaneh and Faareh also again show a form of *pragmatism of survival:* asylum seekers seem to know what they risk by being involved and sometimes that risk is too high. This reveals the invisible "optimism", inherent in many asylum activist group politics. Through not taking into consideration activists different positions and subsequent during events, there is, according to many asylum seekers I have been talking to, a "dangerous" optimism inherent; the unspoken assumption that "everything will be ok". Asylum seekers´ stories, however, show that there is a real harm to this optimism for them: it is their fear of the possible outcomes that keep them from becoming "active" in a more traditional sense. This withdrawing might easily be read as an obstacle to activism, as exactly where state and power want you to be; afraid to resist, bound by fear. These stories, however, show that their pessimism might be *the* asylum activist act that keeps them alive.

Conclusion

The chapter demonstrated how formal asylum activist spaces work by trying to create mutuality and to build a knot that ties everyone in. Yet, disconnection and dissonance are created, because the space does not acknowledge the different kinds of everyday experiences, materialities and the physical exhaustion people bring to the room. As a

result, without it meaning to happen, the space of formal solidarity becomes another space of depletion. The solidarity in these spaces is disrupted as people who are most depleted by the bordering regime cannot be comfortable in formal asylum activist spaces. In order to allow for *real* solidarity, asylum activism need to be situated. Only that way activists can recognise that already depleted asylum seekers who are forced to embody the border in their everyday life, are doubly depleted by their attempt to find solidarity and build solidarity because of what politics are practiced within these spaces. The question of the politics of the subject in discomfort, the unfed and unwell body, thus starts at thinking about the materialities and emotionality that underlie political agency.

The chapter also revealed the constant negotiation of political possibilities. Asylum seekers´ questioning, in words and bodily reactions, of the formal space of politics as well as the notion of an activist subject provide both disturbances of notions of the political and equally provide alternative ways of accounting for and understanding the political and solidarity. These acts of questioning of bodies cannot be located within a struggle over rights or membership, or the claiming of citizenship, but rather provide and practice different cartographies of politics than citizenship which help us to reimagine and resist contemporary bordering practices. Recognising the potential of these embodied acts can open up ways of conceptualising politics that, beside citizenship, allows for a more complex consideration of different positionalities. Perceiving affect and emotion as a way to communicate different positionalities can help us to (re)think the boundaries of the political and move towards an affective mode of political subjectivity.

These stories also illustrate how there is always more than one space of asylum activism being made and how these different spaces interact. There is the space of formal politics defined by unequal access. Asylum seekers´ positionality and precarious everyday lives do not allow them to enter this space. However, attending to affect and emotion in these spaces allowed me to notice another space of asylum activism opening up in the exact same physical space; a parallel space that is lived by asylum seekers while is unregistered by others: *The politics of the unfed and unwell body*. These politics can only be

registered as political possibilities when situating asylum activism. Asylum seekers´ politics can be described as (1) embodied, affective and emotional, (2) located in the everyday, (3) pragmatic, (4) empathic and caring and (5) rooted in the present moment. These politics do not mark a *becoming-other* in the form of the formal subject of activism, a politics of speech and action, but a *becoming-other-other*: a *new* subject of politics.

Asylum seekers´ activist practice thus disrupts the understanding of the formal political space of the subject-citizen as the only mode of politics. Tracing emotional knots allowed me to attend to asylum seekers´ intense attachments to the concept of "politics" produced by their precarious asylum positionality.

Asylum seekers´ stories also felt like a call for an attentive listening so they would not have to remind, explain, make visible, but also a call for a different kind of inhabitance. It is a call for action and a demand for a new politics, a politics based not on the possibility that asylum machinery or racism might be eradicated, but on learning how to be in political spaces together with people that experience the uneven effects of these structures. Asylum seekers´ practice of asylum activism calls for consideration of different positionalities, histories, politics and risks. It imagines another ethic of care with asylum activism, a notion of the political that emerges in relation to these conditions and a more conscious division of labour according to different legal statuses.

5

Looking Beyond Formal Political Spaces: The Affective Violence of the Asylum Everyday

The last chapter described emotional knots in asylum activism and their role in increasing mutuality and distance in formal activist group spaces. Exploring threads that build these knots showed the role of the "unheard" asylum everyday; the missing registering of the doings of different positionalities in these spaces. As this chapter will go on to show, the asylum everyday is not monolithic, but is full of unexpected moments and entanglements with the political. I want to think of the everyday in this chapter in the many ways it is unacknowledged, unheard, which means that it remains invisible to our senses unless we shift our attention. So in this sense, learning to listen to the asylum everyday is not simply about voice and volume, but about what it means to do research and to "be" "in" the field. As John, the thirty-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda reminds us in the previous chapter: "you have to remember", I witnessed on many occasions the everyday being "forgotten". This again, shows the missing acknowledgement of the precarious asylum everyday, which, I will conceptualise in this chapter as "affective violence".

The previous chapter revealed how, despite activist's good intentions, the formal space of solidarity becomes another space of depletion. It emphasised the need to further unpack the asylum everyday in order to understand how spaces of asylum activism can instead be created that ease up burden. Thus this chapter attempts to situate and further explore the politics of asylum activism by attending to the asylum everyday: the everyday lives of

asylum seekers. As outlined in *Chapter 3*, I conceptualise the everyday as everything that is placed outside of what we call the political. The everyday in this thesis thus includes day-to-day acts as well as what is not made political within formal activist spaces: emotion and affect. The placement and not-belonging of specific things in formal spaces of politics is always political as it reproduces a narrow understanding of politics that intentionally prevents people from participating (as explored in more detail in the last chapter). While the last chapter located and analysed the space of the everyday in formal activist spaces, in the form of everything that went unacknowledged, this chapter will look at the space of the everyday in asylum seekers´ day-to-day lives. I do not only want to argue that the everyday and the formal political are entangled, I also want to show how the everyday itself is political as a space of what I call slow affective border violence.

I argue that intensities of discomfort, produced through everyday bordering experiences, stick (Ahmed, 2004) to asylum seekers´ bodies, where they accumulate and create a heaviness that depletes asylum seekers´ lives. Sara Ahmed famously explored the "stickiness" of emotions. In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Ahmed argues, "there is a political struggle about how we attribute good and bad feelings, which hesitates around the apparently simple question of who introduces what feelings to whom. Feelings can get stuck to certain bodies...and bodies can get stuck depending on the feelings with which they get associated" (p. 69).

I conceptualise discomfort as a complex affectual sensibility felt through the body, expressed in worry, shame and fear; all depleting bodily experiences. The discomfort asylum seekers experienced seemed fixed, immobile, territorialising (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) their bodies over and over. The term accumulation emerged out of my fieldwork to refer to the stickiness of intensities as well as to the heavy material effects this fixing has on asylum seekers´ bodies.

I find these terms helpful in thinking about how political materialities are structured differently. In my conversations with asylum seekers, they often used the words "its so

hard", "exhaustion", "tired" and as well as an endless list of things they "can´t do". These and many other expressions I have heard many times in the field, all reflect a slowing down, a persistent feeling of being weighed down, feeling overpowered and finding it difficult to move. An experience with great density and thickness; hard to digest. A body in which intensities have accumulated is a heavy body, a body in tension, a feeling of worry and anxiety that makes it difficult for asylum seekers to relax, to lessen corporal tension. The heaviness and tension are created by this constant state of fear and uncertainty that makes up asylum seekers´ lives. They speak to the rhythm bordering forced onto their lives as well as a deep sadness and grief. As I explored in the last chapter, these intensities, produced in the everyday energised asylum activist spaces, creating intensities and knots.

In this chapter, I want to describe different spaces of bordering that show the accumulation of intensities. Feelings of discomfort follow asylum seekers wherever they go. In describing different spaces of bordering and different physicalities of discomfort, I illustrate what bordering does to bodies in asylum.

The stories of asylum seekers about these different spaces allowed me to explore its qualitative, processual, lived experience; namely, how bordering depletes life. Thinking through bordering from the perspective of intensity, however, also raises the question of the extent to which bodies have the capacity to manage these intensities. As such, in *Chapter 6*, I consider how an understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of intensity offers an insight into techniques asylum seekers use to manage their experience.

Everyday bordering and the asylum

Much scholarship has pointed out that bordering today must be understood in a much broader context. According to them, the geographies of borders have become more expansive; invading all aspects of people's lives. Landlords, employers, bank employees, education and health care professionals have become responsible for checking the

immigration status of their tenants, employees, students and patients. These new border agents can be seen as daily practices of immigration control (Armeta, 2017, Gravelle, Ellermann & Dauvergne, 2012; Van Houtum & Van Naersson, 2002; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss & Cassidy, 2018). This further illustrates how borders are not simply given but emerge out of border-*making* or *bordering* that takes place in political and public spaces as much as in everyday live. However, these new *border agents* have not chosen to become border agents, most of them are legally forced to execute daily border practices to not "become precarious" themselves.

Nira Yuval-Davis (2013, p. 15) has defined bordering as "practices that are situated and constituted in the specificity of political negotiations as well as the everyday life performance of them, being shifting and contested between individuals and groupings as well as in the construction of individual subjectivities". In this chapter, I want to discuss the increasing pervasiveness and elusiveness of processes of bordering by looking at how affect and emotion become border agents in producing the border in asylum seekers´ everyday lives.

My close friendships with asylum seekers between 2015 and 2018 have shown me that there is something distinctive about the positionality of bordered, racialised bodies in the asylum procedure. As I will argue, the positioning of subjects in asylum needs more particular attention in the discussion of migrant precarity but also within asylum activist spaces. Particularly, in a time in which bordering practices have become more and more diffused (Kaufmann, 2018), privatised (Doty & Wheatley, 2013) and everyday (Armeta, 2017, Gravelle, Ellermann & Dauvergne, 2012).

I will argue that the hostile environment the UK and Germany are actively and intentionally producing works importantly through affect and emotion, therefore bordering needs to be conceptualised as an affective and emotional practice.

The previous chapter has revealed how bordering experiences follows asylum seekers into formal activist spaces and how we can better register the doings of the asylum positionality in these spaces when we attend to affect and emotion. The chapter has also shown how we need a more detailed understanding of the deep emotionality and affectivity of the asylum everyday to be able to create political spaces that make everyone feel comfortable. To attend to the politics of subjectivity in discomfort means attending to the discomfort as a starting point for politics.

Most literature on everyday bordering focuses on questions of access and rights, for example, to healthcare, housing and education as the obvious and visible doings of bordering. What I want to attend to in this chapter is the *background*: the emotional work of bordering.

Everyday bordering works by setting up a system of endless depletion, in which asylum seekers encounter and feel borders everywhere. The feelings of shame, discomfort and fear, constantly being disciplined and not being able to physically sustain their bodies are part of a constant process of bordering. It is *affective border violence*, I argue, that creates precarious subjectivities in the current bordering regime. As mentioned in previous chapters, it is therefore essential, to attend to how bordering works through the body, affect and emotion. The affectivity and effectiveness of everyday bordering, what it *does* and what power it has to affect bodies in the political and the everyday, can only be captured by paying attention to embodied responses, feelings and sensations - the materiality of everyday bordering. This becomes visible in seeing what emotional structures are created and how these affect asylum seekers´ lives. The current political analyses of bordering, however, often disregards this and so negates the sensually violent world this bordering creates.

This illustrates how emotions are bound up with the securing of a specific social hierarchy (Ahmed, 2004; 2013; Lorde, 1981; Collins, 1986; Cohen, 2004; Hooks, 2000, Wilkinson, 2009; Illouz, 1997; 2007). States seek to activate emotions such as discomfort, fear and

shame in asylum seekers (Ahmed, 2004) to uphold existing power structures. From my conversations with asylum seekers it seems clear that violent structures of discomfort and depletion are produced intentionally as they operate to reduce the possibilities for solidarity and transformation. As illustrated in *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 3*, the intensity of these experiences prevents people from living a livable life, but also from appearing in formal activist spaces. As this chapter will show, there is also an emotional component, an emotional wellbeing and nurturing that is necessary to appear in formal political spaces. If we talk about precarity we thus also need to talk about a political condition of an unequal distribution of exposure to *emotional harm*. An unlivable life is thus not only a life that is not worth protecting, sheltering, or feeding it is a life that's actively depleted and made uncomfortable across different spaces and temporalities. However, it is important to make distinctions within the idea of an unlivable life as "unlivability" comes in different degrees.

Being left to die is of course not the same as being left uncomfortable, rather "unlivability" must be seen as a continuum. Importantly, there is also a difference between the affective violence of the state and the discomfort asylum seekers encounter in formal activist spaces. In contrast to discomfort experienced in activist spaces, state violence works by applying different techniques of "unlivability" that, as this chapter will illustrate, are always in conversation with ideas of near death such as detention, deportation and severe emotional depletion.

As this thesis shows, attending to the relationship between the emotional component of precarity and political activism is important when we want to create political spaces in which everyone can feel comfortable. Attending to emotions and affect in the asylum precarity also points to the entanglement between emotional labour, asylum precarity and the activist practices explored in *Chapter 3*. As the last two chapters revealed, the stronger set of implications that the de-prioritisation of care in asylum activist spaces has, in the context of everyday bordering, showed that withholding of care can be used as symbol of power by both asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers.

Affective border violence

I want to propose here to conceptualise the multiple affective asylum precarity that is intentionally created by states as a form of *affective violence*, a form of violence that works through structures of emotions and affects. Affective border violence works in an invisible, gradual and non-linear way, that other notions of violence cannot capture. It must, therefore, be attended to as a form of "slow violence". Nixon (2011) introduced the term "slow violence" as a form of violence:

> "that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility" (p. 2).

Slow violence is, according to Nixon "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (p. 2).

Similar to Nixon´s understanding of slow violence, I argue, asylum discomfort works through creating a massive amount of everyday forms of slow suffering. However, unlike Nixon, I want to particularly focus on the affectivity and emotionality of this suffering. The form of slow affective border violence I want to describe in this chapter is characterised by 1) the continuation of the spaces of discomfort across time and space 2) the accumulation of intensities and 3) its invisibility and 4) non-linearness. There are no clear beginnings or endings to the slow affective violence of bordering. It does not have a direct action-response relationship: the effects of the violence accumulate gradually and often do not show up in direct response to experiences, but are dispersed across time and space. The increasing number of acts of self-harm within detention centres that recently received much media attention (Mulman, 2018; Migrants Rights Network, 2018),

for example, are often not a direct response to one single event, rather they are the result of a massive amount of everyday forms of suffering.

These affective, everyday forms of violence often fade from our view as they work in subtle and quiet ways, through borders that are invisible to most of us. It is through the invisibility that this violence never quite achieves a state of having occurred at all; no one held responsible and in turn this suits a politics of asylum, in which responsibility is pushed back and forth between state authorities and private companies. As I argue, the everyday feelings and structures of affective violence are not always tangible or representable and the "political power of intensities" (Thrift, 2004) is utilised by the state in the day to day to uphold and amplify processes of bordering and racialisation. This political power and its effects only become visible through a closeness of bodies that asylum systems in both countries make nearly impossible: therefore a shift in our understanding of bordering and violence is urgently needed.

Encountering affective border violence

The affective violence I want to share about in this chapter became visible to me in so many ways in the lives of people and communities I was involved in. During my fieldwork in asylum activist communities in London and Berlin, I witnessed endless moments, in which bodies of asylum seekers were subjected to affective violence.

Asylum seekers were subjected to affective violence whenever they walked past the police. Asylum seekers were subjected to affective violence when the police ask them during protest events for their details. Asylum seekers were subjected to affective violence when constantly worrying about money and food. Asylum seekers were subjected to affective violence when only receiving thirty-six pounds a week to cover everything from food to travel expenses in the UK, where the cost of living is high. Asylum seekers are subjected to affective violence when collecting this thirty-six pounds at the post office every week. They were subjected to affective violence when I invited them

over to my house and they were not able to come because they were running out of money. They were subjected to affective violence when feeling discomfort whenever I paid for something or offered them money. Asylum seekers were subjected to affective violence when they were not able to attend a demonstration because they could not afford the journey.

They were subjected to affective violence when asked to eat food in Berlin´s asylum camp spaces that made them sick. Asylum seeker women* and children were subjected to affective violence when the spicy foods mothers were served led to their children refusing to breastfeed. They were subjected to affective violence when having no agency in deciding what they want to eat and when. Asylum seekers were subjected to affective violence when their most intimate relationships were infiltrated by bordering processes. They were subjected to affective violence when constantly having to worry about their basic needs being met. They were subjected to affective violence when reporting to the Home Office, never knowing if their very presence might end up in them being detained.

Asylum seekers were subjected to affective violence when living in camp spaces with a complete lack of privacy and safety, particularly for women*. Asylum seeker women*, who had experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives, were subjected to affective violence when forced to live in a camp space where they were controlled and harassed by male* security guards. They were subjected to affective violence when being deprived of sleep. Asylum seekers were subjected to affective violence when their bodies were forced to constantly manage and negotiate feelings of fear, stress and powerlessness. They were subjected to affective violence when the markedness of their racialised bodies meant being asked to leave a pub where we met to work on one of our projects together. Asylum seekers are subjected to affective violence when walking on the streets worrying that the markedness of their racialised bodies could lead to harassment or violence. They were subjected to affective violence when bordering processes produced constant feelings of sadness, anger, worry, helplessness and depletion.

As *Chapter 4* revealed, asylum seekers were even subjected to affective violence in spaces of asylum activism; the space of formal solidarity, becoming at times yet another space of depletion as the people who are most depleted by the bordering regime cannot be comfortable there and the more this remains unacknowledged the more emotional knots build. Slow affective bordering violence needs to be seen and deeply considered in activist spaces - across different spaces, bodies, labour and time. Attending to these different layers of discomfort, the multiple affective precarity, as an unnoticed form of violence is not only important in order to understand how these everyday waves of state violence are lived and experienced but also how they are, and can be, politically negotiated and challenged.

In the following, I want to turn to the question of how can we capture the affective doings of the asylum everyday that is a form of pervasive, elusive and slow affective violence. I will argue that in order to confront this slow affective form of border violence, in all its temporal and spatial complexity, we need to shift our attention to what is invisible to us, to the media and to academic knowledge production, and consider it all in great detail.

The following narration of different spaces of bordering in asylum seekers´ everyday life show asylum seekers´ constant negotiations of discomfort. This chapter hopes to show how discomfort accumulates, sticks onto bodies of asylum seekers creating heaviness. Moreover, I began to see the continuity between the emotional knots I observed in asylum activist spaces and their everyday lives. The continuity I saw, was asylum seekers being forced to negotiate the now and make it inhabitable wherever they went. These "unseen labours" express themselves in negotiations of discomfort, heaviness and separate realities.

To do this I began to assemble fragments of conversation, memory and reflection of my encounters with asylum seekers between 2015 and 2018. In each fragment, I return to the question: How does everyday bordering shape bodies of asylum seekers? In Spinoza's terms, emotions shape what bodies can do, as "the modifications of the body by which

the power of action on the body is increased or diminished" (Spinoza, 1959, p. 85; 2001). So rather than asking "What are emotions?", I will ask, "What do emotions do?" By doing this, I hope to draw a picture of the emotional landscape of bordering.

Exploring affective border violence across different temporal and spatial settings

Here I want to map the emotional landscape of racialised bodies in the asylum procedure in relation to the everyday. Discomfort; unease, worry, shame and fear are emotional aspects of asylum seekers´ daily life in quite specific ways: at the local post office, during gay clubbing, in their "homes" and friendships. The friendships with asylum seekers developing out of my fieldwork have shown me that understanding the particularities of an asylum positionality requires us to not distribute discomfort to everyone, we all feel uncomfortable at times, but that we recognise how discomfort is already unevenly distributed. This chapter is a journey through different spaces of depletion and precarity – different spaces of affective border violence, while always coming back to the role of the state.

Collecting money

The first story is a story about formal contact with the state taking place at a post office in London. Until spring 2017 in the UK, most asylum seekers had to collect their allowance in cash from a local post office, where they had to present their Application Registration Card (ARC) that confirms their identity and eligibility for support.[20] When people apply for asylum, they are not allowed to work while they wait for their claim to be decided. Those who have savings must live off them; those who are destitute, which is a high number, given the circumstances under which many people arrive in the UK, are entitled to support in the form of housing and an allowance of £36.95 a person a week. Cynthia, a

[20] This practice changed in spring 2017, now asylum seekers´ allowance is loaded onto debit cards (ASPEN card) each week, with which they can get cash from cash machines.

thirty-year-old woman* from Nigeria describes her experience of collecting her allowance at a local post office:

> "Sometimes, if you go to the post office to pick up your money everyone is looking at you and you feel so uneasy. I always feel so uneasy. One time my money was short of two pounds but I didn't go back to ask for it, when I realised two pounds were missing, because you don't call for attention because they look at you. So you just have to walk away. Sometimes the person giving you the money doesn't even look at your face. I never go there on a Monday because they queue is very long. I´m going when the queue is very short. I´m afraid people are thinking: why is she getting the money anyway? It just comes to your head so I just walked away shamefully but I felt so uncomfortable. I felt like it is my right and I don't exercise is because I don't feel I can do it, I don't feel comfortable around myself. Because when people feel comfortable they can defend their position but if you´re not, of course, you walk away. Even if it is just two pounds" (Cynthia, 2017).

Cynthia describes intense feelings of unease and shame when collecting her money at the post office. Her simply being there and people possibly identifying her as an asylum seeker makes her feel uncomfortable as people might perceive her as undeserving. These feelings of worry, shame and fear keep her from asking for the missing two pounds. Having been friends with Cynthia for two years, I know how valuable these two pounds are for her. Cynthia is not allowed to work as the majority of asylum seekers and so has to live of £36.95 a week, which is not enough to cover her travel expenses to her solicitor, to occasionally see friends and buy food. She relies on other people contributing to her expenses.

Cynthia´s story also shows the bodily intensities that being identified as asylum seeker brings: Cynthia´s discomfort of being yet again identified as an asylum seeker is larger than her essential need for the two pounds. In our conversation, she expressed shame around not being able to stand up for herself, to not conform with the internalised model of a neoliberal subject that "takes care of themselves", of a resistant subjectivity that speaks up and acts. However, not asking for the two pounds to avoid further embarrassment makes her feel uncomfortable too, as she feels she is not claiming her

right to the exact amount she is due. This speaks to the already mentioned politics of shame that are mobilised by states to uphold existing power structures (Munt, 2007; Ahmed, 2004, Zembylas, 2008).

Cynthia explains how getting attention, being recognised as an asylum seeker collecting money, is something she is afraid of, that makes her feel uncomfortable as people might perceive her as "not deserving". At the same time not being recognised, looked at, not getting attention as she describes with regards to the person working in the post office "not even looking at her", feels uncomfortable as well. This speaks to the complexity and ambiguity of the politics of emotion (Ahmed, 2004). The complex and ambiguous intensity attached to being identified as an asylum seeker or "being invisible" does not only appear in the space of the post office, however, they continue in most other spaces of asylum seekers´ everyday lives.

A forty-five-year-old asylum-seeking man* from Uganda called Samuel, for example, shared with me the story of how he felt invisible to a bus driver, who ignored him and not looked at his face after he showed a ticket from Red Cross he has been given when leaving a detention centre. He then decided to pay for his journey so he felt it was being treated as “a human being”. It becomes clear that the intensities of being identified as asylum seekers continue over time and space as the following section on gay clubbing will also show. Spaces of bordering thus flow into each other, causing these affectual sensibilities to accumulate.

Looking at what happens before and after asylum seekers enter and leave the post office to collect their money also shows the continuation of discomfort. The "before" and "after" the post office is another space of discomfort as many asylum seekers have to walk through neighbourhoods that reconfirm their concerns of being recognised as racialised foreignness. Asylum accommodation is concentrated in the lowest income areas and through the recent collapsing of bordering and racialisation, violence on the streets has become unpredictable. Many asylum seekers I have spoken to encounter verbal or

physical threats on a daily basis. Some of them have been shouted at, others harassed, even attacked. Asylum seekers experience their personal space and safety being invaded every day. A twenty-five-year-old asylum-seeking woman* from Ivory coast called Christelle explained to me how these experiences do not just last for a few seconds, often they take up a lot of emotional and mental space[21], even days after the encounter. The discomfort, fear and anger add to her collection of everyday racism experiences that impact upon how comfortable she feels in and around public space. Christelle shared:

> "I don´t try to get into situations where I cannot escape or where I am all alone. Often I ask a friend to come to the post office with me. It just feels too dangerous sometimes to be on your own" (Christelle, 2017).

Cynthia´s and Christelle´s stories reveal how much negotiation, emotion management goes into a weekly activity such as collecting money from the Home Office and the emotional rhythm bordering forces onto their lives. In the post office, Cynthia and Christelle (and all other asylum seekers I interviewed) have to negotiate the complexity and ambiguities of the *politics of discomfort;* tied to their appearance in public spaces as bordered, racialised others; tied to needing their allowance to survive; tied to other people´s possible judgement and lastly, tied to not speaking up for themselves. Outside of the post office, Cynthia and Christelle have to negotiate their fear of being harassed, attacked and verbally abused. These constant negotiations, the continuance of intensities and their stickiness paralyses asylum seekers´ bodies and as a consequence diminishes their power to act.

[21] Using emotional and mental space, I refer to how much space, time and energy goes into these experiences after they have happened. While emotional space speaks to the intensity and circulation of feelings and emotions, mental space speaks to how much thinking, worrying and thought processes of fear go into these experiences of everyday racism and bordering.

Gay clubbing

The next space of bordering I want to look at is a very informal contact within the state and yet, still is about documentation, identity and the ways in which asylum seeker are always at the border even if they are not trying to pass a border or claim asylum; they have become the embodiment of the border, taking it with them to wherever they go. In autumn 2016, my two friends Christine, A thirty-one-year-old asylum-seeking woman* from Eritrea, and Dalia, a thirty-six-year-old asylum-seeking woman* from Somalia, shared their experience of going clubbing with me, and what discomforts it brought up. Dalia and Christine were really excited to go out to get some distraction from constantly thinking about their asylum case, about the uncertainty of not knowing what the next day will bring. As they shared, gay clubbing was supposed to bring some momentary relief and fun and was supposed to help them to forget the asylum just for one night, however, when they were queuing in front of a gay club and discovered that the club was checking people's ID, they were confronted again with the affective violence of the border:

> "We were so reluctant to bring out the card because they take such a weird look at you" (Christine, 2016).
>
> "And of course it's a moment you don't want to think about it… I felt so uncomfortable, so uncomfortable" (Dalia, 2016).
>
> "You never know what will happen with those ID checks. I know people get detained in all kinds of different locations. It tends to happen when you don´t expect it" (Christine, 2016).
>
> "Yes, that is what tends to happen. This is what makes you crazy. Knowing everything could happen anywhere. You´re never really safe" (Dalia, 2016).

This story shows how even when asylum seekers are trying to escape the border for one night, they are still encountering it and by that, its violent affects. Similar to post office story, this story communicates the discomforts; fears, worries and pains attached to being

interpellated as asylum seekers. Dalia and Christine, as they told me, were hoping to enter an alternative space in which they are "not forced to identify as anything". Both of my friends felt embarrassed to have to "identify" as an asylum seeker because some people might perceive them as undeserving. Moreover, they were afraid of the possible consequences that identifying as an asylum seeker could have for them. Identifying as an asylum seeker feels unsafe because it could lead to anything; from a racist comment, to violence, to the police being called, to them being detained.

Dalia and Christine´s thinking and worrying about the possibility of detention also speaks to the entanglement of the politics of discomfort with the politics of detention. Both of my friends felt worried about what consequences showing their ID would have. Showing your ID as an asylum seeker always bears the risk of being detained. My two friends who shared that story have both been detained before. In fact, thirty of the forty asylum seekers I have spoken to, were detained at least once. Some of them were picked up on the streets, others were detained when reporting to the Home Office; as they are required to do at different intervals. The affective violence of detention, as Dalia and Christine mention here, does not start at the point when people get detained and ends when they are released. It is the constant threat of a possible detention, the unpredictability, that is violent too; an affective violence that works through keeping people in a constant state of fear and worry.

Dalia and Christine were looking for a space of comfort, an evening of comfort, where this intensity would lessen. However, the border even follows asylum seekers into "leisure" activities. Clubbing, in particular, illustrates an important social space. It is an available communal activity of physical pleasure that allows people to bridge different lives. There is also relative anonymity that allows people to be whomever they want to be. However, my friends search for a different way to be, stripping themselves of this identity for one night, is denied by them trying to enter the space.

Gay clubbing offers the possibility for asylum seekers to strip their identity as asylum seeker for one night and practice another identity. This possibility can ease burden and bring about relief, as Christine and Dalia shared. However, as mentioned before the LGBT identity, as another identity, is also forcefully instrumentalised in the asylum process, in which asylum seekers feel the demand to appear in public and become visible to prove their case (Lewis, 2014). LGBT asylum seekers are forced to perform a visible LGBT identity in order to be considered worthy candidates for asylum. The space of gay clubbing does thus involve, on top of the discomfort created around documentation, another layer of discomfort produced through LGBT asylum seekers having to negotiate this need to be visible and the possible risks this visibility brings.

The story illustrates how other identities such as LGBT are entangled with the asylum identity, which does not allow any moments of comfort. In a moment such as clubbing asylum seekers are looking for momentary comfort, or at least only one level of discomfort, attached to having to perform a specific identity. However, as explained above through having to create LGBT "proof", asylum seekers never have the freedom to only be their "sexual self" as in the context of asylum, peoples "sexual self" is entangled with their "asylum self". Despite the forced visibility that asylum seekers encounter in the space of gay clubbing, asylum seekers also shared with me how it still provides some comfort as for them "just being there" always also represents a small articulation of LGBT rights.

Having had many such experiences, many of the asylum seekers I have been talking to decided to not go clubbing anymore. In times, when almost everyone is turned into a bordering guard, their "don´t do", "don't go", "don´t say" lists are long. They "do not go out". They do not "walk on the streets in the night", as that is "not safe". They do not allow themselves to "relax for a just a minute", because that minute "might be the moment" when they get detained or deported. They do not stay away from their homes longer than one night as they always need to be available to receive and to respond to letters. They "don´t travel at peak times" because that costs more. They "don´t take the

overground or tube" as it is more expensive than the bus, and most importantly, they can "not forget" that bordering shows up for them around most corners, in most conversations.

As this was not already more than anyone could live with, asylum seekers also find themselves "stuck" in these, and many moments, only being able to appear as asylum seekers. This shows the role subjectification plays in everyday bordering and how it is entangled with physicalities of discomfort that become fixed and immobile. It illustrates what bordering does through assigning subjectivities and emotions to bodies. The bordering machinery in the UK and Germany "addresses" bodies and offers them a particular identity which they are forced to accept. Being at the post office, reporting to the Home Office, talking to a lawyer, being detained and even clubbing and other leisure activities, subjectifies bodies as asylum seekers. It becomes clear that an essential aspect of the affective violence is that the racialised body in asylum does not exist outside of their embodiment and marker of the border. This further highlights the objective of this research to look at moments of agency and political possibility within the space of asylum as a space of intense discomfort and bodily depletion.

Again, in order to understand how slow affective violence works we need to look at the affective experience as not an isolated experience but a continuation of discomfort and precarity. Identifying as an asylum seeker and negotiating the intensities that brings is not something that they only have to do when they go clubbing. As the previous exploration of the space of the post office showed, it is through the continuation of discomfort across time and spaces that makes up affective border violence. While the story of the post office and clubbing illustrates how asylum seekers have to negotiate and manage intensities in "public space", the following two stories will show how even in their "homes" and friendships the discomfort, precarity and affective violence continues.

The space of the camp

The next space I want to look at is the space of the camp, which in 2015 was "home" to eighty-five percent of all asylum seekers in Berlin. These camps were mass shelters, structured like camps. Most of them were composed of one big hall, sometimes up to two-hundred asylum seekers shared this one space, sleeping on bunk beds or field beds. There were no adequate toilets and showers and people had to eat, sleep and live all in one big room. Most camps were located in former hotels, gyms, sports halls, schools and airports. As explained in *Chapter 2*, since 2012, Berlin had commissioned an increasing number of non-state actors, such as private companies and charity organisations to provide asylum housing (Knight, 2016; Pfahler, 2015; Soos & Siebert, 2015). In 2015, half of all asylum accommodation in Berlin was provided by private companies such as Gierso or "European Care". Private companies made billions out of asylum accommodation, in which the living standard was inhumane (Knight, 2016; Pfahler, 2015; Soos & Siebert, 2015).

Chapter 2 also pointed at how this private market regulated every moment of asylum seekers´ everyday lives. The asylum machinery decided where they could go, what they could eat, whom they could meet, and as such, was influencing how they felt. The space of the camp is, as I experienced it, the most controlled and extensive space of discomfort I will look at on this journey, a space with great density and thickness and multi-layered discomfort depleting asylum seekers' lives.

During my time in Berlin, at the beginning of June 2017, I visited an asylum seeker camp for women*. It was an old four-story school building that had stood empty for a long time before it became a women* camp space in 2016. I sat down on a bench right before the camp as that was the best location to wait for the women* to leave the camp. I was not allowed to go inside of the building to visit anyone so my only option to meet them was to sit in front of the camp and wait for them to come outside to get their lunch. Lunch was served in a part of the building that could only be entered from outside. While sitting on

the bench and waiting, a thirty-three-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Syria, Mara, sat down next to me and smiled. She introduced herself and told me that she used to live in “this camp”, pointing with her hand at the old yellow school building behind us.

Mara was doing doctoral research in Syria until about a year ago when she had to leave and got thrown into her precarious life in Germany. The camp we were sitting in front of became a lager[22] in February 2016 to provide separate accommodation, a safe space, for women* and children who came to Germany on their own and needed “special protection”, as the camp administration proudly announced in a local newspaper, because of the many traumatising experiences the women* have had. At that point around 320 women* and eighty children lived in the old municipal building, many of them were forced to stay longer than the statutory six months. Mara lived in the camp for ten months and was still in contact with many women* living there, visiting them regularly, she shared. She feels sorry for them as they are being stuck in what she calls "everyday torture". When Mara came to Germany in September last year, she first lived at the largest camp in Berlin:

> "This is the worst place to be for women and children. So much violence, harassment, even attacks from men: from security stuff, social workers, volunteers and even asylum seekers. I was so scared all the time… I followed the social worker around for days saying that I need to be moved. I can´t be there, it´s too much" (Mara, 2017).

A few months later, Mara was finally able to move to another camp; the old school building in front of which we were sitting. “So far so good”, she thought, “but they did not know” what was to come, she continued. In the following ten months, Mara was forced again to negotiate daily sexual harassment and control from security staff working in the camp. The security staff were everywhere, she said.

[22] The asylum activist community in Berlin uses the German word “lager” in order to emphasise that asylum shelters are structured like camps.

> "They are located in different places but they go around the building every hour so you can find them everywhere. All the women in this place are afraid, they are lost… sometimes something happened with a guy from the security and some women got hysterical, screamed, cried. Some tried to kill themselves. It´s impossible. You can´t live in this place. Women are most afraid at night. Even in the middle of the night, the security staff walks around the building. You can hear them laughing and walking by. You can hear their voices and you get really scared. Your room door is always open. It cannot be closed with a key so it´s even scarier in the middle of the night" (Mara, 2017).

This story shows the pervasive and multi-layered affective violence exercised within camp spaces on a very particular object of bordering: the bodies of women*. It also narrates how fear and worry energise every inch of these camp spaces; located in nearly every encounter women* make within them: from the shower, to their bed, to walking past security, to eating or/and to talking to a social worker. All asylum-seeking women* I have spoken to, living in camps experienced constant discomfort, fear and tension. This story also reveals how affective border violence is entangled with gender with states weaponising sexual vulnerability that amplifies bordering, and by that, adding an extra layer of fear and discomfort onto the asylum experience. Mara and the other women* living in the camp described how fear and tension "territorialises" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) their bodies over and over, wherever they go. They can feel it during the night when they are asleep, and first thing in the morning when waking up. They are left with no space of comfort, no space where these intensities could be released for a moment.

Every time they encounter a security person, asylum seekers again encounter the border and are reminded of their precarious position as asylum seeking women*. Women's acts of screaming, crying or taking their lives shows the extent to which these emotions have become accumulated and show the collapsing of emotion management; the inability of their bodies to negotiate and manage these feelings any longer. The intensity of the camp experience weighs women* down, immobilises them and thus also keeps them from leaving the camp for outside activities. In camps, this feeling of not being able to influence their own living situation pervades all spheres of the women*'s daily lives.

Actions such as screaming and crying, however, must also be seen as the actively political negotiation of affective violence as they symbolise ways to release some of these intensities. They mark both the collapsing of emotion-management and yet, also a "letting-go" of that management, so illustrating the ambiguity of these intensities.

The camp is an isolated, inaccessible space for non-asylum seekers, physically and emotionally, showing how affective violence works through its invisibility to us. The intense affectivities produced in the space of the camp are also not always easy to communicate or to represent, which, I argue, is utilised by the German state to uphold and amplify processes of bordering and racialisation. As mentioned before, the political power of these intensities and their continuation works through their invisibility - their effects only became visible to me through close friendships. Moreover, looking at the space of the camp also illustrated how the privatisation of the asylum system creates a situation where responsibility is pushed back and forth between state authorities and companies making it an even more elusive form of violence.

Friendships with non-asylum seekers

Another space I want to look at is not a physical space, it is the relational space of friendships, in particular, friendships of asylum seekers with non-asylum seekers, such as myself. Asylum seekers spoke to me often about their "reality", by which they meant the material consequences of asylum and everyday bordering: a materiality I cannot fully know or feel as it is not my embodied experience. The repetition of the words "this is real" in our conversations felt like a request to witness and recognise how unevenly distributed and invisible the effects of bordering are, even within activist circles. About twenty of the forty asylum speakers I have interviewed, spoke to me about living a "parallel life" from people that are not asylum seekers. In my friend's continued engagement with the disconnection of our lives and the precarity that goes unnoticed, I also felt frustration and exhaustion. Their repetition of the words "this is real" also speaks

to the draining work of having to remind, explain, make visible different positionalities and their effects, the what I call unseen emotional labours of bordered, racialised bodies. As briefly explored in the last chapter in relation to the different risks and harms of formal asylum activism, bordering practices and racialisation work by putting the subject most depleted through its violent systems in a position, in which the violence is only registered if they do the necessary work to make it visible. What I want to argue in this section, is that having to negotiate different realities in asylum seekers´ relationship with non-asylum seekers must be looked at as another space of slow affective violence.

I want to illustrate why I think the space of friendship with non-asylum seekers should be registered as another space in which this slow affective violence of bordering continues, by sharing part of a conversation I had with my friend Nima, a thirty-nine-year-old asylum seeking man* from Iran. Nima and I spoke in a café a week after we both attended a demonstration against immigration raids in spring 2017 together:

> "I don't have the same rights as you, you can stand at parliament square because it doesn't really affect you but I… I don't even know where I belong. And it's a very…frustrating. And you remember the last time we went to that demonstration together? There was this guy, this speaker, next to you, and he called me twice to tell me that he was spat at. He told me it was some kind of racism and when the police came and he was holding the mic and the two of them were shouting guess who they came for to take the details? They came for him. The black guy. You know they just feel like you are the victim. You are black – why are you shouting? And then there is of course also the police that could detain you… yes, that's a reality" (Nima, 2017).

> "Yes, that is something I don´t experience when I go to a demonstration. I was not aware that was happening to John" (Isabel, 2017).

> "Hmm yes, what you and me see is very different. That is why no one understands… You understand a bit more because you are interested in knowing and still... It´s so hard honestly" (Nima, 2017).

While this story also shows the different harmful consequences that political involvement can have for asylum seekers and the intensities and emotional structures that come with appearing where bodies are not assigned to appear (Butler, 2015); I want to go on to focus on the frustration and disconnection that comes from being positioned differently than bodies that are not bordered and racialised. To me, it felt like feelings of unfairness was what produced Nima´s frustration and discomfort. As mentioned in the previous chapter, asylum seekers often expressed their frustrations with non-asylum seekers, particularly white citizen subjects, that seem not to understand the intensity of the stress and discomfort they find themselves in. This reveals that even when asylum-seekers and non-asylum seekers are in the same space, overcome the active spatial isolation, the state is capable of making even friendships difficult; creating different emotional structures.

My conversation with Nima also shows how particularly in a space of friendship between asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers, there is the possibility to transform the workings of border violence by making it visible. When the affective violence I am exploring in this chapter, works through its invisibility to us all, then making it visible marks an important act of asylum activism. Our ongoing conversations about the violence, as asylum seekers shared with me, created little moments of comfort. Sharing the invisible doings of slow affective violence must, therefore, be seen as an emotionally affective practice of asylum activism.

However, while I felt and was told that these conversations offered some comfort, I am also aware that the possibility for transformation was often mostly built on the unseen labours of asylum seekers; the draining work of having to remind, explain, make visible different positionalities. A practice of asylum activism, therefore, has to attend to this burden, even in our most intimate friendships, and ask how we can ease up this burden. While Nima appreciates my interest in his experience, he also communicates that only giving space to other people´s stories, listening when asylum seekers share, is not enough. The work that needs to be done by non-asylum seekers is an active continuous

practice of paying attention, shifting our attention to the experiences of different positionalities and the affects and emotions they produce.

Slow affective violence of the border is less obvious, less difficult to observe and grasp than anger, verbal or physical forms of violence. Therefore, to redistribute burden we need to practice attending to these otherwise invisible and subtle forms of violence. The practice of asylum activism, I want to suggest here, is not activism in the traditional sense of speech and action in public space, rather it is an internal self-practice of reflection and of re-orientation. It is another form of action and illustrates the boundaries of a differentiation between action and non-action, activity and passivity. Unlike more public displays of asylum activism this kind of self-reflection, by its nature is subtle, private and unobserved, unnoticed and is yet bodily action. The subtle, unnoticed forms of affective violence seem to ask to be met and negotiated, with similarly subtle and unnoticed practice of slow negotiation. This also further emphasises, as the result of *Chapter 4* have shown, the need for a situated asylum activism.

The space of the bed

This last space I want to look at is the space of the bed. The journey has shown the extent to which bodies of asylum seekers´ experience discomfort and how it accumulates and creates heaviness that depletes asylum seekers´ lives. It also showed me how much negotiation and management goes into embodying the border. As I argue, bordering works through the body by its interconnectedness with political action. As Butler has argued: "Living and acting are bound together in such a way that the conditions that make it possible for anyone to live are part of the very object of political reflection and action" (p. 44). The majority of asylum seekers I spoke to were constantly worried about their basic needs being met, which created an urgent and necessary focus on their own bodies and its needs. Many asylum seekers retreated from social and political spaces into their beds, which is often the only space that they felt they did not have to "make inhabitable"; that is, they do not have to put energy into negotiating it.

The bed illustrates both the collapsing of management and negotiation, and a retreat from discomfort. Many friends shared stories about how tired and exhausted they are. The space of the bed thus becomes a space of retreat; a space where their bodies can collapse and do not have to appear in a specific way. It is the space where asylum seekers can allow themselves to fall apart, to release some of the intensities they are not able to hold. A space where bodies can curl up and express feeling weighed down, overpowered and finding it "difficult to move"; a space where no movement is needed and deep sadness and grief can be expressed. As well as it is also a retreat form the rhythm bordering forces onto asylum seeker lives and a space, maybe one of the only spaces, where asylum seekers are not at the border; identifying as asylum seekers.

In June 2017 I had a conversation with my two friends Ahmed, a forty-four-year-old asylum seeking man* from Afghanistan, and Jalila, a thirty-three-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Afghanistan, who both spoke about the space of the bed:

"Honestly, I´ve not been ok. The last few weeks have been horrible. I feel there are days where I wake up and think I will do something for myself like going for a walk. But I realise I just go downstairs and back to bed. It's the stress. It´s just been so stressful. It´s been a year now" (Jalila, 2017).

"I know… There was a long time, if it wasn't for the will inside of me, I would have stayed in bed all day. And I did... often" (Ahmed, 2017).

"It feels like you can´t explain what´s wrong with you, you just feel like you are not ok, very tired. I´m so tired all the time... I could sleep all the time" (Jalila, 2017).

Jalia´s and Ahmed´s conversation shows the heaviness of the asylum experience putting pressures on their bodies and causing depletion. The bed, as they both narrate, is a space they do not have to "make inhabitable" or put energy into negotiating.

The space of the bed is another very clear example of how asylum seekers do, and at the same time do not; manage the intensities and heaviness of the border violence. Retreating to their beds is a form of negotiation, of active management that aims at self-

care. When bordering works through affective violence and putting asylum seekers in a position of constantly having to negotiate this violence and the intensities it produces, the bed becomes a space where asylum seekers withdraw themselves from that negotiation actively to create some distance between themselves and the intensities of the border. This again illustrates how in the context of asylum, retreating, "non-doing" and "passivity" can be important forms of action, of asylum activism.

At the same time, the space of the bed also illustrates, as outlined before, the collapsing of management and how asylum seekers´ bodies are not able to manage the intensity of the border any longer. The complexity and ambiguity of the space of the bed also speaks to my critique in *Chapter 3* of the understanding of asylum activism as a specific physical space. As the space of the bed shows, activism, political negotiation, and recovering from violence can all happen within the same space. Specific physical spaces are thus, I argue, never indicative of political action or possibility, rather it is the practice of negotiating the border that is. Asylum seekers negotiate different borders here, and by that *become activist*. They negotiate the border of what it means to be an activist and at the same time resist the affective violence of bordering. Their practice of asylum activism as self-care in the context of the bed still challenges bordering practices by putting down management for a moment: asylum seekers strip off the formal political subject´s imperative of having to "fight" the system.

The space of the bed also illustrates how discomfort seizes subjects back into their bodies. In considering strategies to endure transient pain, Ahmed (2002) states how pain sensations demand us to attend to our embodied experience. I argue, the same counts for extreme sensations of worry, fear and shame. My conversations with Ahmed and Jalila also showed, how asylum seekers´ relationships to others are diminished through the border: Bodies that experience intense feelings of discomfort and depletion are reluctant to socialise, talk, less able to enjoy life. These sad "passions", as Spinoza (2001), defined them, diminish a person's energy and power of activity. The intensity and the extent of discomfort reduces other more "enjoyable" intensities such as friendship or hobbies. As a

result, asylum seekers become more aware of their bodily surfaces, of the disconnection to others (Ahmed, 2002). These disconnections are intentionally mobilised by states to keep asylum seekers in a "non-political" space through a social order that is constantly fixed and reproduced by making it exhausting and nearly physically impossible to contest it.

Conclusion

While the last chapter focused on what emotions and knots were evoked by different situated bodies encountering each other in formal asylum activist spaces such as meetings, this chapter looked into the affective violence of the asylum everyday. It was a journey through different spaces of depletion and multiple precarity that illustrated how affective border violence works through its slow and gradual, continued depletion of asylum seekers´ lives.

While the accumulation of affective border violence can also be seen as an emotional knot, I chose the term "affective border violence" here as it speaks to the different degrees and intensities of unlivability I was told about. I also argue that it is important to distinguish the wilful depletion intentionally created by the state through its use of affective violence, from the discomfort and depletion that asylum seekers´ experience in formal activist spaces despite the good intention of those who organise in solidarity.

Following up on the previous chapter, this chapter also continued to contemplate a political response to affective border violence. Exploring the space of formal asylum activism and the asylum everyday demonstrated the heavy burden asylum seekers´ live with. In their everyday lives they constantly have to negotiate border violence; at the post office, gay clubbing, in asylum accommodation, friendships and even to some extend in their own beds. Then again in formal asylum activist spaces, asylum seekers are further depleted by the affective violence of the border when its affects are not registered. Both chapters speak to the emotion management and unseen labours of having to explain and

make visible the effects of bordering practices. If our objective as asylum activist community really is to redistribute burden, then we can not miss how this burden affects bodies of asylum seekers. Therefore, to we need to practice attending to these emotions and affects, to the discomfort and depletion.

In this chapter, I also further explored asylum activism as an emotional and affective practice. Despite asylum seekers´ discomfort and depletion in all of these spaces, there were also moments of political agency to be found though these political possibilities could not be captured by the model of political subjectivity as we know it. Their political agency challenged a clear-cut differentiation between action and non-action, activity and passivity, and therefore almost received the state of never having occurred, and yet, I argue, these "non-doings", marked a *becoming activist* as they negotiate the affective violence of bordering practices. Moreover, these unregistered forms of *becoming activist* might have been the most meaningful acts of asylum activism I have observed as they may have been just what kept asylum seekers alive. Therefore we need to attend to a politics that is not visible and grand, not spectacular or public but rather hidden and; a politics of those who are just getting by.

In the next chapter, I want to move forward by further considering some of the ways through which asylum seekers negotiate the discomfort and these uneven effects of bordering that they encounter in both spaces of formal groups as well as their everyday lives. These techniques of *becoming activist* do not change the uneven distribution of harm, however, they do point at the political potentials within the asylum.

6

Attending to Political Possibilities: Asylum Seekers Becoming Activist

Thinking asylum activism as emotional and affective practice of *becoming-other*, *Chapter 4* described some emotional knots in asylum activism and their role in increasing distance between different situated subjects. Such knots were built around the unregistered and unacknowledged affective border violence that asylum seekers encounter wherever they go. That this form of violence went unnoticed in formal asylum activist spaces teaches us something about the *doings* of a narrow construction of the political, even in spaces of asylum activism that arise in "opposition" to these violent affective practices of the state.

After exploring what affects and emotions were evoked in traditional asylum activist spaces such as meetings, demonstration and other events, *Chapter 5* analysed how bordering affects asylum seekers´ everyday lives. The last chapter was a journey through different spaces of discomfort and depletion to explore the multiple and affective precarity asylum seekers are subjected to on a daily basis, a precarity that I conceptualised as affective border violence. The journey through different spaces of bordering showed how bodies of asylum seekers have to negotiate and manage intense feelings of discomfort in both "public" and "private" spaces. Asylum seekers are thus positioned in a way that never allows them to be comfortable. And yet, despite their positioning, as this chapter will show, they *become activist*. This chapter will further zoom in on the political possibilities of asylum seekers as an agent that, according to mainstream political theory, does not have any of the resources of agency.

In this chapter, I want to bring together the two spaces I explored in the last two chapters: the formal space of asylum activism and the asylum everyday, to show how a *becoming activist* can be found in both; formal asylum activist spaces, where asylum seekers question established ideas of the political and in the everyday, where asylum seekers perform practices of radical hope disrupting the emotional structures of the asylum everyday. Rather than tying activism to a particular group involvement or space, I want to consider acts of asylum seekers that open up possibilities, that allow a *becoming-other-other*. As I observed, asylum seekers do not become activist by becoming the formal subject of political rights (the singular *other*), instead, they *become activist* by *becoming-other-other*; a *new* subject of politics. Their *becoming activist* seemed like a practice of othering the formal *other* by subjects who are not immediately captured or legitimated by the available norms of political practice.

Following up on previous chapters this chapter attempts to further situate asylum activism by exploring the question of a what I call *politics of the unfed and unwell body*. *Chapter 4* identified the politics of the unfed and unwell body as (1) embodied, affective and emotional, (2) located in the everyday, (3) pragmatic, (4) empathic and caring and (5) rooted in the present moment. *Chapter 5* further identified some moments of political possibility in the asylum everyday. These moments of agency also spoke for a politics that is embodied, pragmatic and caring.

The *becoming activist* I will describe in this chapter is different to conventional theories of political action as it encompasses a number of things as political actions: ranging from a gesture, to a subtle feeling, to a speech act. These otherwise unnoticed forms of politics require a reformulation of what political space and political subjectivity is. The aim of the chapter is to map these unnoticed acts of politics within asylum activist spaces to illustrate how they, on the one hand, disturb notions of the political and, on the other hand, provide alternative ways of accounting for and understanding politics and solidarity. Recognising the potential of these embodied acts can open up ways of conceptualising

politics that allows a more complex consideration of different positionalities beyond citizenship.

I will explore how asylum seekers negotiate pressures, exclusions and different positionalities, and their emotional and affective *doings*, by using a number of very specific techniques that I will introduce in this chapter. These techniques do not change the uneven effects of affective border violence and a narrow understanding of the political, however, they point at the political potentials within the asylum. As this chapter hopes to show, asylum seekers´ *becoming activist* is linked to creating little spaces of comfort, and therefore must be seen as a form of political negotiation happening in conversation with states mobilising, what I call, a *politics of discomfort*.

Becoming activist as *becoming-other-other*

As explained in the introductory chapter of this thesis, I use Deleuze´s and Guattari's concept of *becoming-other* as it allows me to attend to asylum activism as a practice, always in process of being made. The *becoming activist* I want to look at in this chapter is thus asylum activism in its making: within formal spaces of asylum activism and the everyday. Deleuze and Guattari´s philosophy of difference conceptualised subjectivity as a process of *becoming*, not a state of being (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). Deleuze describes *becoming* as a process in which something *becomes other* by bringing "into being that which does not yet exist" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 147). This happens through a practice of diversifying, multiplying and deconstructing existing norms and identities. So far this thesis has illustrated how *becoming activist* opens up new ways to conceptualise political subjectivity and symbolises thus an entry point to look at the transformation of power dynamics within and outside of asylum activist spaces. *Chapter 4* identified existing norms, practices and identities within asylum activist spaces, while it also showed (similar to *Chapter 5*) how asylum seekers negotiate and challenge these norms in their emotional, embodied and practical acts of asylum activism.

Next to Deleuze and Guattari, Stuart Hall (2014) also used the word *becoming* to speak to cultural identity formations. According to him, cultural identity formations are not something that already exists but are constantly in process of being made:

> "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall, p.225, 2014).

Both Deleuze and Guattari´s as well as Hall´s notion of *becoming* allows us to attend to asylum activism as fluid and open and something which does not only locate the "continuous play of history, culture and power" (Hall, p.225, 2014) in every moment but also the possibility of political re-making and re-orientation. As Deleuze has put it: "History amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become', that is, to create something new" (1995, p. 171).

I hope to show in this chapter how asylum seekers create "something new"; *become other-other* by diversifying and deconstructing assigned forms, subjectivities and emotions of political subjectivity and the asylum. I want to share moments of *becoming activist*, the making of asylum activism that otherwise escapes our senses, that I observed in both formal activist spaces as well as in the everyday.

My affective sensory experience of asylum activism was the starting point of the exploration of a *becoming activist*. The first weeks of my involvement group meetings left me often feeling confused and uncomfortable. I tried to make sense of the high turnover of racialised bodies in these spaces and why the same bodies did not participate equally in group discussions. I often observed people reading the news, watching football or sleeping during the meetings. Outside of activist spaces, many asylum seekers told me

that they do not want to get involved in group activities; "want to be left alone". Later on, I learned that many asylum seekers used techniques to manage their experiences and emotional reactions in political and everyday spaces that allow them to not only support their asylum case but also maintain some level of wellbeing. With regards to formal political spaces, these techniques included increased physical distancing from these spaces as well as managing their involvement within them. These techniques I want to interpret here as a *becoming activist*.

It was listening to intensities and their emotional knotting what allowed me to feel, and by that witness a *becoming activist*. While, I observed and felt these intensities in formal group interactions such as activist events and meetings, I noticed, and was told about them most often in personal interactions with asylum seekers. I conceptualise intensities as the experiential dimension of affects and emotions that I noticed in discourses as much as non-discursive forces. As mentioned before, my fieldwork has shown me that the combination of words, voice, physicalised and emotional/affective context cannot be looked at in separate ways. Therefore, I consider here intensities expressed in discourse and bodily sensations.

As *Chapter 4* showed, many dynamics I observed during the two years of my fieldwork escaped language and action. Some were expressed in sitting in silence or falling asleep during group meetings. Most often it was an absence, a withdrawal of action, speech or participation that marked it. The registering of moments of *becoming activist* was based on my long-term involvement, friendships and the observation of social norms and practices over this long period of time.

Listening to these intensities was what allowed me to explore unnoticed acts of politics within asylum activist spaces. As this chapter will show, *becoming activist*, *becoming-other-other* is a rupture (Ranciere, 1999), a crack in normativity of political and everyday space. This chapter is thus also in conversation with the question of how we can understand a politics that is not enunciated in speech or formal political intervention?

Rather than turning toward the concept of citizenship as the ultimate model of politics, I argue we need to think again about what political space is and how communication and symbolisation happens in a more expansive political space. As argued before, it is a matter of learning to hear the voices, to attend to expressions of the political that are traditionally not perceived as political.

As argued in *Chapter 2*, the emotional and affective practice of asylum activism needs to be explored by looking at the entanglements between state bordering practices and intimate human relationships due to the interaction between the two in asylum activism. As my friendships with asylum seekers have shown, bordering practices affect people on the most intimate of scales, their emotions, bodies, homes and friendships. The rapidly changing state-bordering systems in Germany and the UK infiltrate asylum seekers´ everyday lives in different ways, while at the same time inadvertently remaking what political space is and can be. Human relationships in the context of asylum activism cannot be thought, felt or sensed without thinking, feeling and sensing the role of the state. *Becoming activist* thus always takes place as a result of a constant negotiation between state power structures, social and institutional practices, as well the capacity of individuals to shape, change and negotiate these structures.

As Deleuze (1988), Foucault (1988; 2002) and Hall (2014), amongst others, have argued, subjectivity is constructed in relationship to power but not completely consumed by it. Rather, agency and power are constantly renegotiated. A *becoming activist* thus works within the norms that constitute people as asylum-seeking subjects. However, these norms can also be looked at as the very conditions of agency. As Ranciere (1999; 2001), Butler (2005) and Foucault (1988) have pointed out, not embodying the norm can open up possibilities for re-doing norms in unanticipated ways or practising *other* norms, and by that, disrupting the order of things.

As outlined in *Chapter 3* in more detail, Ranciere (1999) engages with a notion of the political beyond established forms of the political. According to him "politics exists when

the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part" (Ranciere, 1999).

Similarly, Butler (2015) explores how the assembling of subjects in resistance, simply the appearance of their bodies might be "saying" something (without relying on speech). This can either happen through the embodied, visible disrupting of norms or because the assembly happens in opposition to "differential forms of power that qualify who can and cannot appear" (p. 50). In other words, simply the presence, the appearance of a part that "has no part" can disrupt a social order as it is an embodied critique of who is allowed to appear in public space. Both Butler (2015) and Raniere (1999) do not attach the political to specific spaces that excludes some bodies, but sees its appearance in precarious and vulnerable bodies gesture to "the right to have rights". Bodies are not only able to resist despite their precarious and vulnerable lives, but *because* of these conditions.

Bordering systems in the UK and Germany produce the emotional and political structures shaping asylum seekers´ lives as well as their interaction in political spaces. At the same time, as the previous chapters have highlighted, moments of political possibility can always be found within these structures. The last three years of my involvement have shown me how asylum seekers are capable of negotiating and transforming these structures by *becoming-other-other*, a *new* subject of politics and by doing so they are not only affectively shaped by these structures they also actively shape them.

In the following, I will explore how asylum seekers transform the formalities of political space through specific techniques that allow asylum seekers to transform emotional landscapes and structures of formal political spaces and the everyday. I will also speak to the interplay of state power structures and asylum seekers transformation of these structures. As the previous chapters have shown, the emotional landscapes and structures of formal political spaces and the asylum everyday influences what bodies of asylum seekers can do; through unacknowledged politics of discomfort. Practices of everyday bordering aim at isolating people and making them as uncomfortable as possible.

Becoming activist as an emotional and affective practice of *becoming-other* thus always links to making asylum seekers´ lives more comfortable.

Becoming activist in the context of formal activist spaces: Negotiating distance and involvement

This first section will explore possibilities of *becoming activist* in formal activist spaces, where I observed asylum seekers negotiating involvement and distance. In the following, I hope to show why these negotiations, in my eyes, constitute a *becoming activist*.

In negotiating involvement and distance, I will argue, asylum seekers step out of the formalised situation of being non-political and become a *new* subject of politics; the *other-other*. I will look at strategies of bodies to manage the material qualities of the political as well as of the racialised asylum positionality that reformulates what political space is. From the friendships with asylum seekers that formed over the last three years I learned and observed how much emotion management was involved for them to simply be in these formal spaces of asylum activism. In the following, I want to explore two examples of emotion management which I observed often: firstly, increased physical distancing to total absence and secondly, increased mental, emotional or conscious distancing within formal asylum activist spaces.

When I speak about asylum activist spaces here, I refer to asylum activist group spaces, meetings and events. Even though *Chapter 1* and *Chapter 2* have shown that asylum activism can be found in encounters outside of these formal spaces of politics, in the first part of this chapter I want to explore how through regulating their involvement and distance in these formal spaces of asylum activism asylum seekers transform the formalities of these spaces. Whilst most research has looked at political negotiation in form of a particularly active practice as their starting point, in the following I want to look at how asylum seekers disrupt political spaces through inactivity and withdrawal. Which must, as I will argue, also be conceptualised as an active negotiation of political space.

The first technique I want to look at is what I call “increased physical distancing to complete absence”.

During the last three years I heard many stories from asylum seekers I met outside of group meetings and events about why they chose to not engage in formal spaces of asylum activism any longer. When asked why they prefer to keep their distance from these spaces, the majority of asylum seekers said that their experience of these groups had been "frustrating", "uncomfortable" and sometimes even "dangerous". They described the emotions that their involvement brought up as "too much" or "too demanding”. In consequence, as Cynthia, a thirty-year-old woman* from Nigeria, told me one day: "staying away, not being involved, feels like the only solution” (Cynthia, 2016).

They also spoke to me about having enough "problems", "things to deal with" already, through their everyday bordering experiences. Negotiating and managing emotions that political spaces bring up, on top of the intense discomfort they encounter in their everyday lives, feels “overwhelming” and not doable.

The increase in distance they create between themselves and these formal activist groups appeared to me as a practical tool designed to reduce and manage the number of affective intensities they experienced and so creating little gaps of some comfort. A majority of asylum seekers that used that technique were first involved in these spaces. Through their involvement, they gradually learned and felt what it meant, emotionally, to appear in these spaces and then started to further increase their distance.

Amina, a forty-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Iran, for example, was involved in different asylum activist groups for nearly a year before she decided to no longer be involved. When Amina arrived in Germany, she saw how bad the situation was and got involved in different groups immediately. In the activist groups she joined she hoped to find solidarity and a platform to change the situation for women* asylum seekers in Germany. She put all her energy, “all her life”, into her involvement which left her feeling

drained and exhausted. She was going from one meeting to the next, organising event after event. When I spoke to her, one year later, Amina seemed disillusioned and exhausted:

> "It doesn't matter what group you get involved in, there are always the same power structures. I´m tired of seeing them. People with secure status take up too much space and the situation of asylum seekers is not taken into consideration when organising protest events. Being involved in these actions can have bad consequences for people in the asylum process; they can lose their accommodation or be deported. Other activists fail to see that!" (Amina, 2017).

Amina´s experience mirrors the experience of all forty asylum seekers I have spoken to. In that conversation in summer 2017, she expresses feelings of frustration and discomfort around power dynamics within asylum activist groups, which, as explored before, did not consider the different risks of political engagement for asylum seekers. While *Chapter 4* attended in more detail to the affects produced through the missing acknowledgement of these risks, I want here to focus on her technique of increasing her distance to these groups in order to manage the amount of discomfort she experienced. When meeting Amina that summer, I could sense a deep feeling of powerlessness about the fact that she was not able to control the possible harmful effects that asylum activist spaces might have on her life. This "not knowing" what is going to happen and how harmful it will be, reminds her, as she shared, of her *everyday camp life* (p.15) and adds an extra layer of discomfort. In her everyday life Amina, like all asylum seekers I interviewed, is deprived of the possibility of taking an active role in shaping her life. She is not able to influence her living situation and her time is scheduled for her to varying degrees; this ranges from having a fixed time of return to the camp to schedules for eating and washing clothes, to schedules for language courses and other activities. "This other stuff", Amina says, "I can´t change, but I can decide if I want to be involved in activism next to all the other problems". I argue therefore that we must read Amina´s story not only as one of desperation but also one of agency, of pragmatism of and self-care.

Through absenting herself completely, Amina created the certainty that there is not another actor, next to the asylum machinery, that puts her life at risk. Absenting thus needs to be seen as another example of a *pragmatism of survival* that Amina and others seemed to use as they know that the risks are traditional forms of asylum activism are often too high. Amina´s physical absence in asylum activist spaces thus must be read as another form of activism, a being political that does not always have to live in resistance, to fight back. As Ahmed argues in her book *The Promise of Happiness* (2010): "the task is not to redescribe passivity as activity ... but to think of passivities as involving different kinds of action" (pp. 209–210).

For, asylum seekers, as already outlined in my previous chapter, withdrawing might be an important action to survive, after all they know the amount of discomfort they are capable of holding and managing their involvement accordingly.

Moreover, increased distancing is an act of self-care, of self-perseverance. Not being involved feels like the only possibility to manage feelings of discomfort and unsafety and by that restore some kind of well-being. Asylum seekers often told me that if an organisation or activist group would ask them how everything is, they would say "everything is ok". Just so they would accept their distance. Most of them also expressed feelings of sadness around this practice:

> "I know this is sad, but so many people feel like that. So many people. They are tired of talking to activists, to organisations, to groups, to politicians, to the press - talking to everyone and nothing changes. It´s so exhausting. It´s really exhausting. I can´t do it any longer" (Hamid, 2017).

My conversations with Hamid and Amina´s reveal the intensities created by the double depletion of the everyday and activist encounters and illustrates further why acts that make asylum seekers´ lives more livable, that create little spaces or gaps of comfort, must be seen as a *becoming activist.*

To provide another example of how asylum seekers used "increased distancing" as a tool, I want to share my first encounter with Abdoul and Mohammad, two asylum seeking-men* I met in Berlin in May 2017. Shortly after I arrived in Berlin, I heard about a protest of asylum seekers in front of an asylum camp. I decided to go there and talk to them. When I got to the camp, the first thing I saw was a little security house right in front of a huge building. Many people were leaving and entering the camp, queueing at the security building in order to show their ID to be allowed to enter the space. On the other side of the road, I saw a small group of four to five people sitting on chairs underneath some oak trees next to a huge pile of mattresses covered with a blue canvas.

Pointing at the pile, the group told me that they are "protesting". Their protest started about ten days ago, when a security person asked Abdoul, a forty-one-year-old asylum seeking man* from Mali, to leave the camp. Abdoul explained to me that he "just wanted to get some bread for his sick child from the kitchen", but entering the kitchen outside the regulated mealtimes is prohibited. Another forty-five-year-old asylum seeking man* from Iraq, who calls himself Mohammad, tells me that he is at risk to "be thrown out" too as his wife has diabetes and sometimes she needs to eat something very quickly or she faints. All five agreed that the current food arrangement in the camp is unacceptable, why they decided to start their protest. After about forty minutes of conversation, I asked Abdoul and Mohammad if they work together with other activist groups in Berlin and they tell me that they have made the "good decision" to not "accept their help". When I asked them why they think it was a "good decision", Mohammad and Abdoul shared that they are afraid if they work together, it would no longer be their protest. They shared their fear of their action being "taken over" by other activist groups who "have their own agenda".

> "We have tried to work with some people but it is difficult so we decided to not work with them anymore. It is easier that way, it is our problem so we know best what to do" (Abdoul, 2017).

The group mentioned how often they have seen protests of asylum seekers that started off with practical demands such as criticising the high number of security staff in camps, the limited access to social workers and the structures for food distribution, then have been "used" by other groups to critique political systems or the German government. "This is a problem", Mohammed says, as their "small problems" do not get enough attention that way, it dissolves in the structural, political critique. By keeping their independence and not cooperating with other asylum activist groups they avoid having to negotiate different understandings of politics. They fear that their practical demands would not get enough attention, which they have experienced working together with activist groups before.

As I explored in *Chapter 5*, asylum seekers commonly criticised the abstract objectives of many activist groups, wishing for a politics that is specific and connected to state practices by focusing on how inequalities get reproduced in the everyday. Asking for something specific, as they explained to me, also enhances their chances of getting it. Mohammad´s and Abdoul´s frustration and fear, leading to their distance, is, on the one hand, produced by different ideas about political responses to these bordering practices, but also, on the other hand, speaks to affective violence of the asylum everyday and how it produces a necessary focus on actions that are practical and can be changed right now.

All my conversations with asylum seekers have revealed how *increased distancing* from formal asylum activist groups is used as a technique to enhance asylum seekers´ lives by reducing intensities such as discomfort, fear and anger that these encounters bring up. They are ways of creating little spaces, gaps, of some comfort. For many people that I have met in the last three years, only complete refusal feels manageable as their bodies are already struggling to cope with the intensities that their everyday lives produce.

This technique of *increased distancing* thus illustrates a skilful emotional self-management as asylum seekers pay attention to their own well-being, their emotional life, and adjust their involvement accordingly. This *mindfulness* allows them an emotional sustainability; a

management of safety, exhaustion, discomfort, precarity, identity loss and shame. The technique illustrates how asylum seekers turn themselves into political subjects of their choice and that way regain a certain state of comfort and safety while living within a world of constant bordering. They thus negotiate political possibilities through their increased distancing and even in complete physical absence.

These negotiations also change formal spaces of asylum activism. The complete absence of many asylum seekers transforms the formality of political space. Asylum activist spaces are constructed around the subject of solidarity; the asylum seeker. Whether the group is made up out of asylum seekers or not, the objective of asylum activism for most activist groups is to raise awareness about asylum seekers´ situation or pressure the government into changing bordering practices. This absenting of the subject of solidarity questions the legitimacy of these groups that are supposed to be in solidarity with asylum seekers. Their absence marks a silent and subtly expressed devaluation of these activist group practices, that do not allow them to appear politically. It shows the power of withdrawal to shape and transform asylum activist spaces.

Another technique, another way of negotiating distance and involvement, I observed, was *increased mental, emotional or conscious distancing* while being physically present at activist group meetings or events. This technique involved sleeping, not listening, reading the news, watching football and the withdrawal of speech and acts (such as translating to other asylum seekers). I observed them with my eyes, but mostly with a personal feeling of discomfort. In the following, I want to explore how sleeping as one of these practices is transforming the formality of political space.

Entries into my field diaries between 2015 and 2017 noted many occasions of asylum seekers sleeping during meetings. As mentioned before, as the meeting space can be seen as the kind of mandatory part of the involvement, it is an interesting space to explore asylum seekers encounter with the "formalities of politics". In January 2016, when I attended one of my first formal meetings, I wrote in my field diary

> "Some people are nodding off, most people are looking at their phones or having their eyes closed, almost disappearing in their thick winter jackets. The room is cold. After she finished her thirty-minute-long presentation she asks if there are any questions. No one looks up. No one raises their hands" (Isabel, 2016).

In the following three years it happened often that I looked around during activist meetings and at least four out of an average ten asylum seekers had their eyes closed, nodding off.

While I always felt some interest in these observations, it was my friend Lylie, a thirty-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Cameroon, who asked me to look at it as a form of action:

> "You need to ask yourself why are people sleeping? There are people that are sleeping all the time during the meeting. You need to ask yourself why are they here?" (Lylie, 2016).

It was not until many months and conversations later that I began to interpret what I observed as a technique used by asylum seekers to manage their experiences and emotional reactions in activist spaces that allows them to not only support their asylum case but also maintain some level of wellbeing. The majority of asylum seekers I spoke to told me that they cannot avoid being in these spaces as they provide an important platform as well as support for their asylum claim (for example in form of legal support letters), but in distancing themselves in various ways they manage, and negotiate, the way the political space impacts on them and in doing this, they reshape these spaces in powerful ways. As the previous chapter showed, everyday bordering produces intensities of discomfort that accumulate, stick to asylum seekers´ bodies and create a heaviness that depletes their lives. Sitting in meetings brings about yet more discomfort because of the unheard asylum everyday (see *Chapter 4*). By distancing themselves from the discourse, observations, emotions and a consciousness that ignores their reality, they reduce the intensities that they have to negotiate. Living within a world of bordering comes with the

need of constantly being alert, sleeping must therefore also be seen as a way to lessen corporeal intensity and to regain a certain state of comfort and safety.

While these techniques make asylum seekers´ lives more negotiable, they also affect activist spaces; the other "body" of that encounter, in several ways. Sleeping bodies speak, without words, about the exhaustion and intensities that their everyday lives produce. Sleeping also slowed these spaces down, sometimes topics and questions needed to be repeated and conversations turned into monologues; changing the rhythm of these activist spaces. In spaces of solidarity, movement and speech are thought of as constantly in exchange. What I often observed, instead, was people talking at distracted or sleeping bodies. These bodies asked for an attentive listening to them and the politics and histories of their exhaustion.

By withdrawing their consciousness, the sleeping bodies of asylum seekers distanced themselves from existing power dynamics, while at the same time engaged in a salient and subtle negation of political possibilities. Asylum seekers seemed to challenge the hidden dominating power dynamics in these groups by using a similarly hidden technique of disruption.

Sleeping bodies also often created a collective feeling of tiredness and heaviness that spoke to the circulation of exhaustion and depletion. Moreover, they turned the subject of comfort (the non-asylum seeker) into the subject of momentarily discomfort and allowed the subject of discomfort (the asylum seeker) to experience momentarily comfort. Lastly, it disrupted the abstract engagements in these spaces in forms of theoretical readings, as well as their value, by a refusal of asylum seekers to take active part in a rational, theoretical, ideological and future-oriented practice of activism. By closing their eyes, withdrawing consciousness, they challenge these ways of knowing.

When looking at these techniques, it is also important to note that these practices of *becoming activist* cannot be viewed as isolated from a larger structural context that

constrains asylum seekers political possibilities. Asylum seekers´ choice of technique happened within the context of a practice of bordering, which has become more pervasive and everyday than ever: following asylum seekers wherever they go. Their choice of technique is thus restricted as affective border violence causes so much discomfort and depletion that increased distancing becomes their technique of choice. It also becomes clear that the politics of discomfort mobilised by the state is negotiated by asylum seekers through a politics of comfort.

As mentioned earlier, during the three years of my fieldwork, I observed endless actions of the body; bodies speaking and transforming activist space without words or acts. What I observed, next to ways of creating more comfort for asylum seekers, were silent negotiations about what political space is. These negotiations I read here as a form of collective resistance. Without any explicit coordination, peoples silence, their closed eyes and falling asleep (retreating from a space of interaction) formed a collective and embodied negotiation of political practices in these spaces.

Lastly, I want to shortly contemplate the sociality in this form of *becoming activist*. All these techniques felt like a collective politics far away from public squares and yet, bodies across time and space assembled to speak up (through action) for the unacknowledged asylum everyday and the narrow construction of the political. I want to argue here that when a group of asylum seekers remaining silent and sleeping during activist meetings to disrupt the formality of political space, constitutes a political assembly as they (consciously or not) disrupt the formality of the activist meeting space. They reclaim the uncomfortable space of the meeting. Even though their embodied performance was enacted by a few bodies only, their discomforts and depletions were "speaking" for a huge assembly of precarious bodies in asylum - connected over different spaces and time. It is the multiple asylum precarity that does not allow them to be in the same (public) space, to be fed and well-enough to assemble.

So far this chapter has shown how asylum seekers apply specific techniques to increase distance between them and formal spaces of asylum activism. By distancing themselves outside and inside formal group spaces they reduce their feelings of discomfort and make their lives more livable. Moreover, increased distancing must also be read as a collective negotiation of political practices and norms in these spaces. These findings also reveal the performativity of silence and inaction, and the ways these techniques are an event of interruption[23], in a Rancierian sense, that rewrites what political space is and can be. In the next part of this chapter, I want to look at another technique that asylum seekers used to negotiate the impact of affective border violence on their bodies.

Becoming activist in the context of the asylum everyday: Practices of radical hope

The previous chapter has shown how asylum seekers are forced to negotiate affective border violence on a day-to-day basis. Asylum seekers are occupied negotiating the now and making it inhabitable wherever they go. Extreme sensations of worry, fear and shame seize asylum seekers back into their bodies. This immediate, heavy, experience of asylum and everyday bordering traps people "in *the present*". Sensations of discomfort demand them to attend to their embodied experience. As a consequence, their relationships to others are diminished: bodies in discomfort are less able to socialise and talk, and less able to enjoy life. But as the following will show, *the present* can also bring about relief from these emotions, a lessening of the intensity of discomfort and depletion, by practices I want to conceptualise here as practices of radical hope.

In the following, I want to explore a *becoming activist* for asylum seekers in the context of the violent asylum everyday. I witnessed asylum seekers reclaiming the space of the everyday through exchanging little acts of care, solidarity and hope - these acts, I argue, are inspired by a re-orientation towards radical hope. Their practice of radical hope firstly, creates an alliance, an emotional connection and empathy, based on asylum seekers´

[23] This also links to Deleuze´s (1993) and Whitehead´s (2004) understanding of an *event* as something that disturbs the order of things. In their understanding an *events* "sticks out from the ordinary, marks historical discontinuities and opens up the future to a series of differentiations" (Tamboukou, p. 96, 2015).

shared experiences of their unlivable lives. But asylum seekers´ little acts of care, solidarity and hope also critiqued the current order of things (Foucault, 2002), in which asylum seekers are isolated within the state and massive bordering machinery designed to reduce asylum seekers´ human connections to a minimum. In other words, these acts disturbed the affective logic of bordering. They expose "gaps" in the seemingly all-encompassing discomfort that contemporary bordering practices produce, and are as such, constitute a *becoming activist*. These acts, as a practice of asylum activism, reformulate what political space is by expanding notions of it to the everyday and the body.

Practices of radical hope

As already mentioned, I want to further explore asylum seekers´ relationship with hope. Hope is often defined as an expectation of something desired, which is linked to the future and some kind of optimism. In the following, I want to show what practices and understanding of radical hope asylum seekers articulated. I also want to focus on what hope *does* in the context of asylum activism. As the stories below illustrate, it allows asylum seekers to leap up or out of the stuckness of their lives, the stuckness of the affective structures of bordering. Therefore I argue that in order to understand asylum seekers´ practices of hope we need to think hope, not as an expectation, but rather structured through an openness that marks its relationship to the present and to the social order. Radical hope opens up possibilities and agency for asylum seekers that are otherwise positioned in a way that they can never be comfortable with. The asylum machinery and spaces of solidarity feel heavy and deplete asylum seekers´ lives, and yet, these practices of radical hope show a political agency that transforms the emotional structures of these experiences.

In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant proposes that:

> "all attachment is optimistic, if we describe the optimism as the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying something that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene" (p. 2).

A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually "an obstacle to your flourishing". While my results do not speak to relationships of cruel optimism but rather a very pragmatic way of encountering the border**,** Berlant's engagement with the present, and the modes in which we might inhabit it, speaks to my own interest in investigating hope's role in negotiating the asylum everyday. I want to conceptualise hope as a moving out of oneself into the world, an openness that allows for the desire to bring something closer but also to reject that which is not desired. This openness, as I observed, often happened when asylum seekers felt that their existence had lost all meaning. Similarly to how I want to attend to radical hope in this chapter, Jonathan Lear (2008) conceptualised radical hope as the ability to maintain hope in a meaningful existence, even when a person´s existence has momentarily lost all meaning.

In the following, I hope to show how practices of radical hope, as an orientation towards the present and towards what is possible now, allowed asylum seekers to make it through day-to-day life when their day-to-day has become unlivable. Similar to negotiating distance and involvement, practices of radical hope are a technique to manage and reduce affective intensities and at the same time open up our understanding of politics.

In the first year of my fieldwork, I met Godfrey, a thirty-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda. He was one of the most optimistic people I have ever met. Later, I learned that what I observed was not simply optimism, which would be a turning away from the violent reality of the asylum everyday, as he shared, it was what I want to conceptualise here as *radical hope*. Months after we first met, he explained to me that he has not always been that "hopeful" but that being an asylum seeker had changed him, forcing him to re-orient himself. During his time in the UK, he has felt deep desperation, grief, lost family members and witnessed many friends´ depression that resulted from feeling stuck and

completely powerless while waiting for their asylum claim to be processed. “The darkest time”, he shared, was when he was detained in 2013 for three and a half months. It was then in detention when he realised:

> "I can either kill myself or have hope, there is nothing in between" (Godfrey, 2016).

Deciding not to take his own life, he instead decided to completely devote his life to hope. In the deepest darkness of detention, when his ideas of how to live a meaningful life lost all meaning (Lear, 2008), he was able to connect with a sense of radical hope, a hope in life. Listening to him describing his experience, radical hope felt like a deep trust in life, a trust that what he was going through was meaningful or at least would become meaningful one day. Similar to Lear´s engagement with the "death of the subject" as an opening, a *becoming-other*, Godfrey´s experience in detention, and the momentary loss of everything that had meaning to him made (in the end) space for another, deeper, trust in life, which allowed him to confront the uncertainty of being in the asylum process, the unknown, with openness and hope.

The meaninglessness he experienced in detention, I have witnessed in many asylum seekers´ sharings. A twenty-five-year-old woman* from Albania called Sara, for example, kept asking herself in conversations with me:

> "Who am I anyway? Who am I?" (Sara, 2017).

I felt her vulnerability and precarity in the threat of meaninglessness in these questions, a total loss of identity.

Another woman* from Nigeria called Mary repeatedly told me:

> "I´ve lost myself in the (asylum) process" (Mary, 2017).

While what these asylum seekers perceived as the death of their subjectivity, lead sometimes to suicidal thoughts, most often I observed a spark of radical hope following these moments of complete loss of meaning. In the case of Godfrey, it was in the highly controlled and hostile environment of detention where he re-oriented himself towards the present and what is possible now. He shared that in the following months in detention, he experienced much less of a struggle than before. Instead of thinking about how meaningless and precarious his life had become, which made him feel alone and powerless, he focused on his very reduced, but existing, amount of political possibilities within the space of detention, in which he found himself:

> "Someone's solicitor told them they need a photocopy and for that person in detention, it felt like the end of the world. I said, no problem, you just go tomorrow and get a photocopy. I used to ask: What do you need? How can I help? I always tried to take away some of the pressures that person was feeling by offering my company, my support. Some people would say, they don't have any money in their account so I would give them mine. I would call people outside and tell them please buy me airtime and top up this number and I give it to others. My sister used to put money on my card and I used to give it to other people in detention who needed it more. They were complaining that they need money and I just said – let's go and I give you money. All the money I had I shared" (Godfrey, 2016).

Godfrey shared at least twenty stories with me of how he supported people in detention. I think of these acts of practical support, care and empathy; he described as activism, as practices of radical hope that opened up political possibilities through their focus on the present and what was possible in the now. Godfrey often criticised many asylum activist groups focus on big actions and events. He used to say:

> "the real activism happens behind closed doors, behind walls - that's what supports us the most" (Godfrey, 2016).

However, I do not just want to look at Godfrey acts as individual acts of activism and solidarity (behind detention walls) that mark courage, selflessness, care, which of course

they do, but here I want to focus in particular on what they do rather than what they are. These acts open up a space, make space, for moments of relief, of joy, of feeling supported and cared for. Godfrey´s practice felt to me like a search for an alternative form of life, they created another way of being, another way of relating, another way of enacting solidarity.

Similarly, Kaboure, a 36-year old asylum seeking man* from Nigeria shared his practice of radical hope:

> "I try to help by focusing on what is possible. This helps me and my friends. Sometimes people are in the asylum process for two-and-a-half years so I encourage them to find some comfort. Being in the asylum process is quite a challenge, I know. But once you embrace it, it has... You have to find the belief within you. If you don't find a silver lining in this situation... oh my God it can really do a lot of harm…" (Kaboure, 2016).

Importantly, as Godfrey´s and Kaboure´s story show, these practices also negotiate the emotional structures of affective border violence by creating little spaces of comfort and relief. In our conversations asylum seekers often quoted James Baldwin saying "I can´t be a pessimist, because I´m alive". Despite the hostile environment another form of being, relating to others and enacting solidarity opened up that marks radical hope.

Around the time of the Brexit vote in spring 2016, I had an ongoing conversation with Justine, a thirty-nine-year-old woman* from Uganda that I met during a protest event. In the following weeks, we met regularly and discussed what she described as the unseen emotional labours of an asylum seeker.

> "People keep calling me up and tell me about their struggles. Everyone has so many problems and its overwhelming, so I say, ok let's just enjoy today, now – what can we do today? If you are spending your whole life waiting for that day, then you are wasting your whole life. And these days have not helped you. The anger you have, the resentment you

> have – you can even go and shout at someone, but if you just look for that good thing, this one good thing – at least you have the chance that something will come up. It takes you away from being so negative, you get some relief from the situation" (Justine, 2016).

Similarly to my conversations with Godfrey and Kaboure, my conversations with Justine made me aware of how affective border violence plays into the friendships of asylum seekers with other asylum seekers. Justine describes how she manages her overwhelmed feelings by moving her conversations with other asylum seekers to a focus on "good things". As she pointed out to me in many conversations, she feels, she "needs" to manage these conversations to exercise some control over her own emotions. Speaking to other asylum seekers and their difficult emotions produced by affective border violence brings up powerful feelings of anger, fear, sadness and heaviness in her. What she described, was the circulation of emotions: Justine was overwhelmed by emotions that had felt settled and yet, in that moment, in conversation with other asylum seekers had momentarily reached her. This also points at the workings of border violence that are even emotionally harmful when not directly directed towards a person. Through changing the perspective of the conversation, through practicing radical hope, she created some comfort for herself and others by negotiating the impact that the affective violence could have on her own body.

Justine´s practice appeared to me as another example of a practice of radical hope as it created an opening in the everyday bordering experiences of asylum seekers, a space for something else to emerge. The practice of radical hope has not only the potential to transform asylum seekers´ experience, it also is a political negotiation of bordering practices that work through the body. It is the bodily life of bordering she transforms in the taking back of control and managing how much emotional, physical and mental space this harmful bordering affect and subsequent emotions are given in herself.

Alan, a thirty-six-year-old asylum seeking man* from Nigeria, also shared with me how often people approached him with their problems and how it made him feel sad and

heavy. Hearing his friends´ stories about their everyday struggles, Alan found it particularly challenging to listen to them because, as he shared, he could feel their pain; its resonance with his own evoked an emotional connection; their precarity, vulnerability and pain was his pain too. Listening to his friend's stories felt like listening and reliving his own story, as he explained, which again brought up pain, fear and discomfort. Similarly to Justine, Kaboure and Godfrey, Alan developed a strategy that was necessary to "survive" and make it possible to talk to his friends: another example of a practice of radical hope. He focused on what is possible, on the "silver lining" of the situation.

These stories also show the how deep empathy of asylum seekers, when listening to other asylum seekers´ stories, is part of a practice of radical hope. While practices of everyday bordering aim at isolating people and making them as uncomfortable as possible, asylum seekers´ practices of radical hope explored here, changes the effects of these bordering practices by creating solidarity; by sharing tools and techniques that help asylum seekers to feel more comfortable.

My conversations with Alan, Justine, Kaboure and Godfrey are exemplary for many stories I have heard from all the forty asylum seekers I became friends with. Asylum seekers´ practice of radical hope allowed them to transform discomfort in their own and others bodies. As the asylum experience is such a traumatic one, one might think that focusing on the future; on what is possible once this is over, is a good approach to survive the present. However, asylum seekers´ stories have shown the opposite, their survival was linked to focusing on the present and what is possible now. These practices seemed central to the potential deterritorialisation of asylum seekers´ bodies in discomfort as they provide the possibility for new, more desirable forms of life; of relating and of solidarity to emerge. I want to look at these acts of radical hope as political as they allow asylum seekers to *become other* than the embodiment of bordering. I also do not want to read these stories as simply "positive thinking", rather they are affirmative, as their stories fully acknowledge the difficulty, the stickiness and heaviness; the materiality and emotionality of being an asylum seeker and yet, at the same time embraces hope as a search for

alternative forms of life. They see the possibility of political negotiation within their limited conditions of possibility. This illustrates an understanding of "politics" that is about the possibility of searching and finding another form; an understanding of politics that is rooted in an embodied practice, rather than in theory and abstract thinking. The practice of radical hope thus includes a radical trust in the face of great discomfort, anxiety and uncertainty.

Conclusion

This chapter explored a *becoming activist*, the making of asylum activism by asylum seekers in the context of formal spaces of asylum activism as well as in the context of the violent asylum everyday. Particular attention was paid to otherwise unnoticed and invisible acts of asylum activism: asylum seekers´ management of their involvement, distance and practices of radical hope. Even though I located the two techniques in different spaces, it is important to mention that I found both practices in the formal space of asylum activism as well as the everyday, there was fluidity between the two. Asylum seekers also applied their technique of *increased distancing* in the everyday when, for example, they managed their conversations with other asylum seekers and also carried their practice of radical hope into formal spaces of asylum activism, where friendships and the everyday continued through, for example, exchanging smiles, nodding or physical touch. The formal did not, however, *create* these intimate moments, they were a form of negotiating what belongs and what does not in political spaces.

In both cases, asylum seekers´ *becoming activist* seemed to be linked to creating little spaces, what I call gaps of comfort in the otherwise violent asylum everyday and therefore must be seen as a form of political negotiation happening in conversation with states mobilising politics of discomfort. This chapter, following up on the previous chapter, thus points at the political power of the dis/comfort in the context of asylum activism. On the one hand, states mobilise the "political power of intensities" (Thrift, 2004) in the asylum day to day to uphold and amplify processes of bordering and racialisation. This powerful

affective violence, as explored in *Chapter 5*, works through its embodiedness and invisibility. On the other hand, as this chapter showed, asylum seekers use the political power of comfort to negotiate these affective politics. The *becoming activist* of asylum seekers I explored in this chapter, must therefore be conceptualised as a *becoming comfortable* that is in conversation with these affective bordering practices. Asylum seekers´ practice of asylum activism and solidarity was focused on bringing relief, easing burdens and creating little gaps of comfort.

The next chapter will further explore the politics of dis/comfort and its power to create mutuality and closeness between differently positioned bodies. Asylum activism is a space in which different positionalities meet and in order to create gaps of comfort, it needs to attend to the politics of dis/comfort. We therefore need to explore what allows for mutuality and comfort between differently positioned bodies. Banerjia and Distanteb (2009) have argued, that in the greatest proximity, the distance or difference of the other most honestly encountered. Therefore, the next chapter looks at the space of friendship and how it offers us productive possibilities to explore and negotiate the space between "self" and "other".

7

Tracing Moments of Closeness and Distance Between Entangled, Fluid and Affective Positions

The last few chapters explored the affective components of a *becoming activist* of asylum seekers. I described the *becoming activist* of the unfed and unwell body as creating gaps of comfort, a *becoming comfortable*, that negotiates power through affect and emotion. In a model of an affective and emotional politics, the body is a site of struggle, a space where inequality and social order is negotiated (Ahmed, 2013; Lorde, 1981; Butler, 2015). This chapter further explores the politics of dis/comfort by showing how comfort and discomfort are entangled with different positions and identities that constantly shift, and therefore always offer the possibility for transformation, a possibility to *become comfortable*.

This chapter will zoom in on the concept of positionality to show how encounters of different positioned bodies can create comfort and discomfort. These dis/comforts, as any other affects and emotions, emerge from their specific context as well as them having the power to generate meaning through the histories and contexts that they invoke (Ahmed, 2004). As the previous chapter has shown, paying attention to dis/comfort is of political relevance as it plays an important role in sustaining power structures (Illouz, 1997; 2007; Lorde, 1981; Ahmed, 2013; Wilkinson, 2009), as well as being used by asylum seekers to negotiate these "political power of intensities" (Thrift, 2004).

Asylum activism is a space in which different positionalities meet, a space of relationship, and it is thus essential to understand how the politics of dis/comfort play into encounters of differently positioned bodies. If activists, asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers, want to integrate a politics of comfort in these spaces, we first need to understand what exactly allows for mutuality and comfort considering subjects in different social positions. By focusing on the affective dimension of positionality, this chapter traces moments of closeness and distance between entangled, fluid and affective positions.

In considering these moments, I want to follow contemporary research on positionality (e.g. Sawyer & Liggett, 2012; Kaspar & Landolt, 2016; Eppley, 2006), arguing that subject positions are multi-layered and ever-changing. Therefore, I will look at positionality as fluent and in the form of a cultural practice, rather than a fixed identity. This is in line with my understanding of subjects and their constant *becoming*.

I am going to enter the conversation about positionality through reflections on language, whiteness, veganism, religion and hipsterism. Using slightly different access points than, often used race, class and gender, I hope to show how these practices are access points for us to understand the affective *doings* of particular positions and identities that must be looked at in the context of different histories, politics and positions of power. Moreover, they are access points into learning about the possibilities for a *becoming comfortable* of asylum seekers.

While *Chapter 4*, *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6* attended to the space of formal asylum activism, the asylum everyday and both spaces together respectively, this chapter, still in reference to these three, will mostly be focusing on the space of friendship. The space of friendship is one example that shows how emotions, affects and relationships that are traditionally placed in the everyday, are also present in formal spaces of asylum activism. Activist group meetings are spaces where people can meet, connect and form friendships. The space of friendship is a space of an intimate meeting of different social

locations and experiences, which therefore allows us a deeper look into the *doings* of positionality and its *felt* dimension.

In all three spaces moments or gaps of comfort were created. I refer again to moments or gaps of comfort to acknowledge that while structures of inequality tied to our different social positioning did not cease to exist in these encounters, there were little moments of connection, mutuality, and openings that brought lives together, even if only for a moment. It is these moments and gaps I want to trace in this chapter as they can teach us something about the possibility of asylum seekers to *become comfortable*. Paying attention to what makes and unsettles difference and connection in different spaces, in which these different positionalities meet, is also an important learning point in a move towards a common politics. Therefore I want to reflect in this chapter on some of our positions to show how they can produce comfort and discomfort that affect our experience of closeness and distance to others.

The reflections in this chapter add to my previous discussion of the politics of dis/comfort. In *Chapter 4*, I explored how formal asylum activist spaces create discomfort by not listening to the voices of asylum seekers. *Chapter 5* then showed how bordering mobilises intense feelings of discomfort to deplete asylum seekers´ lives and sustain existing power structures. *Chapter 6* illustrated how asylum seekers practice a politics of comfort that creates little gaps of comfort in the space of asylum, otherwise constructed as space of intense discomfort and depletion. The present chapter attempts to weave together the threads of dis/comfort and positionality.

The asylum positionality can be seen as a position of endless discomfort created by processes of racialisation and bordering. What creates spaces of comfort in my fieldwork relationships seemed particularly important and interesting as the hostile environment of the German and UK government uses multi-textured techniques to create as much discomfort for asylum seekers as possible. Asylum activism must thus, in consequence, contemplate the questions of what creates momentary ease; and what turns spaces of

depletion into spaces of comfort. Therefore, I will explore here how little spaces of comfort can be created within different positioned subjects.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, I conceptualise discomfort in this thesis as a complex affectual sensibility felt through the body, expressed in anger, shame, worry, pain, fear and stress, all depleting bodily experiences.[24] I experienced discomfort as a personal feeling, escaping language but also expressed in many conversations. Dis/comfort assisted me in expanding my knowledge about the *doings* of everyday bordering and political space. As mentioned in *Chapter 1*, comfort and "feeling comfortable" are important aspects of corporeal experience (Bissell, 2008). While comfort is most often associated with positive and desirable sensations, that gives a sense of security (Malinowski & Stamler, 2002; Tutton and Seers, 2003), discomfort is portrayed as far less desirable sensation, a depleting and unsettling bodily experience. However, as outlined in more detail in the previous chapters, in the context of a traditional political subjectivity, being "outside" of one´s comfort zone is also associated with transformation, action and persistence (Bissell, 2008).

As already mentioned in *Chapter 1*, and in accord with Bissel here, I am also aware of the limitations of creating a binary labelling comfort as "good" and discomfort as "bad"**.** Looking at discomfort as only destructive and comfort as only productive does not account for the complexities of affects and emotions and their relationship to power and transformation. I also observed discomfort as being productive as it created, for example, our ongoing everyday conversations about political space. Moreover, it allowed asylum seekers to learn and make sense of existing power dynamics in political spaces and in their everyday lives by listening to their own feelings.

[24] Asylum seekers expressed different emotions and bodily sensations to me such as anger, shame, worry, pain, fear and stress, however, most often they described their bodily experience of these emotions as feeling "uncomfortable". Therefore, in this thesis I use the concept discomfort to group together depleting bodily sensations that decreased asylum seekers´ power to act.

In this chapter, I attempt to further develop my conceptualisation of dis/comfort by bringing it into a relationship with its entanglement with different social positions. I want to attend to the question of what it means to think the politics of dis/comfort as a practice in everyday encounters. The political power of dis/comfort runs through my following contemplations on language, whiteness, veganism, religion and hipsterism speaking to 1) the violent affective politics of discomfort and how it plays out in everyday encounters of different positions and 2) access points into transforming spaces of discomfort into spaces of comfort. As this chapter will show, in order to attend to the politics of dis/comfort we need to attend to how they are practised in everyday encounters.

Towards an entangled, fluid and affective positionality

In *Chapter 5*, I argued for the importance of theorising the asylum positionality as a specific form of precarity in order to understand what emotions and affects bordering practices produce. Within the range of precarities that are produced by the border, there is a very particular multiple affective precarity for people in the asylum process. *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 5* illustrated how bordering practices effectively and affectively produce "unlivable" lives. Asylum seekers´ lives are constrained and controlled by many practices that are uniquely tied to the asylum process. However, while focusing on the very particular violence that bodies of asylum seekers´ experience as bordered, racialised others allows us to map the affective structures of contemporary bordering experiences, there is also the risk of homogenising the asylum experience. Bordering processes impact on subjects in different ways depending on their complex social position, which is based on a multitude of positionalities: from race, class, gender, sexuality to personal experiences, interests, specific identities and food choices. The asylum is thus one of many different social positionings and through its entanglement, with other positionings, it creates different experiences. *Chapter 5*, for example, illustrates how the asylum position and LGBT position are entangled and produce even more precarity for asylum-seeking subjects.

As a white, middle-class female researcher from the Global North conducting long-term research on asylum activism in the United Kingdom and Germany, I reflected a lot on positionality before, during and after my fieldwork. The term "positionality," refers to an awareness that our life experiences and social position impact how we see and understand the world around us (Haraway, 1988). Recent discussions, drawing from critical and feminist theory, demonstrate the complexity of positionalities that are at play in fieldwork encounters and therefore emphasise the need to take them into consideration in academic knowledge production and beyond (e.g. Haraway, 1988; Gibson-Graham, 1994; Kobayashi, 1994; Nast, 1994; Nagar, 1997; Rose, 1997; Stanley & Wise, 2002; Browne, Bakshi & Law 2009; Chattopadhyay, 2013; Fisher, 2014). Situating the knowledge produced in this research project is thus crucial to consider how the multitude of my and others positionalities may influence the "results" of this work.

Race, gender and class are rather fixed categories which are often used to describe how people are positioned in the world. I hope to illustrate in this chapter, that by only considering a person's gender, race, class, sexuality, it is not fully possible to grasp the complex and affective workings of positionality that I experienced in my friendships with asylum seekers. Rather, they require a focus on different cultural practices and their entanglement with different social positions.

Reading about positionality in the area of asylum and migration studies, I found a researcher´s position in the field often being portrayed as either "in" or "out" of the live worlds, realities, of the "researched". The "insider" status is often defined through a person migration or asylum history (e.g. Carling, Erdal & Ezzati, 2014; Nowicka & Ryan, 2015). However, my note on terminology has shown how complex, controversial and ever-shifting terminology in the field of asylum and migration is. Using the migratory status of a person as the foundation for a specific positionality of a group can be particularly problematic as is covers up important differences they experience with regards to race and coloniality. Describing people according to their legal or migratory status does thus not allow us to look at differences in how people are positioned

differently within these categories. The term "migrant", for example, is used for very differently positioned subjects: from asylum seekers to white middle-class subjects, such as myself. Being a migrant does thus not bring me closer to understanding the experiences of asylum seekers in the UK and Germany. What instead brought about moments of closeness were other shared positions such as language, conversations about whiteness, veganism, religion and a critique of hipsterism. These other positions created closeness between otherwise very differently positioned subjects.

This chapter is not trying to criticise the importance of paying attention to race, gender and class, as they are essential categories in order to understand how inequality is (re)produced, rather, I want to add to this relevant literature on positionality by looking at specific practices as access points to trace how fluent, relational and contextual race, gender and class positions are as well as how politics of dis/comfort play into these encounters. Positionality is not something stable within one subject, but shifts depending on space, time and encounter (e.g. Nast, 1994; Sawyer & Liggett, 2012; Kaspar & Landolt, 2016; Eppley, 2006; Rose, 1997). As this scholarship indicates, fieldwork positions and relationships cannot be reduced to somewhat fixed or frozen positionalities based on social categories but rather unfold constantly. This chapter thus also hopes to add to research that tries to break down specific kind of identity formations and fixed positions to reveal the affective *doings* and entanglements of processes of racialisation, gender, class with other positions.

I first considered the practices I want to describe in this chapter as not relevant to a project exploring political activism. However, as the last three chapters have shown, paying attention to what creates commonalities in formal spaces of politics as well as in personal everyday encounters is essential for a political project of asylum activism if it wants to create spaces that are inhabitable by all. Tracing moments of connection and comfort is an important practice of care, of mutual ethics, that helps us to rethink, reshape and rebuild the spaces we inhabit together. Attending to the feelings, to the care and hidden politics of dis/comfort that plays out in different spaces of encounter provided us

with possibilities for mutuality and reorientation. This shows how political these daily practices are, particularly in the context of asylum.

I observed the dis/comforts created around these complex positionalities in bodily sensations, resonances, gut reactions, intensities of experience and conversation. These subtle affects and emotions required a practice of awareness and attention. Dis/comfort allows us to see positionality, not as something that is fixed to a subject but rather something that that is located in the moment of encounter through which feelings, consciousness and agency are shaped. Positionality is therefore produced between bodies instead of being located with(in) a subject or an objective, determining condition. We are always positioned in relation to something/someone else. Depending on the encounter, our position can change. I argue that attending to dis/comfort allows us to explore the affective dimension and complex entanglement of different social positions and identities. As mentioned before, I argue that encounters of different positions can create comfort and/or discomfort. While feelings of comfort allow mutuality and closeness, feelings of discomfort create distance between bodies.

Dis/comfort, different social positions and identity figures in everyday encounters

In the following, I also want to tell the story of my friendships with asylum seekers in order to show the entanglement dis/comfort, social positions and identity figures in everyday encounters. By reflecting on our friendships and what made them possible, as well as the dis/comforts within these friendships, I will try to narrate how language, whiteness, veganism, religion and hipsterism were implicated in its making.

Dis/comfort and language

First, I want to attend to language as a cultural practice that is entangled with these different positions and dis/comforts. Language is an inherently social and cultural *doing* (Schecter & Bayley, 2005) that is, as this section hopes to illustrate, entangled with the

making of gender, class, race and asylum. Looking at language as a practice allows us a more fluid, contextual and differentiated understanding of its effects and affects.

In my friendships with asylum seekers, language brought about mutuality and feelings of comfort as much as it brought about distance and feelings of discomfort at times. Language determines who can speak with whom, and whose voices get heard. The politics around language, and its entanglements with the making of gender, class, race and asylum, decide on the norms of language use; who sets these norms and enforces them; who determines what languages and linguistic behaviour are acceptable? Language is thus entangled with power (Foucault, 1980; Butler, 2013; Spivak, 1988). What I want to focus on in particular, is how language, through its entanglement with social positions, creates comforts and discomfort, pointing at the affective dimension of positionality. This shows how power is negotiated through affect and emotions and how these materialities can produce distance and closeness between bodies.

Racialisation, gender and class position asylum-seeking subjects very differently with regards to language and power. The majority of asylum seekers I became friends with were from countries, in which English is the first or second language, for example Uganda and Nigeria, or have lived in an English speaking country for a while. Most asylum seekers were from at least a middle-class background. Our friendships grew out of conversations that were only possible because we spoke the same language. Speaking the same language opened up a space for our very different experiences and positionalities to meet and to be in conversation with each other. Being in that space of conversation also enabled our other positions to encounter, which in turn changed how we were positioned towards each other. Speaking the same language, allowed the discovering of commonalities and differences beyond our legal status and visual markers such as skin colour. Speaking the same language brought about feelings of comfort. It created an emotional connection that made us feel at ease and enabled us to listen to each other, hearing each other's different positions that further increased the comfort we experienced around each other.

All of the forty asylum seekers I became close to had access to support networks that they could rely on for help, which their language skills allowed them to access and inhabit. However, during my fieldwork, I have also encountered many asylum seekers who did not speak English or German. For them, the asylum experience was even more isolating experience as they had significantly more problems accessing support, knowledge and social networks. Asylum seekers who did not speak English or German were often depending on other asylum seekers for translations or to give them money to pay for a professional interpreter. A lack of language skills kept them moreover from accessing activist groups and having agency in their asylum claim. In order to be an active agent in the asylum system in the UK and Germany, asylum seekers need to have a good level of English/German. Not speaking these languages means not being able to read letters that might need urgent responding. It means having to pay extra to get good translation services. It means having to depend on social networks in order to understand the asylum system, outcomes and consequences. This creates a lot of extra discomfort on bodies of asylum seekers, who feel helpless, alone and powerless in a world, which they cannot understand but that still decides upon their futures.

This highlights how even though none of my asylum seeking friends were in a privileged position, some of them were able to mobilise power not available to others. It also points at how states mobilise language´s entanglement with class, racialisation and power in the context of asylum as a technique of bordering and racialisation. Speaking or not speaking a language can thus either further increase feelings of discomfort and depletion or bring about little moments of comfort and connection. This shows how power is always also negotiated through the body, through making bodies uncomfortable or comfortable. However, whether or not an asylum seeker spoke English and/or German could not only be tied to their education and class, most often their circumstance of being from a country in which English is the first or second language, decided on their relative position of power and comfort.

The politics of language also seemed to be entangled with the politics of gender. *Chapter 5* explored the particular precarity of asylum seeking women* living in camp spaces in Berlin, where women*´s bodies are subjected to multi-layered affective border violence. States actively use women*´s sexual vulnerability in these spaces as technique of bordering by adding an extra layer of fear and discomfort onto the asylum experience. *Chapter 5* has also shown how intense feelings of discomfort makes asylum seekers less emotionally, physically and mentally resourced to socialise, talk and leave the camp.

Moreover, asylum seeking women* are disproportionally often single mothers and responsible for care and emotional work putting them in a position of being subjected to even more affective violence by not only experiencing anger, stress, worry about as a result of their own precarious positon but also the equally precarious positions of their children. I want to make the point here that this extra layer of violence affecting bodies of women* disproportionally, has important implications for women*`s possibility of access to language and power: Through the extra depletion, bodies of women* are less able to access language courses which positions them less powerful, compared to asylum seeking men* who generally do not have to negotiate sexual harassment on a daily basis or function as primary care-givers of their children. In consequence, women* are not able to access as many social networks and build friendships with non-asylum seekers, which are often built on speaking a common language. Most of the women* I became close to during this research were young single women, not responsible for any care work.

Next to language´s connection to gender and power, language also seemed to be entangled with racialisation and class, which I often observed entering formal activist spaces. As shown in *Chapter 4*, asylum seekers as specific actors become less seen and heard than the citizen or "regular migrant" in formal activist spaces. I often observed the power over discourse being negotiated at activist meetings. The negotiation over whose voices got heard became very visible to me in feelings of discomfort during one meeting in July 2017 where a collective of different asylum activist actors came together to prepare a press conference. The press conference was part of a protest against the end of

a school occupation, in which asylum seekers had lived for over two years. Half of the people attending the meeting were not fluent in English or German and were therefore not able to follow the conversation (held in German and English). The facilitators of the meeting had asked three asylum seekers to translate simultaneously so everyone would be able to follow the discussion. However, during the meeting, the group of people, mostly German and European citizens, who could follow the conversation without translation did not take enough breaks for the translators to do their work. In consequence, the majority of asylum seekers could not follow the conversation. Asylum seekers began to complain to their neighbours and translators in their own languages about not being able to understand what was being discussed.

About thirty minutes later, the conversation paused and the facilitators asked the three asylum seekers they had asked to do the translations to inform people about the discussion. The translators looked up, and with both raised hands and annoyed expressions, announced that they were not willing to translate any more as they had "stopped listening". Their act of not listening here can be seen as a way of asylum seekers to negotiate the power over discourse by refusing to enter the little and exclusive spaces of access that were offered to them. This also links to my observations in previous chapters, in which asylum seekers used different techniques of mental and emotional distancing, such as their refusal to translate and by that negotiate what political space is and who holds the power over the discourse within it. Their act of not listening, not paying attention, thus disrupted the existing power over discourse and positioned them differently accordingly. This shows how positions of power linked to language can shift very suddenly, even within one meeting.

I also and most often encountered language and its entanglement with gender, class and racialisation in my conversations with asylum seekers during Breaking Through Bars meetings[25]. In spring 2016, Alan, Abi, Dara, Aazar, Yanelle, Emmanuel, Justine and I met

[25] In May 2016 a group of asylum seekers and I set a group and platform called "Breaking Through Bars", which was supposed to create a space to discuss people's experience of being involved in asylum activist

up regularly to explore our experiences of formal asylum activist spaces in the UK. We took notes of our meetings and recorded some conversations. I always felt some discomfort around our differences with regards to language proficiency and terminology. As already mentioned, the majority of asylum seekers I became friends with, came from an at least middle-class background and had completed an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, which, compared to other asylum seekers, positioned them relatively in a position of power. Moreover, their background played, I believe, an essential role in allowing our joint inquiry into the politics of asylum activism. However, we had not all studied social sciences and some asylum seekers had studied in a different language; histories that positioned us differently in discourse and power.

The terminology I used was a result of being exposed to academic terminology in European universities over seven years of study that, with its inherent epistemic violence[26], I observed making asylum seekers uncomfortable and alienated at times. Other times, expressions asylum seekers used made me feel uncomfortable, also pointing**,** again at language´s entanglement with gender, class and racialisation. I remember Charles, a thirty-seven-year-old man* from Uganda once calling me "baby", which caused intense feelings of discomfort in me. On top of the feeling of discomfort I already feel by everyday sexism, I felt an extra layer of discomfort around its entanglement with racialisation, class and different cultural language practices. Both of these situations further emphasise the affective dimension of positionality and how power entangled with language and other subject positions are felt and negotiated through the body. In both situations, we shared our discomfort around language and power that allowed for the dynamics to be recognised as well as helping our affective positions of dis/comfort to shift. Relationships are, as outlined in my intimate ethnographic approach back in *Chapter 1*, always filled with different levels of power. However, our friendships

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groups spaces in London. Together we mapped our thoughts and feelings through which we experienced our activist involvement.

[26] In her work on "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak (1988) defines *Epistemic Violence* as the infliction of harm on post-colonial subjects though discourse.

allowed for open conversations about this discomfort and distance created through our different positions and made it possible for them to shift again.

Dis/comfort and whiteness

Secondly, I want to attend to dis/comfort and whiteness and its entanglement with the asylum. Asylum seekers often placed me as somewhere in between "one of them", "one that understands", "one that knows" and "the other", "white people", "one that is not in their shoes". With "not in their shoes", as they explained to me later, they meant that as a white person, I do not understand the fear and discomfort they often felt at protest events, knowing that the police would come to them first or them going home late worrying about street harassment or violence. It meant that I could not understand the feeling of consistently being identified as a bordered, racialised body and what feelings practices of whiteness produce. Knowing this different experience could not entirely be shared in words, pictures or stories but only felt, and never by me, created an emotional distance between us, emphasising how the encounter of different situated subjects can create comfort and discomfort.

Our different "realities" (as explored in more detail in *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 5*) created many moments of discomfort between us. All asylum seeking friends shared with me that they sometimes felt uncomfortable in my presence because of my whiteness. Whiteness, as I learned, was according to them linked to *a practice of inattention and unawareness* and it was my missing registering of the *doings* of racialisation that caused discomfort and distance between us. This links to my findings in *Chapter 4*, where I explored how the unheard, unnoticed asylum-everyday, causes feelings of discomfort in formal asylum activist spaces. *Chapter 5* also showed the political power of the intensively felt emotional dimension of bordering that is invisibility to most of us.

When we entered activist meeting and event spaces, a café or the living room of my house-share, asylum-seeking friends often looked around immediately and made a

comment on the skin colour ratio. Then, they would look at me with a subtle screwing up of their eyes and a serious gaze, clearly recognising that I had not made the same observation. I often sensed some level of discomfort and disconnection in these moments. In September 2016, when my friend Caleb, a thirty-four-year-old asylum seeking man* from Somalia, and I went to an activist event on asylum and bordering, immediately after sitting down in a large room of about fifty people, he looked around and then witnessed:

> "There are only white people here! I can only see three to four black people!"(Caleb, 2016).

Another time, in November 2016, Lydia, Solomon, Yanelle, Sami and I met in a café to discuss a recent activist meeting about deportations we attended. After a while, I looked outside because everyone kept looking out of the window next to us. I saw a group of police people standing outside of the café, in which we were sat when Lydia, a fifty-seven-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Uganda commented:

> "Do you see all the policemen? They must have a big call. These are the serious ones, it's the metropolitan police, not the ones with the blue clothes. I counted twelve earlier but now there are more" (Lydia, 2017).

Lydia, Solomon, Yanelle, Sami and I started talking about my unawareness and inattention to the police outside and Lydia, Solomon, Yanelle and Sami began to share stories about their experiences of having been detained before when "not having been cautious enough" (Yanelle, 2016). "Its bordering psychology", Sami, a forty-year-old asylum seeking man* from Iraq added:

> "of course we are more aware of their presence than you are. You are white. You are safe" (Sami, 2016).

This illustrates how examining whiteness as a practice, entangled with racialisation and asylum, allows us to see how different social positions create discomforts through specific

practices. I argue, my non-doing, inattention and unawareness here must be contextualised; it must be looked at in the context of the slow affective violence of the state. The affective violence of bordering and racialisation works through its continuation of the spaces of discomfort across time and space, its accumulation of intensities and its invisibility. Therefore, my inattention and unawareness can be read as a complicity, consciously or unconsciously, with the state´s attempt to invisibilise practices of bordering and racialisation.

In a group conversation with one of my friends in a café somewhere in the English countryside, we explored how asylum seekers´ attention and awareness of whiteness is tied to specific practices of whiteness that are marked by feelings of dis/comfort. Sitting in the café, I asked Alan, a thirty-six-year-old asylum seeking man* from Nigeria:

> "Does it feel weird that everyone here is white?" (Isabel, 2017).

Alan looked around, smiled and said:

> "Yes that's true, I stayed a week and I didn't see any black person. That's the English countryside" (Alan, 2017).

He shrugged his shoulders and shared that his "blackness" only becomes really noticeable, conscious, for him when he feels actively "made uncomfortable" (Alan, 2017). The discomfort is always present "to some level", he says, "but sometimes I don´t realise and other times its very strong". In our conversation it felt he distinguished between different practices of whiteness: a discomfort, caused by a practice of recognising him as racialised foreignness, "which happens all the time", he says, compared to a practice of whiteness that treats him as racialised foreigner.

My conversation with Alan highlighted for me the importance of paying attention to different practices of whiteness but also the affective violence of the continued processes of bordering and racialisation. Racialised and bordered bodies are, as outlined in more

detail in *Chapter 5*, bodies in constant discomfort. Exploring dis/comfort in the context of asylum is of political relevance as it plays an important role in sustaining power structures.

While so far, I have focused on how the violent materialities of bordering and racialisation are linked to everyday practices of whiteness and produced discomfort and distance in my friendships with asylum seekers, I next want to briefly focus on what allowed for moments of comfort.

Listening and attending to other positions and sharing emotions, affects and feelings, is what created moments of comfort. Again, I want to speak of *moments of comfort* to acknowledge that structures of inequality tied to our different social positioning did not cease to exist in these encounters. My conversations with asylum seekers often explored our different positionings and changed both of our perceptions of race from visual markers to the embodied life of these markers. We had many conversations about asylum seekers´ normalised feelings of discomfort around whiteness and my unawareness and inattention. Our encounter made me examine my own practice of whiteness and what it means to have privilege, and how this affected my fieldwork and friendships with people who are positioned differently. We explored how conversations about race are influenced by our lived experiences of race and how they impact our day-to-day encounters. Through these conversations, we were able to more critically interrogate whiteness in terms of its *doings*, and how these *doings* affect our lives in very different ways. In our friendships, I experienced over and over again how listening and sharing created moments of comfort, of more closeness, of more understanding. While our positions of power, tied to racialisation, class, gender and bordering did not change, our affective positions of discomfort and comfort were constantly shifting between different degrees of closeness and distance.

Dis/comfort and veganism

The next position I want to reflect on is the practice of veganism and how it created comfort and discomfort in my friendships with asylum seekers through its entanglement with racialisation and class. Interestingly, my vegan position allowed me and others to connect and mutualise around an identity beyond race, gender or class. Veganism enabled a closeness in fieldwork encounters with a group of asylum seekers, while it also created moments of disconnection with others. Therefore, I want to reflect on how the practice of veganism, through its entanglement with racialisation, class and other positions can create comfort and discomfort by drawing some people closer together while causing others to move further apart.

I became vegan in 2013 while doing my master's degree in Germany. Two years later, in winter 2015, shortly before starting my fieldwork for this PhD, I moved into a vegan community house-share in London. It was very important to all of us to keep our kitchen vegan and therefore everyone that came to visit was informed about our practice.

When my field encounters started in early 2016, it was still cold outside and many asylum seekers preferred to come to my house instead of meeting in a café or park. I think that partly had to do with their financial situation, but also with the discomfort they felt when I offered to pay for their drinks or food. I remember that every time an asylum-seeking friend came to visit for the first time, I felt a nervousness and discomfort around mentioning that we keep our kitchen vegan, expecting that it would cause discomfort and increase distance between us. Reflecting on it later, I think this expectation was probably built on what I will discuss below in this section as white-veganism.

The reaction of asylum seekers to our vegan kitchen was very different. To my surprise, some asylum-seeking friends turned out to be vegan too. Solomon, a thirty-one-year-old man* from Uganda, for example, shared how difficult it is for him usually to visit new friends, especially "African friends", he said, because "people like to prepare meat for

you". As Solomon explained "then there always comes the uncomfortable moment" where he has to decide to either tell his new friends that he does not eat meat or occasionally he eats it anyway, "just to not make anyone uncomfortable" (Solomon, 2016). When I revealed that we are a vegan house-share other asylum seekers also smiled at me, hugged me, and told me how happy they were to hear that, that they would "not have to feel uncomfortable eating" with me. Some of them grew up in a vegetarian household too.

Our mutual practice of veganism opened up many conversations about food and dis/comfort around food, that further deepened our connection and friendships and built a foundation of trust and understanding. Solomon and some other asylum seekers shared how difficult it is in "black communities" to not like meat. Family dinner, connection and identity are formed around preparing and eating meat together, as they shared. Being vegetarian or vegan is perceived as something "white", which positioned them differently within their "own community". At the same time, it opened up mutuality and connection for us and positioned us closer in relation to each other. So in this particular situation, under this particular circumstances, our shared food practice allowed for connection and functioned as a position we both inhabited. Even though all of my housemates are white, our community house felt like a safe space for these asylum seekers because of the lack of discomfort around food.

However, in other friendships, such as my friendship with Eshani, food practices and their entanglement with race, class and even coloniality produced discomfort and distance. Eshani, a twenty-seven-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Afghanistan came to Germany in 2015. A few weeks after meeting Eshani first, she told me a joke: "A person sits in a restaurant and asks the waitress "I´m vegan, what can I get?", pointing at the menu. The waitress answers "a taxi!". This joke created an uncomfortable moment, in which Eshani looked at me laughing, after telling her joke, waiting for me to mirror her amusement however I could see by her facial expression that she observed me only being able to smile for a very short moment. She asked me if her joke had made me feel

uncomfortable and what followed was a long conversation about culture and diet and veganism´s entanglement with racialisation, coloniality and class.

Eshani experienced veganism as a white, middle-class, exclusionary practice, even within "left activist spaces", she shared, where it feels especially uncomfortable as she expects people there to be aware of its connection to whiteness:

> "I often observe that people are made uncomfortable in activist spaces when they do eat meat. Vegan people think they are something better. In activist spaces! People should really know better…" (Eshani, 2017).

Eshani spoke to me about the "violence" of a white-veganism that created an image of veganism as a product of class privilege, as dependent on having a large enough income to eat only expensive foods (e.g. Polish, 2016; Ramírez, 2015; Robinson, 2013). This ignores, however, she argued, how eating habits have already been colonialised, and are further complicated by poverty. She feels angry, she said, thinking about how people have been habituated to think that bad food and poverty are naturally linked to race. My conversation with Eshani offers thus another example of how power dynamics are negotiated through the body and feelings of discomfort. Her comments tell the story of the affective *doings*, the affective violence of food practices through their entanglement with race and coloniality.

Eshani also critiqued the often-used images of people of colour as victims, for example by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), to illustrate dehumanising animal food practices for not attending to affective violence they inflicted through using these images. A critique I share and have often thought about when seeing vegan advertisements. As many scholars and activists of colour have stressed the concept of "humanity" is a Western concept that is entangled with power. To become "human" means after all to become white (Polish, 2016): "the very hierarchy of human versus non/human animal that veganism challenges is charged with the history of white

supremacy" (p. 374). It is a violent white practice that puts whiteness above all *other* life (Harper, 2014).

Interestingly, during our conversation, after a while, the feelings of discomfort and distance turned into moments of closeness. Our conversation made me reflect on the dissociations of veganism with communities of colour. The local health food stores and community gardens I regularly visit are mostly all white, middle-class, spaces. It became clear to me that for Eshani, making fun of veganism, a specific practice of whiteness she perceives as "violent", is a way to critique whiteness. Her mocking can thus be seen as a way to negotiate power and *become comfortable*. Through hearing the voice of her position and veganism´s violent affects, and Eshani hearing me sharing her critique of white-veganism, moments of comfort were created. In our conversation, we reached a common position of the importance of exploring veganism as a white practice that is linked to racialisation, class and coloniality.

This shows that attending to others´ positions can allow for moments of comfort and for a change of position. I left my conversation with Eshani with a much more critical position on white-veganism and Eshani said that seeing how an anti-racist and anti-speciesist struggle are tied together, positions her a little bit closer to a vegan position. This also highlights how relational and ever-changing social positions and identities are, that even in one encounter, one conversation, as this story revealed, positions can shift.

Dis/comfort and religion

Religion and its entanglement with race, class and asylum also points at the affective dimension of positionality and how power is negotiated through affect and emotion. All forty asylum seekers I spoke to about asylum activism, thought of themselves as "religious" or "believers". More than half of them went to church every week. From our conversations, I also knew that a high number asylum seekers found their way into asylum activist spaces through religious communities such as churches, mosques and social

centres where they met regularly to not only pray but engage in social activities. As I have learned, they are spaces that offer moments of comfort and hope from the discomfort and depletion of the asylum system. Therefore, clearly, these religious communities are also spaces of asylum activism.

From the beginning of my involvement, I noticed what important role religion played for all of my asylum seeking friends. Despite this importance, the asylum activist groups in which we were all involved in and first met all explicitly separated themselves from faith groups who were also mobilising around asylum issues. These formal political spaces were constructed as secular spaces that were supposed to accommodate and make everyone comfortable; an atheist, a person subscribing to Christian belief as much as a person subscribing to Muslim belief and thus, as they argued, religion had nothing to do in there. Despite its official absence, religion was very much present in meetings, events and social media conversations of these activist groups. This “unwanted” presence was sometimes "policed" when asylum seekers were reminded of what belonged and did not belong in these political spaces and other times it was simply ignored.

It felt to me that there was an unacknowledged dissonance, an inauthenticity, about the ideal of an all-accepting, tolerant space of asylum activism and at the same time the unquestioned acceptance of secularity as the European white norm. The fact that this norm created discomfort and felt "unnatural" for the majority of asylum seekers was ignored. In the many years of my involvement, I never observed an open conversation that discussed the "neutral" space of politics; a "neutrality" that never really purely existed anyway. As I observed during my fieldwork, the secular norm of asylum activist practice was constantly negotiated but in a more subtle and quiet form, by, for example, asylum seekers sharing prayers on social media or bringing up the word "God" during activist meetings. These political negotiations over the secularity of the space hence never happened openly; in speech or discussion, but in asylum seekers simply not complying to the norms that everyone had "agreed" upon.

The fact that the vast majority of people subscribing to a Christian and Muslim belief in these activist spaces were asylum seekers, while the majority of atheists, such as myself, were white British or European citizens shows how the practice of religion is always already racialised. Different practices of religion and the affects and emotions these practices create, can thus not be understood without attending to processes of racialisation and coloniality. Many scholars have explored how religion as a practice was, and is, used to reinforce cultural privilege by creating hierarchies and differentiation (e.g. Hubbard, 2005). Discourses over religion are racialised as the stigmatisation of very particular religions such as Islam for example shows (Garner & Selod, 2015; El-Tayeb, 2014). Activist spaces which are by default secular and not reflective on the entanglements of religion with existing power dynamics ignore how hierarchies and differentiation are re-made every day. The maintenance of political spaces as (vaguely Christianised) secular white spaces through not attending to these dis/comforts, their politics and histories, therefore, however unintentionally, racialises these spaces.

These forms of racialisation are indirect forms of *doing*, they are a form of slow violence that only gains meaning when connecting these subtle dis/comforts and invisible negotiation of political space and its secularity to histories. Slow violence, as I have discussed in *Chapter 5*, is a violence marked through the continuation (of the spaces) of discomfort across time and space, the accumulation of intensities and its invisibility. While *Chapter 4* showed how the missing registering of the violent asylum everyday turns asylum activist spaces into another space of discomfort and depletion, this section on religion highlights that paying attention to the asylum everyday and its discomfort can and should not stop there. A practice of asylum activism needs to also attend to larger histories and politics.

Even though my asylum seeking friends spoke to me much about how God helps them through the asylum process, shared their prayers and sometimes even religious images with me through social media, at first I did not pay much attention to what discomforts and distances were created in my friendships with asylum seekers with regards to religion.

I grew up in an atheist family and I never had much interest in religious subjects. Conversations about faith and religion had the tendency to make me feel uncomfortable. Asylum seeking friends often asked "Are you a believer?" and I always replied that "I believe in having faith", just not in a specific religion or God, but in life. However, one year into my fieldwork, when I moved into the vegan house-share mentioned before, my position shifted. Some of my housemates were part of a Buddhist, spiritual community and practised meditation regularly. Months later, I became close friends with some people who considered themselves as religious. These friendships brought about many conversations about my understanding of religion as institutional religion and expanded my notion of it.

As conversations around religion had entered my life at home, in my friendships with asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers, I felt an increasing comfort to think, read and feel around the subject of religion. These circumstances positioned me differently in relation towards religion and asylum seekers´ interest in religion. Moreover, this shift in position allowed me to listen to the discomfort of asylum seekers produced by the secular norm in formal activist spaces. It allowed me to observe the constant negotiation of the secular space. We spent afternoons listening to podcasts on spiritual and religious subjects together, shared about books we have read recently. This commonality created comfort, trust and increased a sense of understanding each other that affected the extent to which asylum seekers felt comfortable sharing with me. This shows how through unpredictable life changes and sharing, repositioning can happen that changes how we relate to others around us and how much comfort or discomfort we feel around others.

While our relationship to religion and its entanglement with racialisation and coloniality was still positioning us very differently with regards to power, there were moments of comfort possible. The division between what I will call "spirituality"; including adopting a Buddhist set of beliefs, and its growing interest in popular culture, must be looked at very differently with regards to affective violence, I argue. While some religions such as the Islam are racialised, as mentioned before, Buddhism overall fits the norm of the white

neoliberal subjects in western countries, and as such, does not produce the same dis/comfort or a "fellow feeling" (Ahmed, 2004).

Dis/comfort and hipsterism

In this last section, I want to explore "hipsterism" and its entanglements with race and class that created moments of discomfort and comfort in my friendships with asylum seekers. In literature, hipsters are understood as young white urban middle-class people whose lifestyles are oriented towards authentic experiences and formed in rejection of mainstream forms of consumption (Maly & Varis, 2016; Schiermer, 2014; Thody, 2014). Hipsters are trendy consumers (Michael, 2015; Thody, 2014). In research on processes of gentrification in Berlin and London, the term hipster is increasingly used to describe young white middle-class people moving into urban working-class neighbourhoods leading to the displacement of its working-class residents in the wake of rising rents and property prices (Hubbard, 2016; Grand, 2018; Bernt, Grell & Holm, 2014; Huning & Schuster, 2015).

During my fieldwork in Germany Mara, a thirty-three-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Syria, (introduced first in *Chapter 5)*, and I met regularly to write newspaper articles together about the situation of women* living in asylum camps. Often we met close to the place where she lived, then walked around the neighbourhood to find a place to sit down and talk. This usually took a long time as Mara scanned many cafés coming to the conclusion:

"No, I don´t want to go inside. It´s a white hipster café"(Mara, 2017).

Usually, we walked past thirty cafés, which she all identified as "white hipster cafés" to then end up in a very small bakery, in which most people buy bread and leave again. Mara, however, seemed to be very happy sitting there. As soon as she sat down, she smiled at me and said: "This is a nice café".

Mara shared with me how uncomfortable white hipsters made her feel. Mara conceptualised hipsters as consumers that “sit in cafés and worry about style”. She refers to the higher prices that are a result of the gentrification of urban neighbourhoods. Hipsterism, as she said, "comes with a price" that she can not afford. Also, there is a "dress-code" that she does not want to meet as it symbolises whiteness and power to her.

Moreover, in hipster cafés, there is, according to her, usually a white majority that makes her feel uncomfortable. But, as she shared, there is also something particular, even more uncomfortable, about the "white hipster" compared to other white people. Mara explained how in her experience, many white hipsters "pretend to be progressive, political, in solidarity with refugees, but then they don't do anything else than sitting in these cafés". While the hipster in London is often described as ironic, post-critical (Schiermer, 2014) and apolitical, an essential element of the construction of the hipster figure in Berlin such as the "Neukölln hipster" is a politically left-oriented (but inauthentic) white (man*) (Bernt, Grell & Holm, 2014; Huning & Schuster, 2015).

Her intense discomfort around the hipsters in-authenticity, “the hipsters pretending to be political”, reminded me of the strong sense of disappointment, I often felt in conversations with asylum seekers about their experience of formal asylum activist meeting spaces. Entering asylum activist groups, they hoped to find solidarity, connection and support. Despite these intentions of all activist groups, what they found was another space that felt bordered and uninhabitable. Maybe hipsters as a figure that is allegedly progressive and politically left-oriented (in Berlin) feels like a similar disappointment of a possible ally, that instead of attending to power structures use their white privilege to enhance their own sense of individuality and self-expression, and by doing so reproduce symbolic power and violence.

Hubbard (2016), for example, contemplating whether the hipster is "friend or foe", argues that while literature suggests that "the hipster does rarely operate consciously as developers or gentrifiers themselves, they are still pushing away the ethnic and class diversity that makes such areas affordable in the first place" (p. 3). The habitus of the hipster as a creative class, as Pratt (2011) argues: "is a de facto support for a particular type of gentrification, and an implicit, or often explicit, (re-)ordering of social and cultural priorities" (p. 296).

In my conversations with Mara, the "hipster" felt like an access point, a way for her to further recognise and unpack a particular kind of whiteness. As she shared there are other figures of whiteness that she finds less problematic and offensive than the figure of the white hipster. It is the hipsters in-authenticity, in that they "pretend to be political" that, for Mara, marks a particular figure and practice of whiteness. The intense discomfort this particular practice created for her, felt to me also like a highlighting of a specific form of white violence. In Mara´s critique of the hipster´s in-authenticity is however also a critique of the confused, subtle and indirect form of violence and of symbolic power. It is a form of violence, of discursive, material and affective violence, that is invisible to most of use and works exactly through this invisibility (see *Chapter 5* for a more detailed discussion of slow affective violence). This story and Mara´s engagement with the hipster offered both of us an access point to exploring different forms of whiteness and its violence.

Mara´s identifying and differentiating of white practices reminded me of my conversations with Alan and Eshani, in which they also tried to make sense of different levels of affective violence produced by different white practices. This adds to other scholars engagement with whiteness as a practice (Garner, 2007; Ahmed, 2007) by illustrating the need to differentiate between different practices of whiteness and the ways in which they cause affective violence. Whiteness is not one fixed identity but can take different forms and figures and, according to how they are practiced, create different material experiences of discomfort and violence.

While many asylum seekers in Berlin could have easily identified me as "white hipster", Mara for some reason did not perceive me as white hipster or at least not to an extent that made her feel uncomfortable. Mara and I had shared many conversations about a practice of critical whiteness and felt a deep sense of friendship because of our passion for feminism and asylum activism, and somewhere on the way of our encounter, a space of comfort was created that positioned myself closer to her than the white hipsters in the cafés. The friendship between us had seemed to be able to transform some discomfort and my whiteness, for some moments, seemed not so salient, rather, it was our shared identity as asylum activists and feminists that seemed to bring us into an alliance.

Even though we were still positioned very differently, there were unpredictable moments of connection that seem to change the workings of these positionalities (even though just momentarily). This again shows how positionalities are created in relation to others and how different positions can shift and alliances can change. Compared to these other white people sitting in cafés, I was perceived as closer to her, while in any group conversation with a majority of asylum seekers, I would have been identified as the *other*. This illustrates "how many dimensions of sameness and difference can be operating at any given moment" (Song & Parker, 1995).

Conclusion

This chapter attended to the affective dimension of positionality and its entanglements with racialisation, class, gender and coloniality. I attended to positionality and its affects through the different cultural practices of language, whiteness, veganism, religion and hipsterism to show, how these practices are an important access point for us, not only to understand the affective doings of particular positions and identities, but also to learn about the possibility for a *becoming comfortable* for asylum seekers. A *becoming activist* means creating little spaces, gaps, of comfort in the otherwise violent asylum everyday.

The results also showed how different social positions, through their entanglement with politics, histories and power, create comfort and discomfort through the meaning that they invoke (Ahmed, 2004): accordingly, creating comfort must be seen as a form of political negotiation of affective border violence. This chapter highlighted that in order to understand what meaning and affects specific positions invoke, we need to look at different positions in their *doing*. This links to my understanding of subjects and life in its constant *becoming* (Deleuze, 1988). Cultural practices can either reproduce existing power dynamics and position us accordingly, or sometimes, in very unexpected ways, reposition us along other lines. As the section on veganism illustrated, these repositionings can create moments of comfort in otherwise uncomfortable encounters. While our positions of power tied to racialisation, class, gender, sexuality and bordering did not change, our entangled, fluid and affective positions of discomfort and comfort were constantly shifting between different degrees of closeness and distance. Focusing on positions as practices can also support us by offering access points to unpack some identities and positions such as whiteness in more detail. Only if we are able to identify their different forms and affects can we pay attention and recognise affective relations that are violent and be in conversation about them.

Moreover, in this chapter, I attempted to further develop my conceptualisation of dis/comfort by bringing it into a relationship with its entanglement with different social positions. I attended to the question of what it means to think the politics of dis/comfort as a practice in everyday encounters. As this chapter has shown, practising asylum activism in the context of the politics of dis/comfort means re-orientating our attention to the subtleties, the background, emotions, feelings and relationships in our daily cultural practices. Moreover, how the section on religion has shown, paying attention to the asylum everyday and its discomfort should not stop there, it is about making connections between matters intentionally disconnected by the state. A practice of asylum activism therefore needs a practice of connecting affects and emotions to larger histories and politics.

Lastly, the results of this chapter also link to my previous exploration of forms of activism that go otherwise unnoticed such as increased distancing and radical hope. The translator´s refusal to translate, Mara´s avoidance of the hipster figure and Eshani´s mocking of vegan practices all show, how daily acts can become ways to negotiate power. Not listening, avoidance and mocking in that context create little gaps of comfort and therefore marks a *becoming comfortable.* This further illustrated the importance of a situated asylum activism. Depending on a person´s position, the same action can have very different political meaning. While my inattention to bordering and racialisation in day-to-day life: for example not immediately noticing the police presence, needs to be looked at as sustaining the affective violence of the state; asylum seekers´ inattention in the context of a formal asylum activist setting marks a negotiation of the formality of political space.

8

Moving Forwards

Re-locating asylum activism

This research project began with the question of what and where asylum activism is. I first located it in specific spaces, with specific people and specific activities: formal activist group involvement. However, my fieldwork has taught me how asylum activism is constantly remade through political negotiations that are emotional and affective, complex, ambiguous and fluid, happening both inside and outside of formal activist spaces.

These political negotiations, I learned early on, aim firstly at extending, and by that *re-locating,* asylum activism and secondly, are always in conversation with state bordering practices as these practices are changing what the space of the political is. With this in mind I therefore proposed to look at asylum activism through the notion of *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Hall, 2014), rather than being reduced to a physical space, specific physical activity or identity. Attending to asylum activism as a practice of what I termed *becoming activist* allowed me to think, feel, speak and practice asylum activism in its emotionality, affectivity, complexity, ambiguity and fluidity within the "continious play of history, culture and power" (Hall, p. 225, 2014). Considering asylum activism in its constant *making* also offers us the opportunity to observe its continuous *re-making* and provides therefore political possibilities for re-orientation.

My thesis followed a critique of the activist as an autonomous, rational and "unmarked body" (Haraway, 1988) and the assumption that there is only one way to be a political subject that accommodates everyone by shifting the focus on to emotion, affect and different subject positions. Not all subjects enter the political in the same way, and thus what is offered as the formal space of the political does not work for everyone. The results of *Chapter 4* showed how formal asylum activist spaces work by trying to create mutuality and build a knot that ties everyone in, yet, disconnection and dissonance are created, because the space does not acknowledge the different kinds of everyday experiences, materialities and the physical exhaustion that asylum seekers bring to the room. As a result, without it meaning to happen, the space of formal solidarity becomes another space of depletion.

The solidarity in these spaces is disrupted as asylum seekers, who are most depleted by the bordering regime, cannot become comfortable. Keeping this in mind, the question then is, how can we gain greater awareness over the *making* and *re-making* of asylum activism and its complex, ambiguous and fluid spatiality, subjects, affects and emotions? In the following I want to offer some of my findings as an opening to re-orient activism towards a space of care that all bodies can inhabit, especially asylum seekers.

Locating asylum activism beyond citizenship

My results have shown how seeing citizenship as the only mode of politics depends on a particular physical comfort that excludes some bodies, such as asylum seekers, from appearing. Butler has argued that only the well-fed body can be the body of formal politics (2015). What I wanted to attend to throughout this thesis, is thus the question of a *politics of the unfed and unwell body*, of the asylum seeker. The politics of the unfed and unwell body are *always already* a *becoming activist,* as asylum seekers are not traditionally perceived as political subjects. This research was thus a practice of learning to listen to hear the political expressions of asylum seekers by attending to their everyday, affect and emotion as well as different subject positions.

It became clear to me that how we look and what expressions of the political we pay attention to, is what political agencies (and by that politics, histories and social positions) we prescribe with power. As *Chapter 3* has shown, within the growing engagement in social science literature with asylum, migrant and refugee activism (i.e. Milllner; 2011; Rygiel 2011; Nyers 2015; Atac, Rygiel & Stierl, 2016; Bhimji, 2016; Zamponi, 2018; Nyers & Rygiel, 2012; Ilcan, Isin & Nyers, 2014; Gill, 2016; Tyler, 2013), most scholarship focuses on how migrants, asylum seekers and refugees strategically employ citizenship as a social practice that enables them to, what I call, *become citizen* (Nyers, 2006; Nyers & Rygiel, 2012; Ilcan, Isin & Nyers, 2014).

Only attending to a model of politics of speech and action that is linked to the citizen-subject, however, always reproduces hierarchies of power (Redclift, 2013a; 2013b) and therefore to some extent justifies the bordering of asylum seekers (Basham & Vaughan-Williams, 2013). Locating politics, especially in the context of asylum, must therefore always consider the larger structural processes of racialisation and bordering.

Throughout this thesis I have argued for the importance of considering political subjectivities and acts beyond *becoming citizen* such as *becoming comfortable*, pragmatism, passivity, acts of emotion-management and hope. *Chapter 4* revealed the hidden, subtle and difficult-to-detect political negotiations of asylum seekers in formal political spaces, highlighting their alternative ways of accounting for and understanding the political and solidarity. *Chapter 5* then illustrated how actions such as retreating, screaming and crying must be seen as political negotiation as they symbolise ways to release political intensities. These actions mark the collapsing of emotion-management and, in the context of the completely managed asylum seeking subject, they mark a political act. *Chapter 6* showed how asylum seekers negotiated affect and emotions produced through their encounters with other asylum seekers, with non-asylum seekers and their everyday lives; through a technique I call *increased distancing*, which many asylum seekers used as it felt like the only possibility to manage their intense feelings of discomfort and unsafety. The chapter went on to show how asylum seekers reclaim the

space of the everyday through a practice of what I term radical hope that helps them and other asylum seekers to manage their emotions. Asylum seekers´ practice of radical hope moreover challenges the current order of things (Foucault, 2002), an order in which asylum seekers are isolated within the state and a massive bordering machinery was designed to reduce asylum seekers´ human connections to a minimum. In other words, these acts disturbed the affective logic of bordering. *Chapter 7* then narrated how asylum seekers negotiate whiteness by unpacking its different practices and the different levels of affective violence they produce. The "hipster", as one example of many, illustrated a way through which asylum seekers recognised and challenged a particular form of white violence. Through mocking they negotiate the political power of discomfort that plays an important role in sustaining existing power structures.

Overall asylum seekers´ *becoming activist* always seemed to be linked to creating little spaces; gaps of comfort in the otherwise violent asylum everyday and therefore must be seen as a form of political negotiation happening in conversation with states mobilising their politics of discomfort, as a form of slow affective violence, against asylum seekers. As explored in the first chapters of this thesis, border practices in the UK and Germany are driven by violent politics of discomfort. In formal political spaces, as revealed in *Chapter 4*, the politics of discomfort continue and therefore the *becoming comfortable* of asylum seekers, I argue, must be recognised as a practice of asylum activism.

Asylum seekers' practice of asylum activism was also marked by *pragmatism*. Asylum seekers' promise of activism lay in doing little practical things such as stopping deportation flights or demanding practical changes such as the food distribution system in a camp. Their decision to take part in specific forms of activism was based on a pragmatic assessment of their political possibilities and its possible harmful effects which I conceptualised as a *pragmatism of survival*. *Chapter 4*, *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6* showed how asylum seekers carefully considered the possible risks and harms of different forms of asylum activism and then made a pragmatic choice whether these risks and harms were too high.

Moreover, asylum seekers used different techniques to manage their emotional wellbeing: increasing their distance to formal asylum activist groups as well as managing their involvement within them: allowing themselves to maintain a healthy boundary of what they were, and what they were not, able to do in order to survive. *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 6* illustrated how on top of the intense discomfort asylum seekers encounter in their everyday lives, they have to negotiate and manage emotions that political spaces bring up. Asylum seekers physically distanced themselves as a practical tool designed to reduce and manage the amount of affective intensities and so create little gaps of comfort**.** Next to that, asylum seekers' practice of radical hope, as a political negotiating of bordering practices that work through the body, can also be seen as an active management of the affective violence of bordering; a taking back of control by managing how much (bodily, emotional and cognitive) space they give to affects and emotions produced by bordering practices. *Pragmatism* and *emotion management*, therefore, I argue, in the context of asylum, must be looked at as a political act of self-care and survival.

Next to pragmatism and emotion management, asylum seekers reclaimed passivity as a necessary and political action for survival. As illustrated in *Chapter 5*, asylum seekers retreating to their beds, for example, is a form of political negotiation, of active management that aims at self-care. When bordering works through affective violence and putting asylum seekers in a position of constantly having to negotiate this violence and the intensities it produces, then the bed illustrates a space where asylum seekers withdraw themselves to, away from that negotiation to actively create some distance between themselves and the intensities of the border. This illustrates how in the context of asylum, retreating and passivity can be considered important forms of action in asylum activism. I came to understand that resting might have been the most meaningful act of asylum activism I have observed as it may have been what kept asylum seekers alive.

Moreover, in formal activist groups spaces; sleeping, reading the news and not-listening were acts of *passivity* that challenged a notion of politics that structurally excluded them

from participating. Asylum seekers' reclaiming of passivity was not only in conversation with violent border practices however, it also spoke to the unseen emotional labours of bordered, racialised bodies in activist spaces (*Chapter 4*), in friendships (*Chapter 5*) and in other encounters. My story about the discussion of what rice to use at an activist event illustrated how sometimes simply being in asylum activist spaces produces emotional work for asylum seekers: having to make visible the difference produced through their asylum positionality as well as managing the intense emotions these conversations produced in themselves and others. In *Chapter 6*, I then reflected upon how the possibility for transformation, through conversation between asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers, are most often dependent upon asylum seekers´ taxing work of having to explain and make visible different positionalities. In their *passivity* I therefore saw a refusal to perform these emotional labours, the reclaiming of the right to *not* resist.

Moreover, asylum seekers' *becoming activist* was rooted in the present. Most asylum seekers´ lives are in constant uncertainty, not knowing what the future will bring, not knowing if they will be detained or deported tomorrow. The possibility of politics for asylum seekers, therefore, opens up in the present and in what is possible now. As *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 6* explored, the politics of temporality seemed essential to asylum seekers´ reformulation of politics. Ideology and political theory is abstract and its investment goes into thinking, discussing a better future. Asylum seekers' engagement with the politics of temporality challenged a politics exclusively invested in the future, in a hope for a better future, one that is ultimately built on the idea that everyone has the same capacity to decide and anticipate their future (Munoz, 2009; Edelman, 2004). In their critique is a reminder that there are different capacities for being able to opt out of the present, depending on how a subject is positioned. These findings speak to other scholarship on the politics of temporality (Halberstam, 2005; Dinshaw, Edelman, Ferguson, Freccero, Freeman, Halberstam & Nguyen, 2007; Halberstam & Halberstam, 2011) showing that our rights and possibilities for a future are unevenly distributed.

As all of these examples illustrate, asylum seekers do not *become activist* by stepping out of the formalised non-political *other* to become the formal subject of political rights (the singular *other*, the citizen), instead, they *become activist* by *becoming* what I term *other-other*, a *new* subject of politics. Rather than being orientated towards rights and membership, asylum seekers' politics were oriented towards survival, comfort and care. Through these politics important entry points opened up into the field of everyday life; the routines, activities and emotions of being an asylum seeker in which power structures and inequality are reproduced.

Asylum seekers´ political negotiations, I argue, cannot therefore be located within a claiming of citizenship (Nyers & Rygiel, 2012), but rather in providing and practicing different cartographies of politics which help us to reimagine and negotiate contemporary bordering practices. Their political agency challenged a clear-cut differentiation between action and non-action, activity and passivity, thought and emotion. Asylum seekers reclaimed activities such as (non-)listening, sleeping or withdrawing and by that turned them into political acts. Through practising a form of asylum activism that inhabits the space of passivity, comfort, pragmatism, emotion management and hope, their *becoming activist* almost goes unnoticed in the model of political subjectivity as we know it, and yet, these acts negotiate political space as much as affective border violence. With this in mind I wish to urge future researchers to attend to a politics that is not only publicly visible and loud but also that which is hidden, subtle and quiet: a politics of those who are just getting by. Future research could also explore further my notion of *becoming-other-other*, a practice of othering the formal *other* by those who are not immediately captured or legitimated by the available norms. The notion of *becoming-other-other* could also be brought into conversation with queer migration scholarship exploring modes of politics beyond citizenship (e.g. Roseneil, Growhurst, Santos & Stoilova, 2013).

Scholars and activists interested in asylum activism thus need to pay more attention to a *becoming activist* that is not, what I conceptualised as a *becoming citizen*. This thesis thus supports the critique of other scholars (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Papadopoulos,

Stephenson & Tsianos, 2013; Roseneil, Crowhurst, Santos & Stoilova, 2013; Muller, 2004; Nyers, 2009; Guillaume & Huysmans, 2013), arguing that simply extending our understanding of citizenship so it includes everyone, and by that, trying to fit all other expressions of the political in a western and deeply exclusionary concept, is connected to coloniality and processes of racialisation that in turn colonialise political possibilities.

Locating asylum activism in affect, emotion and the body

My findings also strongly suggest locating asylum activism in affect, emotion and the body. In looking at asylum activism through the lens of affect and emotion, my work problematised the ways in which asylum activism is understood politically as public and organised politics and examines all its other manifestations in the everyday. Moreover, it challenges the emphasis on action by looking into the role of affect and emotion and the ways in which asylum seekers engage in asylum activism as an emotional and affective practice.

My research showed how, in the practice of asylum activism, affect and emotion became a language that allowed us to listen to the *doings* of different positionalities, political space and bordering. Not attending to the embodied nature of asylum activism, as this thesis has shown, means not being able to observe the *doings* of the politics of discomfort, shame, fear and worry and it also means, not being able to hear the voices of those most affected by bordering practices. Locating asylum activism in affect, emotion and the body is so essential, I learned, as border violence works through the body.

My thesis produced important insights into how bordering practices influence asylum seekers´ needs and capacities to look after themselves in a collective practice of asylum activism. As before mentioned, *Chapter 4* showed the entanglement between emotional labour and bordering practices as another dimension of structural inequality. In particular it narrated different needs of emotional labour and care in the context of bordering practices that are often in a conversation with near death as examples as detention,

deportation and the severe emotional depletion I explored throughout this thesis show. *Chapter 4* explored how many asylum seekers withdraw themselves from asylum activist spaces as they feel their different needs are not taken into consideration. Asylum seekers experience of the political is constructed through an absence of care, of solidarity, of empathy and the unacknowledged violence of the asylum everyday. For asylum activist spaces to become inhabitable for all asylum seekers I spoke to, asylum activism needs to uncover how power works through affect and emotion and how, to different degrees, it depletes and makes uncomfortable the bodies within these spaces.

Listening to dis/comfort is what started this project and was a methodological tool guiding my journey. Asylum seekers' discomfort was made visible through their bodily reactions and mine, as well as our ongoing conversations that opened a possibility for learning. Listening to dis/comfort allowed me to attend to a politics not enunciated in speech or formal political intervention but to how communication and symbolisation happen in a much more expansive political space. I do not want to argue here, for the irrelevance of speech and action, but rather show how firstly, speech and action are always already exclusive modes of politics and how secondly their entanglements with affect, emotion and the body are often ignored; affect and representation are fused together. In that sense, learning to listen is not simply about voice and volume, but about what it means to do research, what it means to "attend" to the field.

I believe in the importance of doing research that happens; inspired by and alongside a learning from feelings and emotions. Listening to feelings and emotions can open up unexpected frameworks and inspire conceptualisations that carry us beyond well-established theoretical ones. Academic knowledge only attends to the realities it has previously made knowable, therefore, if we want new theories, new concepts and practices of politics, we need new ways of listening to them. I argue that affect and emotion can open up new ways of knowing when we allow them to guide us beyond existing meaning-making.

Future research should further explore dis/comfort as a tool to access political possibilities not manifesting in speech or action. Asylum seekers expressed different emotions and bodily sensations to me such as anger, shame, worry, pain, fear and stress, however, most often they described their bodily experience of these emotions as feeling "uncomfortable". Therefore, in this thesis I use the concept discomfort to group together depleting bodily sensations that decreased asylum seekers' power to act. Future research could explore in more detail this entanglement of anger, shame, worry, pain, fear and stress and their role in affective bordering practices.

The results of my thesis thus support other scholars' call for the importance of rethinking our privileging of Arendt's political subject; constituted by speech and action (Butler, 2015; Ranciere, 1999; Honig, 2010). I believe more research needs to be done that explicitly attends to how we can reformulate political space and political subjectivity in a way which encompasses everything from a gesture, to a subtle feeling, to a speech act and by that allow a "democracy of the senses" (Les Back, 2007, p.25). As multiple activist spaces and constant political negotiation are *always already* present, even within spaces that are not perceived as political and subjects which are not traditionally linked to political agency, we need to develop affective and emotional methodologies that allow us to notice these constant negotiations.

Locating asylum activism in attention to affective border violence

This thesis has moreover shown how states mobilise the political power of discomfort in the asylum day-to-day to uphold and amplify processes of bordering and racialisation. This powerful affective border violence, as explored in *Chapter 5*, works through its embodiedness and invisibility while on the other hand, as mentioned before, asylum seekers mobilise the political power of comfort to negotiate the state´s affective politics of discomfort.

The state´s politics of discomfort play out everywhere: in asylum seekers' everyday lives, in formal asylum activist group spaces and also in their friendships with other asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers. In asylum seekers' everyday lives, they constantly have to negotiate affective border violence as this thesis showed: at the post office, whilst gay clubbing, in asylum accommodation, in friendships and even to some degree in their own beds. Everyday bordering works by setting up a system of endless depletion in which asylum seekers encounter and feel borders everywhere. The politics of shame, discomfort and fear; and not being able to physically sustain their bodies, are part of a constant process in which asylum seekers are *bordered.* These everyday asylum experiences make lives unlivable, removing any comfort or safety. This illustrates how emotions are bound up with the securing of a specific social hierarchy (Ahmed, 2004; 2013; Lorde, 1981; Collins, 1986; Cohen, 2004; Hooks, 2000, Wilkinson, 2009; Illouz, 1997; 2007).

As illustrated in *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 3*, the intensity of these experiences not only prevents asylum seekers from living a livable life, but also from appearing in formal activist spaces. The state's politics of discomfort not only affects their capacity *to* appear in formal asylum activist spaces, but also *how* they appear within them. Asylum seekers can never leave their everyday lives and so "enter" all spaces with an embodied precarity that plays into activist interactions and creates emotional and physical distances as *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 6* revealed.

The state's politics of discomfort also infiltrates asylum seekers´ friendships with other asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers. *Chapter 6* revealed particular ways that affective border violence plays into these relationships. As asylum seekers described to me, the sharing of difficult emotions with friends had also, at times become another space of intensity; what they described seemed to me a circulation of affective border violence. For asylum seekers, moments of comfort, in which they do not experience the violent intensities of the border, can thus always, in an instance, become yet another space of depletion, even within conversations with other asylum seekers that are in the "same shoes".

The politics of discomfort also played into asylum seekers´ friendships with non-asylum seekers such as myself. As our different "realities" became noticed (as explored in more detail in *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 5*) many moments of discomfort were created. All asylum seeking friends shared with me that they sometimes felt uncomfortable in my presence because of my whiteness. Whiteness, as I learned, was according to them, linked to a practice of inattention and unawareness and it was my missing acknowledgement of the doings of the processes of everyday racialisation and bordering that caused discomfort and distance between us. This illustrates how slow affective violence works through its invisibility to most of us causing an extra layer of discomfort even in encounters with people who want to be allies.

The politics of discomfort of the state can also be located in the draining work of having to remind, explain, and make visible different positionalities. The invisibility of the politics of discomfort puts asylum seekers; the subjects most depleted by its existence, in a position where their depletion will only be registered if they do the necessary work of making it visible. The burden of showing the effects of the asylum system is therefore on the shoulders of those who are most drained by it. This finding connects to the literature on the unseen emotional labours of racialised and gendered bodies (e.g. Gunaratnam & Lewis, 2001).

In this thesis I suggested extending Butler´s "unfed body" as the resistant "other", to the *unfed and (emotionally) unwell body* as there is also, as I outlined in detail here, an emotional component, an emotional wellbeing and nurturing that is necessary in order to appear in formal political spaces. If we talk about precarity, we thus also need to talk about a political condition of unequal distribution of exposure to *emotional harm*. This thesis thus makes an important contribution to understanding the multiple affective precarity of asylum by introducing the concept of *affective border violence*, a form of violence that is "slow" (Nixon, 2011) and works through structures of emotions and affects that harm bodies of asylum seekers in invisible and non-linear ways.

My thesis contributes to scholarship on slow violence (Nixon, 2011) by emphasising the affective dimension of this form of violence. The form of affective border violence, I described in this thesis, is characterised by 1) the continuation of the spaces of discomfort across time and space 2) the accumulation of intensities and 3) its invisibility and 4) non-linearness. The effects of this affective violence accumulate gradually and often do not show up in direct response to experiences, but are dispersed across time and space and by that, fade from our view. The intense emotional depletion asylum seekers experience, as explored in *Chapter 5*, is not a direct response to one single event, rather it is the result of a massive amount of everyday forms of suffering. As these characteristics make it difficult for activists to respond to this form of violence, we need a shift in our understanding of what counts as violence and a particular focus on the affective dimension of border violence is urgently needed. Most engagement with everyday bordering focuses on questions of belonging, access and identity, as well as how an increasing number of regular citizens are turned into bordering guards (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss & Cassidy, 2018; Brambilla, Laine & Bocchi, 2016). The affective and emotional workings of everyday bordering on the bodies of asylum seekers, however, often escape research and conceptualisations.

My analysis of the affective doings of bordering processes also contributes to scholarship on precarity (Butler, 2006; 2012; Lorely, 2010) by further exploring its emotional component; the emotional wellbeing and nurturing that is necessary for bodies to appear in formal political spaces. An unlivable life (Butler, 2012), I argue, is thus not only a life that is not worth protecting, sheltering, or feeding it is a life that is actively depleted and made uncomfortable across different spaces and temporalities. In bringing scholarship on the politics of emotion, affect and precarity together, my research hopes to contribute to scholarship attending to the materiality of race and bordering (Tolia-Kelly, 2006; Tolia-Kelly & Crang, 2010; Rose, 2001; Barnett, 2008). Future research should hence further explore the affective dimension of precarity. Attending to the emotional and affective workings of asylum precarity and its relationship with the political could also be fruitful in contemplating how we can create activist spaces in which everyone can feel comfortable.

If we want to ease and redistribute burden we need to know what, in the context of asylum and bordering, can create momentary ease and comfort and what, on the other hand, turns spaces into those of depletion.

Locating asylum activism *in* attention to affective border violence, also lets us notice acts as political, we would have not considered meaningful otherwise. As mentioned before, my research showed how asylum seekers´ politics seemed to negotiate the subtle, unnoticed forms of affective state violence they encountered in formal political spaces and their everyday lives and friendships with a similarly subtle and unnoticed practice of slow negotiation. Recognising the political potential of these acts is only possible when contextualising them and bringing them in conversation with the workings of the affective border violence. This illustrates again, how listening to emotion and affect can open up ways of conceptualising politics beyond citizenship that allow for a more complex consideration of different positionalities. Next to looking at the emotions and affects that are produced when people come together in and around asylum activist spaces, listening to the voices of asylum seekers over the last three years has, as already outlined, emphasised the importance of taking into consideration specific histories and politics, and the different situatedness (Haraway, 1988) of bodies encountering in these spaces. The common politics asylum seekers articulated are a politics that is able to hear different positionalities and their different embodiments.

Locating asylum activism in attention to different positions

My conversations with asylum seekers all revealed the importance of making distinctions between the ideas of a precarious and unlivable life, as precarity comes in different degrees. The many voices of asylum seekers heard throughout this thesis all spoke to a not turning away from our different positions and different degrees of precarity, but to attend to them in detail is what brings us closer together and allows for a *common politics*. Over and over asylum seekers criticised the unregistered precarity of their everyday lives and lack of recognition of how that impacts on their political involvement.

Asylum seekers spoke to me often about their "reality", by which they meant the material consequences of asylum and everyday bordering. The repetition of the words "this is real" in our conversations felt like a request to recognise how unevenly distributed and invisible the affects of bordering are, even within activist circles. About twenty of the forty asylum speakers I have interviewed, spoke to me about living a "parallel life" from people that are not asylum seekers. What they were suggesting, I believe, is that we can only overcome our *parallel lives* when we practice *real* solidarity. And solidarity is only *real* solidarity, *as explored throughout this thesis,* if it also attends to the different degrees to which subjects and "objects" of solidarity are exposed to affective violence. An attentiveness to difference can hence bring us together in the shared acknowledgement of those different positions and an understanding that its effects are real and important, and in that meeting not divide us in the ways state structures intend to.

These findings contradict other scholars work on precarity and a becoming common. According to Lorey (2010) and Butler (2006; 2012; 2016), for example, precaritisation is a governmental instrument that normalises difference cutting across specific groups and classes. As they argue, accordingly, divisions into "luxury precarity" and "impoverished precarity" are not helpful, as the only produce competiveness between different degrees of precarisation. Rather, both call for a politics that looks specifically for what they have in common. My conversations with asylum seekers, on the other hand, revealed the importance of making visible our different positions in order to have common ground. As they shared in many stories, practices of racialisation and bordering work through their invisibility. An activist practice must therefore *always*, in all circumstances, confront these invisible violent *doings* by easing up the burden of having to make visible what otherwise lies on the shoulders of racialised, bordered bodies only. A collective response to governments steering racial, religious and class differences must hence be one that uncovers the politics of difference (beyond status and identities) by not falling into the trap of competiveness but by confronting our own discomforts around acknowledging our privilege and doing the necessary emotional work of holding these difficulties.

Attending to different positions must also be paid attention to when presenting the results of this research. As *Chapter 7* revealed, even though asylum seekers in London and Berlin cannot be considered as being in any privileged position, some of them were able to mobilise power not available to others. The majority of asylum seekers I became friends with were from countries, in which English is the first or second language or have lived in an English speaking country for a while. Their language skills allowed asylum seekers to access and inhabit important network structures that other asylum seekers could not. Asylum seekers who did not speak English or German were often depending on other asylum seekers´ translations or money to pay for a professional interpreter. A lack of language skills kept them moreover from accessing activist groups and having agency in their asylum claim. Not speaking these languages means for asylum seekers not being able to read letters and understand a system that decides upon their futures.

The majority of asylum seekers I became friends with, came from an at least middle-class background and had completed an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, which, compared to other asylum seekers, positioned them in a relative position of power. Moreover, I believe their background played an essential role in allowing our collective inquiry into the politics of asylum activism. The *politics of the unfed and unwell body* I attend to in this thesis, are thus importantly still the politics of bodies that are considerably better positioned than other asylum seekers. Future research could attend to the question of how we can learn about the politics of those who do not have the space, time, money, language skills or emotional well-being to appear in political spaces in which different positions encounter.

My thesis also highlighted the particular precarity of women* and LGBT asylum seekers. A lot of women* I encountered, were not able to access as much support through language classes and social networks because bodies of women* in asylum are subjected to multi-layered affective border violence. I observed states actively using women*´s sexual vulnerability as a technique of bordering that adds an extra layer of fear and discomfort onto the asylum experience. Intense feelings of discomforts make asylum seeking

women* less emotionally, physically and mentally resourced to socialise, talk and leave their "homes". Language barriers and a lack of social contact to more powerfully positioned people, in consequence, positioned them in an even more powerless situation. Moreover, asylum seeking women* are disproportionally often single mothers and responsible for care and emotional work. And that not only puts them in a position of being subjected to the affective violence through their own experience of anger, stress and worry about precarity but also the equally precarious positions of their children. As outlined in detail in my previous chapter, this particular precarity, not only made it impossible for many women* to attend group meetings and events, but also to form friendships with non-asylum seekers. Most of the women* I became friends with during this research were young single women, not responsible for any care work and again, as mentioned before, most of these women* were from countries, in which English is the first or second language or have lived in an English speaking country for a while.

My research also revealed the particular precarity of LGBT asylum seekers. Supporting recent queer migration scholarship stressing that LGBT asylum seekers are more at the threat of deportation and violence than any other group of asylum applicants (Lewis, 2014). *Chapter 5* revealed the particular precarity produced through the LGBT identity, as another identity, that is forcefully instrumentalised in the asylum process, in which asylum seekers feel the demand to appear in public and become visible to prove their case. Future research should thus attend to the particular politics of discomfort of the state against women* and LGBT asylum seekers as well as their *becoming activist* and negotiations of the affective violence of bordering.

Locating asylum activism in attention to complexity, ambiguity and fluidity

Lastly, my research also highlights the complexity, ambiguity and fluidity of asylum activist spaces. Activist scholars have critiqued the often uni-dimensional portrayal of activist spaces (Wilkinson, 2009, Butler, 2015). The results of *Chapter 4* illustrated that there is always already more than one space of asylum activism being made, even within formal

activist group spaces. When attending to affect and emotion, I began seeing another space of asylum activism opening up in the exact same physical space, a parallel space that is lived and inhabited by asylum seekers, while being unregistered by others: the space in which I observed asylum seekers articulating and practising their politics. While the formal space of politics expressed itself in speech and action, the expressions of the politics of the unfed and unwell body were not knowable for me at first as they escape current frameworks of political action; they were subtle, hidden expressions of the body. These different politics and their constant negotiations flowed into each other creating a space of activism always in process of being made.

My findings also reveal how political spaces always contain both, the constant reproduction of power dynamics as well as their negotiation. My thesis located asylum activist spaces not just in formal meetings and events but everywhere were people come together to negotiate bordering processes: in conversations in cafés (*Chapter 5* and *Chapter 7*), in my house-share (*Chapter 3* and *Chapter 7*), in Berlin´s camp spaces (*Chapter 2* and *Chapter 5*), a small bakery in Berlin (*Chapter 7*), a detention centre (*Chapter 6*), a post office (*Chapter 5*), on a bus (*Chapter 5*), in asylum seekers´ beds (*Chapter 5*), while gay clubbing (*Chapter 5*), in conversations with non-asylum seekers (*Chapter 4*, *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 7*) and conversations with other asylum seekers (*Chapter 6*). *My findings* revealed how spaces of bordering such as the camp space or a detention centre can be turned into spaces of momentary comfort, and on the other hand, spaces of comfort such as conversations with friends in a café (*Chapter 7*), can be turned into spaces of discomfort when practices of bordering become noticeable and meaningful. This highlights the complexity, ambiguity and fluidity of activist space.

Next to that, thinking of the everyday in the many ways it is unacknowledged, also allowed me to notice the complexity of social space. Locating the everyday not in a specific space, activity or subject but in everything that is not perceived as political, and thus meaningful, offers us access points to understanding how space is always produced through both its foreground and its background. Locating asylum activism in fluidity,

ambiguity and complexity also contributes to an extended understanding of asylum activism, and politics more generally, which links to other scholars' engagement with everyday activism (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010) and implicit activism (Horton & Kraft, 2009), and the role of emotion, affect and the body in politics (Aminzade and McAdam, 2002; Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001; Goodwin, Pfaff & Polletta, 2008; Brown & Pickerill, 2008; Ettlinger, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Katz, 2004; Illouz, 1997; 2007; Ahmed, 2013).

Next to the fluidity, ambiguity and complexity of activist spaces, I also observed the fluidity and complexity of different subject positions. *Chapter 7* revealed how positionalities are created in relation to others and these different positions can shift, alliances can change, even within one encounter or conversation. My conversations with asylum seekers revealed how even though our positions of power, tied as they were to racialisation, class, gender, sexuality and bordering, did not change, our affective positions were constantly shifting between different degrees of closeness and distance.

My research has focused on the space of formal asylum activism, the everyday and friendship, and has therefore intentionally not attended to spaces of political activism that can be located somewhere in-between more conventional political spaces and the everyday. *Chapter 7*, for example, mentioned the role of religious groups. Half of the forty asylum seekers I spoke to went to church every week. These religious communities, I have argued, must also be looked at as spaces of asylum activism as they offer comfort and hope to asylum seekers. I therefore suggest to further explore these religious communities as another space for asylum activism that is located in-between the "formal political space" and the messy everyday. Looking into such spaces, with their different degrees of formality, can, I feel, add to this research by exploring what emotions, affect and political possibilities can be located in these different spaces of asylum activism. Exploring the role of religion is of particular interest in the context of asylum, I believe, due to its entanglement with race and coloniality, and the important feelings of comfort and hope it created for all of my asylum-seeking friends.

Conclusion

Rather than a critique of contemporary asylum activism, this research provided an opening to recreate activism as a space of care that all bodies can inhabit, especially the structurally depleted bodies of asylum seekers. This thesis demonstrated how asylum seekers´ engagement with different positionalities asked for a mutual ethics and practice of care so we can think, reshape and rebuild the spaces we inhabit together. This practice of care needs to happen, I propose, in the everyday, in formal spaces of asylum activism, as much as in the space of friendship and intimate relationships. Close relationships are a space for an intimate meeting of different social locations and experiences, which therefore allows us a deeper looking into the doings of positionality and its emotional and affective dimension. In particular, my research revealed the asylum activist potential of the space of friendship between asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers, a space in which the workings of border violence can be transformed by making them visible.

This thesis moreover showed the importance of confronting the affective and emotional modality of power by engaging with the questions: How do activist spaces feel and who feels safe within them? Attending to the feelings, to the care, and hidden politics of these spaces provides us with possibilities for mutuality. If asylum activism wants to act collectively it must care for the most depleted in its midst. Solidarity politics thus requires an engagement with the question of what it means to distribute emotional resources to those who need it most? How can we work collectively to redistribute and ease up burdens? Only by engaging in and uncovering bordering, racialisation and activism as an emotional and affective practice, can we begin the intimate process of redistribution to make our lives and these spaces of activism livable for everyone.

APPENDIX A: List of Footnotes

[1] The German word „Asylbewerber" is the plural masculine form of asylum seeker, while „Asylbewerberinnen" is the plural feminine form. I use a gender star „Asylubewerber*innen" here to indicate that gender is a spectrum rather than a binary.

[2] Until spring 2017 asylum seekers in the UK had to collect their allowance in cash from a local Post Office, where they present their Application Registration Card (ARC) that confirms their identity and eligibility for support. Now their allowance is loaded onto debit cards (ASPEN card) each week, with which they can get cash from cash machines.

[3] Asylum seekers in the UK who are awaiting a decision on their asylum application are required to regularly report to the UK Visas and Immigration Agency, a division of the Home Office. How often they have to report is determined by the Home Office, however, most asylum seekers I have spoken to had to report once a week. A few only once a month.

[4] The term *everyday camp life* here refers to practices within asylum seeker camps in Berlin, such as constant observation, monitoring of asylum seekers´ behaviour, lack of privacy and safety, waiting and queuing that are producing a particular precarity for people in the asylum process.

[5] The UK has one of the largest immigration detention industries in Europe (Flynn & Cannon, 2009; Gibney, 2008).

[6] Doty and Wheatley (2013) define the contemporary immigration industrial complex as a "massive, multifaceted, and intricate economy of power, which is composed of a widespread, diverse, and self-perpetuating collection of organizations, laws, ideas, and actors (p. 438)".

[7] In this thesis I add gender stars (the symbol *) next to the terms: men, man, women, woman, male and female to indicate that gender is socially constructed and involves more variety of gender identities than a man identifying as male or a woman identifying as female (cisgender). It is important to mention that during my

research, when I identified a person as man* or woman*, it was sometimes my perception of a person´s gender rather than the asylum seekers clearly self-identifying themselves.

[8] I will explain and unpack these acts of care, solidarity and hope in more detail in the following chapters.

[9] I use the word *dis/comfort* in this thesis to refer to experiences of both comfort and discomfort.

[10] The integration loan replaced the right to apply for backdated benefits but unlike backdated benefits, asylum seekers have to pay these loans back.

[11] A "safe" country (UNHCR, 1991) is a country in which, according to the EU or one specific EU-country, human rights are respected and hence there is no risk of persecution. Asylum requests from people from "safe" countries are generally presumed to be invalid, and in consequence, their claims do not receive an in-depth examination on the grounds of persecution.

[12] The asylum activist community in Berlin uses the German word "lager" in order to emphasise that asylum shelters are structured like camps.

[13] "tempohomes" is what Berlin´s administration calls temporary state-owned lightweight housing with a limited lifespan, usually containers.

[14] Many asylum activist groups in Berlin called this private market "lager industry" (camp industry) referring to immigration industrial complex.

[15] An „unliveable" life for Butler (2006) is a life that is at risk of violence, death, starvation, incarceration, and deprivation. A life not worth protecting, sheltering, or sustaining; a disposable life.

[16] Butlers engagement with the "sphere of appearance" is based on Arendt´s work *The Human Condition* (1959). For Arendt, political space, which she calls the space of appearance, is not based on an actual physical location but a space in which people come together in speech and action and by that "appear" in public.

[17] According to Butler´s writing on the relationship between the body and political action, only the "well-fed body speaks openly and publicly" (p. 206, 2015).

[18] Legal support letters are letters that activists, NGO´s, churches and friends write to

support someone´s asylum claim in court.

[19] Arendt´s political subject is the citizen. Many feminist scholars have criticised the political space of the polis that Arendt´s thinking draws upon, because it is built on the exclusion of large groups of people such as women* or non-citizens (Honnig, 2010).

[20] This practice changed in spring 2017, now asylum seekers´ allowance is loaded onto debit cards (ASPEN card) each week, with which they can get cash from cash machines.

[21] Using emotional and mental space, I refer to how much space, time and energy goes into these experiences after they have happened. While emotional space speaks to the intensity and circulation of feelings and emotions, mental space speaks to how much thinking, worrying and thought processes of fear go into these experiences of everyday racism and bordering.

[22] The asylum activist community in Berlin uses the German word "lager" in order to emphasise that asylum shelters
are structured like camps.

[23] This also links to Deleuze´s (1993) and Whitehead´s (2004) understanding of an *event* as something that disturbs the order of things. In their understanding an *events* "sticks out from the ordinary, marks historical discontinuities and opens up the future to a series of differentiations" (Tamboukou, p. 96, 2015).

[24] Asylum seekers expressed different emotions and bodily sensations to me such as anger, shame, worry, pain, fear and stress, however, most often they described their bodily experience of these emotions as feeling "uncomfortable". Therefore, in this thesis I use the concept discomfort to group together depleting bodily sensations that decreased asylum seekers power to act.

[25] In May 2016 a group of asylum seekers and I set a group and platform called "Breaking Through Bars", which was supposed to create a space to discuss people's experience of being involved in asylum activist groups spaces in London. Together we mapped our thoughts and feelings through which we experienced our activist involvement.

[26] In her work on "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak (1988) defines *Epistemic Violence* as the infliction of harm on post-colonial subjects though discourse.

APPENDIX B: List of Research Participants

CHAPTER 1: Points of Departure

(1) Alan: A thirty-six-year-old asylum seeking man* from Nigeria.

(2) Abi: A thirty-three-year-old asylum seeking man* from Bangladesh

(3) Dara: A thirty-two-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Cameroon

(4) Aazar: A thirty-four-year-old asylum seeking man* from Pakistan

(5) Yanelle: A forty-two-year-old asylum seeing woman* from Cameroon

(6) Emmanuel: A thirty-seven-year-old asylum seeking man* from Ivory Coast

(7) Justine: A thirty-nine-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Uganda

(8) Mara: A thirty-three-year old asylum-seeking woman* from Syria

CHAPTER 2: Setting the Scene: Spaces of Asylum Activism in London and Berlin

(9) Marija: A forty-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Serbia

CHAPTER 3: Conceptualising the Politics of Asylum Activism: Connecting Activism, Affect and Bordered Positionalities

(10) Lylie: A thirty-year-old asylum seeking woman* Cameroon

(11) Charles: A thirty-seven-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda

(12) Margaret: A fifty-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Nigeria

CHAPTER 4: Listening to Emotional Knots in the Formal Political

(13) Lynda: A fifty-seven-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Uganda

(14) Solomon: A thirty-one-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda

(5) Yanelle: A forty-two-year-old asylum seeing woman* from Cameroon

(15) John: A thirty-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda

(16) Henry: A thirty-six-year-old asylum seeking man* from Nigeria

(17) George: A thirty-five-year-old asylum seeking man* from Nigeria

(18) Grace: A thirty-one-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Nigeria

(1) Alan: A thirty-six-year-old asylum seeking man from* Nigeria.

(19) Mina: A thirty-seven-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Iran

(20) Sarata: A twenty-nine-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Gambia

(21) Afshaneh: A twenty-five-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Afghanistan

(22) Faareh: A thirty-four-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Egypt

(23) Amina: A forty-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Iran

CHAPTER 5: Looking Beyond Formal Political Spaces: The Affective Violence of the Asylum Everyday

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(24) Christelle: A twenty-five-year-old asylum-seeking woman* from Ivory Coast

(25) Cynthia: A thirty-year-old asylum-seeking woman* from Nigeria

(26) Samuel: A forty-five-year-old asylum-seeking man* from Uganda

(27) Christine: A thirty-one-year old asylum-seeking woman* from Eritrea

(28) Dalia: A thirty-six-year-old asylum-seeking woman* from Somalia

(8) Mara: A thirty-three-year old asylum-seeking woman* from Syria

(29) Nima: A thirty-nine-year-old asylum seeking man* from Iran

(30) Ahmed: A forty-four-year-old asylum-seeking man* from Afghanistan

(31) Jalila: A thirty-three-year-old asylum-seeking woman* from Afghanistan

(15) John: A thirty-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda

CHAPTER 6: Attending to Political Possibilities: Asylum Seekers ***Becoming Activist***

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(25) Cynthia: A thirty-year-old asylum-seeking woman* from Nigeria

(23) Amina: A forty-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Iran

(32) Hamid: A twenty-nine-year-old asylum seeking man* from Iran

(33) Abdoul: A forty-one-year-old asylum seeking man* from Mali

(34) Mohammed: A forty-five-year-old asylum seeking man* from Iraq

(10) Lylie: A thirty-year-old asylum seeking woman* Cameroon

(35) Godfrey: A thirty-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda

(36) Sara: A twenty-five-year-old asylum seeking women* from Albania

(37) Kaboure: A thirty-six-year old asylum seeking man* from Nigeria

(7) Justine: A thirty-nine-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Uganda

(1) Alan: A thirty-six-year-old asylum seeking man from* Nigeria.

CHAPTER 7: Tracing Moments of Closeness and Distance Between Entangled, Fluid and Affective Positions

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(1) Alan: A thirty-six-year-old asylum seeking man* from Nigeria

(3) Dara: A thirty-two-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Cameroon

(4) Aazar: A thirty-four-year-old asylum seeking man* from Pakistan

(5) Yanelle: A forty-two-year-old asylum seeing woman* from Cameroon

(6) Emmanuel: A thirty-seven-year-old asylum seeking man* from Ivory Coast

(7) Justine: A thirty-nine-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Uganda

(11) Charles: A thirty-seven-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda

(38) Caleb: A thirty-four-year-old asylum seeking man* from Somalia

(14) Solomon: A thirty-one-year-old asylum seeking man* from Uganda

(39) Sami: A forty-year-old asylum seeking man* from Iraq

(40) Eshani: A twenty-seven-year-old asylum seeking woman* from Afghanistan

(8) Mara: A thirty-three-year old asylum-seeking woman* from Syria

APPENDIX C: UREC Approval letter

20 September 2016

Dear Isabel,

Project Title:	**Rethinking non-citizen-led activism: An examination of political subjectivity, space and mobility**
Principal Investigator:	**Professor Giorgia Dona**
Researcher:	**Isabel Meier**
Reference Number:	**UREC 1516 155**

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which was considered by UREC **on Wednesday 20 July 2016.**

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with your research project, this must be reported immediately to UREC. A Notification of Amendment form should be submitted for approval, accompanied by any additional or amended documents: http://www.uel.ac.uk/wwwmedia/schools/graduate/documents/Notification-of-Amendment-to-Approved-Ethics-App-150115.doc

Any adverse events that occur in connection with this research project must be reported immediately to UREC.

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
London and Berlin	Professor Giorgia Dona

Approved Documents

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	*Version*	*Date*
UREC application form	2.0	16 September 2016
Participant Information Sheet	2.0	19th September 2016
Consent Form	1.0	5 July 2016

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice in Research is adhered to.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research study is conducted in compliance with the consent given by the ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Fieulleteau
Research Integrity and Ethics Manager
University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)
Email: **researchethics@uel.ac.uk**

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