

**Existing Within and Without:
A Spatial and Temporal Interrogation of Everyday Life in the Irish
and Dutch Asylum System**

By Aibhilín Ryan

**In partial fulfilment of Utrecht University's
Gender Studies Master's Program**

2019

LIST OF FIGURES

(i)	Figure 1. Image of the Stained Window, by Vukasin Nedeljkovic. Included in <i>The Asylum Archive</i> , 2007.	26
(ii)	Figure 2. <i>19.10 & Other Stories</i> , by Rory O’Neill. <i>The Asylum Archive</i> , 2015.	29
(iii)	Figure 3. <i>19.10 & Other Stories</i> , by Rory O’Neill. <i>The Asylum Archive</i> , 2015.	32
(iv)	Figure 4. <i>19.10 & Other Stories</i> , by Rory O’Neill. <i>The Asylum Archive</i> , 2015.	34
(v)	Figure 5. Taken by an asylum centre resident, as part of Zoe O’Reilly’s <i>New Bridges</i> , 2010.	35
(vi)	Figure 2.1. Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.	41
(vii)	Figure 2.2 Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.	44
(viii)	Figure 2.3. Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.	47
(ix)	Figure 2.4. Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.	49
(x)	Figure 2.5 Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.	51

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	4
 Section 1:	
Abstract	5
Introduction	6
CHAPTER 1:	12
Theories and Methodology: Interrogating Marginality through Temporal and Spatial Lenses	
 Section 2:	
CHAPTER 2:	23
<i>The Asylum Archive: A Collaborative Documentation of Ireland’s Direct Provision System</i>	
CHAPTER 3:	39
Waiting Within the Dutch Asylum System: Represented in the Work of Haya Alsalama	
Conclusion	53
Bibliography	55

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would firstly like to thank my supervisor, Koen Leurs, for his consistent encouragement, support, and guidance throughout the duration of this thesis. I would especially like to thank him for always finding the time to share his knowledge. I would also like to thank Jamila Mascat for pointing me in the right direction.

I am extremely grateful to Haya Alsalama for sharing her work with me, for welcoming me into her space, and for embracing my questions even when they were not yet fully formed.

I am indebted to all I have met through De Voorkamer and the insights they have shared on the asylum process in the Netherlands, in particular to colleagues and friends who have shared their experience of living in the AZC.

As always, I am grateful to my parents for instilling in me an interest in human rights and politics, and for allowing time for curiosity. And lastly, to Michael, for his unwavering support and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with how the asylum policies of EU countries affect the spatial and temporal positionings of those living within the system. I examine two case studies which take daily life within asylum centres as the base for opening up a spatial and temporal interrogation of the asylum system. These two case studies are *The Asylum Archive*, an ongoing collaborative documentation of life within Ireland's Direct Provision system, and an untitled series by Haya Alsalama on waiting within a Dutch asylum centre. These works make visible the practices that both Ireland and the Netherlands employ to deter individuals from seeking asylum there. Temporal and spatial theories offer unique ways of exploring the marginality experienced by asylum seekers. This thesis draws from temporal and spatial theories on marginality coming from queer, feminist, postcolonial and marxist thought.

SECTION 1

Introduction

This thesis is a temporal and spatial interrogation of the everyday experience of EU asylum policies. As a research question, I will explore how asylum policies of detention, segregation, dispersal and surveillance work to exclude individuals from normative temporalisations and spatialisations. Analysing photographic work from two case studies, I primarily focus on the asylum centre as a location in which these policies are enacted upon asylum seekers. As sub-questions, I ask how temporal and spatial theories offer perspectives on marginality and how this can be represented.

The first case study looks at *The Asylum Archive* by Vukasin Nedeljkovic, a visual and academic critique of the Direct Provision System in Ireland. The second, is an untitled series on waiting by Syrian photographer Haya Alsalama. Her work in this series can be read as a reflection on waiting within the Dutch asylum system. Rooting this interrogation within the gender studies and post-colonial field, both works raise themes on inclusion, exclusion, and visibility and offer different approaches to questions of representation of the ‘other’. Both works reflect and represent time and space in the process of seeking asylum as liminal, ‘non’, or ‘other’. Before looking at these works, I will give context to my choice in looking at the Irish and Dutch asylum system and outline the theories which have prompted and assisted this interrogation.

Direct Provision and the AZC

Direct Provision [DP] is the system in Ireland which gives full board accommodation to those seeking international protection. The system has been in place since 1999, seeing over 60,000 people go through it.¹ However, former and current DP residents call for an abolishment of

¹ Mark Hillard, Direct Provision in Ireland: How and Why the System was Introduced, The Irish Times, published November 2019,

the system. Long term accommodation has been provided in unfit buildings, such as former schools, convents and holiday homes, as well as in isolated locations. Conditions within asylum centres are cramped; individuals often share rooms with multiple strangers. Residents are unable to cook for themselves and must eat at the times decided by their centre. Until 2018, a complete work ban prevented asylum seekers from gaining employment.² Despite a lift on the ban, asylum seekers must be within the system for at least 9 months to be allowed work. They also must secure employment with a minimum €30,000 yearly salary. Applicants face an undefined waiting period in the system, with the average wait time being 24 months. Some individuals have been within the system for 12 years or more.³

In the Netherlands, the system holds many parallels. AZC⁴ locations are often located on the outskirts of communities, in former military barracks, hospitals and nursing homes. There are also strict regulations preventing applicants from working more than 24 weeks in a year.⁵ Employers are therefore reluctant to hire asylum seekers. Unlike in DP, individuals in the AZC are allowed to cook for themselves in the kitchens provided, similarly however living space within AZCs is often cramped. Families often occupy one room and like in DP, single applicants share their rooms with strangers. The asylum centre in Utrecht is located near the city centre in a former military hospital. One AZC resident stated that there can be up to eight people per room.

Pairing the Irish and Dutch provision systems comes as a result of my own spatial relationship to them. In my home town of Waterford, Ireland, Birchwood House is a direct provision centre in a section of the converted Ursuline convent. It stands on the same land as my primary and secondary schools, located between the two. It's a building I passed every day during my school years and despite some of my classmates living there, I didn't know what it was. I heard stories that it was a prison, or a 'poor house'. Despite the DP centre's location within a community, next to a location that is very much a centre of that community,

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/direct-provision-in-ireland-how-and-why-the-system-was-introduced-1.4086552>.

² Right to Work, Doras, last modified 2nd July, 2018, <https://doras.org/right-to-work/>.

³ Policy Areas: Direct Provision, Doras, accessed February 2020, <https://doras.org/direct-provision/>.

⁴ 'AZC' stands for Asiel Zoekers Centrum, the Dutch for Asylum Seekers Centre.

⁵ Access to the Labour Market, Dutch Council for Refugees, accessed February 2020, <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/netherlands/access-labour-market>.

it was largely invisible to the community. This invisibility may seem strange, however Ireland has a deep history of state-funded institutional abuse going unchecked. Magdalene Laundries and Christian Brother schools operated for decades.

Alongside this history, the integration of residents does not appear to be a priority of the system. Work and visitor restrictions in centres limit opportunities for meeting local community members. Insufficient monetary allowances also results in exclusion from many public spaces that require payment, or the use of public transport.

There are no signs outside Birchwood House to state that it is a DP centre. Shielded by trees, it blends in to the environment- a space not to be of concern to anyone⁶. In 2014, the 160 residents protested the centre's conditions, by locking workers out of the centre. The protested conditions included the inability to cook for themselves or choose meal times, and the restrictions on employment.⁷ An inspection report from the Reception and Integration Agency from 2017 offers insight into the living conditions asylum seekers face in the centre and the strict ways in which they are controlled spatially and temporally. The report shows that despite other vacant rooms, one shared room hosts 7 people⁸. Meals are strictly served over one hour periods, visitors are only allowed in the common areas and there is no free transport made available to residents.

After moving to Utrecht in 2018, I began working with De Voorkamer, a cultural centre and meeting space. I started working on an integration project that reached out to individuals living within the AZC. This gave me the opportunity to visit the local AZC with some colleagues who lived there. The AZC is run by COA⁹, the governmental organisation tasked with housing asylum applicants. Visitors must sign in at the asylum centre's reception if they are to enter the residents rooms. Certain organisations can visit to encourage their integration

⁶ Images of Birchwood House, a Direct Provision centre in Waterford, can be found on the online version of *The Asylum Archive*, <http://www.asylumarchive.com/birchwood-house.html>.

⁷ Donal Lucey, 'The kids began laughing when he told them that his family had to queue up for food', *The Journal*, published January 10th, 2019, <https://www.thejournal.ie/life-in-direct-provision-centre-ireland-1873524-Jan2015/>.

⁸ Reception and Integration Agency Inspection Report, carried out on the 15th March, 2018, <http://www.ria-inspections.gov.ie/en/RIAIR/Pages/Birchwood>, 13.

⁹ COA stands for 'Centraal Opvang Asielzoekers', translating to the 'Central Agency for Reception of Asylum Seekers'.

activities on specific days. This largely takes place in the courtyard of the centre. Once a year there is an open day in which integration organisations, such as De Voorkamer and Welkom in Utrecht, and governmental groups such as COA and the Ministry of Justice and Security, host information stands. On this day the centre is ‘open to the public’ and includes a tour of the centre and resident’s rooms.

Events such as this open day are an example of how asylum centres are locations of temporal and spatial regulation and how in/visibility is controlled. The level of openness of the institution and what is made visible, is controlled by governmental bodies. Public access has its designated time, whilst otherwise the movement paths of visitors are monitored. Public tours of ‘private’ living quarters show that residents’ space is not truly their own. It is significant that ‘De Voorkamer’ translates to ‘The Frontroom’, with the organisation framing their work as a spatial intervention- one revolving around the creation of home.

Thesis Structure

The first chapter of this thesis will outline the theories which frame my analyses of the two photo series. I will ask how normative perceptions of time and space are constructed and how marginality can be looked at through spatial and temporal lenses. To do so I will utilise theories from gender, queer, postcolonial and marxist perspectives.

Key theorists and concepts include Michel Foucault’s ‘the heterotopia’ and his theorising of the role power plays in our spatial positioning. I look at Michel Agier in his development of ‘the heterotopia’ in relation to migrant encampments. These theorists illustrate how the organisation of space and time is used to regulate and control bodies, and how bodies deemed expendable can face exclusion.

I also draw from queer theorist Jack Halberstam’s outlining of a ‘queer’ time and space to illustrate how identity is a factor in one’s perception of time and space. I use the work of postcolonial scholar Rebecca Romanow to extend ‘queer time and space’ to include identities marked by non-normative geographies and temporalisations.

Chapter two takes *The Asylum Archive* as its case study. *The Asylum Archive* is an ongoing collaborative archive of digital, visual and material culture by Direct Provision [DP] residents. It began in 2007, when visual artist Vukasin Nedeljkovic was housed in a DP centre waiting for his asylum application to be processed. Initially a solo project started as a coping mechanism, the archive has now grown into a larger platform.¹⁰ Contributions of visual, academic and activist work now come from current and former DP residents, and non-DP residents. The archive is the first documentation of Direct Provision in Ireland. It interrogates the inhumane conditions of DP and works as a form of self-representation. The scale of the archive is hard to quantify as it is consistently developing and taking new forms. A version of the archive is available online, and as of 2018 in its own printed publication. There are also exhibitions and panel discussions and meetings as part of the archive.¹¹ In the print version, every former and current DP centre is listed with a corresponding photograph, totalling at 159, as well as a map showing their locations in Dublin and the rest of Ireland. Both the online and print version of the archive contain contributions from academics whose writings alongside the visual works offer further interrogations on power, institutionalisation, authority, displacement, and segregation.

Chapter two draws from several of the essays contributed to the archive, as well as diary entries from Nedeljkovic written during his time living in Direct Provision. Despite the large wealth of visual images in the archive, I have managed to select five. These five images, coming from three different contributors, highlight the collaborative nature of the archive. The significance of ‘collaboration’ within the archive is in the creation of community out of a carceral institution that has the aim of disappearing its inhabitants. These five images reflect spatially and temporally on the DP system and its forcible decentering of the lives of residents. Together they illustrate the multitude of ways a life marked by precarity and liminality can impact an individual and how temporal and spatial regulation is weaponized by the asylum system. This chapter engages Stuart Hall’s work on representation, with the question of whether in its collaborative representation of life in DP, does *The Asylum Archive*

¹⁰ Vukasin Nedeljkovic in interview with News Sheet, published May -June, 2019, <http://www.asylumarchive.com/>.

¹¹ A video showing an exhibition of *The Asylum Archive* in Waterford, 2017, can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/203834263>.

create a cultural identity. Can this be considered an intervention to the ‘othering’ policies of DP?

Chapter Three looks at Syrian photographer Haya Alsalama’s series on waiting. This series of five images reflects on how the process of waiting locates individuals in a sustained period of non-space, or ‘in betweenness’. While Alsalama’s photos can be interpreted in many ways, in an interview with Alsalama, she connects this waiting to the experience of living in the AZC as an asylum seeker. Alsalama’s work reflects on what participation within a community looks like, and how our relation to normative time and space constructs and affirms or negates our sense of identity. This series was first exhibited within De Voorkamer in April 2019. Alsalama’s work roots the space of the body within these ‘other’ temporal and spatial frameworks

These two different visual representations of the everyday experience of living within the asylum process, offer interventions to the othering practices of the bodies tasked with providing for asylum seekers.

CHAPTER ONE

Interrogating Marginality through Temporal and Spatial Lenses

Introduction

This chapter will outline conceptually how temporal and spatial frameworks have been used to explore marginality and asks to what extent we can interrogate asylum policies through temporal and spatial logics.

Space and time are basic categories through which we explain and understand human existence. Drawing from marxist, queer, and disability theories on time and space, this chapter argues that there is a ‘common-sense’ of time and space, around which we organize daily routines.¹² It illustrates how (hetero)normative structures frame our perception of temporal and spatial logics. What is perceived as ‘common sense’, is a deliberate organisation of temporal and spatial categories. The creation of such categories is done to facilitate capitalist and patriarchal systems. It also considers how exclusion from these normative framings, whether forcefully, by choice, or out of necessity,¹³ works to marginalize people further.

Beginning with the work of Marxist economic geographer, David Harvey, I will explore how normative time and space is constructed and upheld in the ‘everyday’ organisation of our activities. Moving to Michel Foucault and Michael Agier, I will look at what non-normative space can look like and how we can utilise the ‘heterotopia’ when looking at asylum centres. Queer theorist, Jack Halberstam and disability scholar, Alison Kafer’s work offers perspectives on how linear narratives of progression are constructed temporally and how this works to marginalize people further. Both theorists illustrate how operating in/on ‘other’ temporalities and spatialities is a possibility whether by choice or necessity, and how

¹² David Harvey, ‘The Experience of Space and Time, Chapter 12: Introduction’, in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989) p 201.

¹³ Jack Halberstam, ‘Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies’, in *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies and Subcultural Lives*, (New York University Press: New York and London, 2005), 3.

perception of space and time is intertwined. Most importantly, these theorists illustrate how racism, heteronormativity, ableism and sexism impact one's positioning in spatial and temporal frameworks. Finally, I will look at Rebecca Romanov's spatial and temporal interrogation of the 'post-colonial identity' in relation to queer time and space and ask how this can be applied to those living in asylum centres.

This is done so with the aim of exploring how, and to what extent these theories can be used to interrogate the everyday reality of living a marginal life.

What do we mean by normative time and normative space?

To begin to look at how exclusion from 'normative' temporal and spatial logics can be used as a tool for marginalisation, we must first consider what is meant by normative time and space. For this I will initially look to the work of David Harvey. Harvey's work challenges the idea of a single and objective sense of time and space, and instead illustrates how human practices and behaviour construct these common logics.¹⁴ Harvey's work argues for a recognition of the multiplicity of the objective qualities that space and time can express, and how these qualities cannot be created independently of material processes. This opens temporal and spatial logics up to interrogation through material practices. Temporal and spatial frameworks are made, he argues, through the logics of capital accumulation and social reproduction.

A useful way to consider one's existence in space and time, and what a 'normative' positionality may look like is to take Harvey's illustration of Hagerstrand's schema on time geography.¹⁵ Harvey expands geographer, Torsten Hagerstrand's spatialisation of daily life, to consider *why* it is we move through space and time in such a pattern. He says,

Individuals are here viewed as purposeful agents engaged in projects that take up time through movement in space. Individual biographies can be tracked as 'life paths in time-space', beginning with daily routines of movement (from house to factory, to

¹⁴ Harvey, Chapter 12: Introduction, 203.

¹⁵ Harvey, Chapter 13: Individual Spaces and Times in Social Life, 212.

shops, to school, and back home again), and extending to migratory movements over phases of life-span (for example, youth in the country, professional training in the large city, marriage and movement to the suburbs, and retirement to the country).¹⁶

Within this outline, movement is constrained by finite time resources and defined by the locations (stated as stations or domains) in which activity or social interactions predominantly occur. As Harvey states, this thinking does not illustrate why certain spaces and histories get assigned meaning and why and how these spaces are constructed. Why is it that certain social interactions and temporal moments define one's relation to space?

To consider these questions we can move, as Harvey does, to socio-psychological and phenomenological approaches, such as Michel Foucault, who theorizes the role of power and discipline structures in how our bodies are organised in relation to time and space. For Foucault, the space of the body is the element in this scheme which cannot be altered. Its existence in space must either be in submission to authority, or in resistance. Authoritarian power is seen explicitly in incarceration, policing and surveillance, where one has been forced to submit to governing laws and their consequences, thus impacting the bodies place spatially and in time.¹⁷ This power also works implicitly and systematically, in the predominant 'guiding' principles of society and its ordering of space and time. The body's movements are centred around the home (family life, reproduction), and the workplace (production). Both methods are employed to benefit capitalist and patriarchal orders.

As Harvey comments, the social order is reflected in the commonly used phrase 'there is a time and a place for everything'. Harvey's argument is that the existence of a normative social ordering is done out of the need for progress. Progress is, of course, defined in relation to capital accumulation and achievements which might promise as such. Cyclical and repetitive motions, the examples given such as going to work, to school, birthdays or festivals, give individuals a sense of security, and also a sense of meaning.¹⁸ This meaning and security is born out of a sense of progress. Harvey later goes on to say that,

¹⁶ Harvey, Chapter 13: Individual spaces and times in social life, 211.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, trans. Alan Sheridan, 'Part Three: Discipline', in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

¹⁸ Harvey, Introduction, 202.

Since modernity is about the experience of progress through modernization, writings on that theme have tended to emphasize temporality the process of *becoming*, rather than *being* in space and place.¹⁹

Progress is a key component of how we frame time and space today; it is a moving onwards, upwards and forward. Waiting, periods of leisure and inactivity must be framed within a narrative of progression.

In the following chapters, I will specifically interrogate how time and space is used in asylum policies to further marginalize asylum centre residents. However, here I will briefly outline how asylum centres can be considered as impeding one from relating this waiting period to a progression narrative, or one centred on family, or ‘home’ life. When discussing how the aesthetics of space are often used as a defence against ‘the terror of time,’²⁰ David Harvey comments that the domesticating of space can be seen as a distraction or shielding from the constraints and pressures of time. It is significant then that the spatialisation of asylum centres is used to draw attention to time. In the sparsity of ‘home comforts’, confined rooms and liminal locations, space in asylum centres draws out one's perception of time.

The logic of this is clear when we consider commonly used temporal phrases such as ‘a watched pot never boils’, or ‘time flies when you’re having fun’. The sustained spatial exclusion of AZC or DP residents is purposely used to keep individuals in limbo, and under control. Residents never fully integrate into a new environment and are prevented from making connections within the centre. They remain in the mental turmoil that a life in precarity causes. This spatial arrangement is described by Foucault in the context of prisons, as a purposeful disciplining of residents. Here this can be seen as a method of deterring asylum seekers from applying for refugee status in a country, as a way to ensure residents are prepared for deportation at any moment, and to keep asylum seekers in the identity of ‘other’. Space and time is here used to uphold the agenda of neoliberal governments who do not want refugees in their country.

¹⁹ Harvey, Introduction, 205.

²⁰ Harvey, 206.

The non-normative seen in the Heterotopia

Foucault also spatially theorises the resistance to authority and conformity, through the carving out of ‘other’ spaces of freedom, resistance and difference- the heterotopia.²¹ It is within the heterotopia that ‘undesirable’ bodies exist and against which the ‘utopia’ can be imagined. In this way, the heterotopia is an identity constructing concept. It contains the ‘them’, against which the ‘us’ can be defined.²² This is used by Michel Agier in his interrogation of refugee encampments and refuges. These places exist on the borders of society and are marked by difference, exclusion but also imposed mobility. While the heterotopia can sometimes be considered a space of transformation, here Agier emphasises that in the case of encampments and refuge’s, transformation and action is imposed by the society with which the ‘other’ space borders.²³ While Foucault does not offer a temporal interrogation of the heterotopia, theories by migrant, queer and disability scholars express their existence in heterotopic space as something which cannot be separated from a movement in non-normative temporalisations.

I will utilise Halberstam’s work on queer time and space, and Kafer’s, *Time for Disability and a Future for Crips*, to illustrate how identity can place one in an existence deemed to be ‘other’ or non-normative. Both theorists use their identities to illustrate the existence of non-normative temporal existences and how heavily intertwined it is with one’s relation to their environment. This allows for an understanding of the multiple perspectives and experiences that can frame our perception of time and space, and how linear narratives work to oppress those deemed non productive.

²¹ Harvey, Chapter 13, 216.

²² Michel Agier, Camps, Encampments, and Occupations: From the Heterotopia to the Urban Subject, (Ethnos, 84:1, 2019) DOI: [10.1080/00141844.2018.1549578](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2018.1549578).

²³ Agier, From the Heterotopia to the Decentered Urban Subject.

In A Queer Time and Place: Non Normative Temporalities

Both Halberstam and Kafer illustrate the existence of normative structural frameworks in the pressures they face to conform to them, and in their exclusion from them. Queer theorist, Jack Halberstam outlines the existence of ‘queer time’ working in opposition to (hetero)normative structures, and significantly opens up the term ‘queer’ to include other individuals operating through non-normative modes of living. Disability scholar Alison Kafer illustrates how one’s perception of time and space can alter depending on your body and its relationship to its environment, specifically if this body does not move through the world in a way that is considered ‘normative’.

Halberstam begins his argument stating that queer uses of time and space develop partly in opposition to heterosexuality, and reproduction. Thus, setting queer time outside of the normative markers of progression associated with reproduction, such as planning a pregnancy and having a child, and outside of institutions concerned with this, such as marriage or the church. ‘Reproductive time’ is adhered to in family units, with the framework of how time is spent being constructed around the perceived best interests of the ‘child’. Space is organised in relation to the family, seen in the ‘family room’ or moving near schools and family friendly neighbourhoods.

Halberstam outlines an ‘extended adolescence’, as one example of temporal change in the lives of queer individuals whose time has been unscripted by the ‘by the conventions of family, inheritance and child rearing.’²⁴ Not having to frame a life around child rearing allows for a focus on the present. This also recentres queer lives spatially, allowing for a move away from the focus on family units and homes, and instead to queer communities, networks and alternative modes of housing.

Halberstam also notes how adherence to the (re)production narrative allows individuals to be thought of as stable and responsible saying,

And so, in Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create

²⁴ Halberstam, *Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies*, 2.

longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity.²⁵

Stability is applauded and those living what are considered to be unstable lives, are thought of as immature or dangerous. We can begin to link this to negative perceptions of asylum seekers, who have been portrayed as reckless and untrustworthy due to a life in precarity.

This emphasis on ‘longevity’ and progression is evident in disability discourse. In *Time for Disability and a Future for Crips*, Kafer outlines how disability is often discussed in relation to duration in medical and social discourse. Illness and disability can be considered as being defined in their relation to time. Kafer notes terms like ‘chronic fatigue’, ‘intermittent fatigue’, ‘relapse’ and ‘remission’, define illness in their relation to ‘normative’ time. Severity and value are determined in a person’s disability in relation to the duration one can be expected to live with illness or disability. ‘Prognosis’ and ‘diagnosis’, Kafer goes on to say, project futures of disability and illness.²⁶ Kafer, and other disability scholars, outline crip time as an ‘explosion’ of normative time. It draws attention to the fact that our measurement of time is based on very specific minds and bodies. It also offers the possibility of an alternative temporal framework. As Kafer notes ‘rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds.’²⁷ Crip time makes flexibility a key component.

Disability discourse also makes visible the barriers that prevent access to certain spaces and how this can shift what is the centre of one’s environment. It also is a consideration of how different bodies move within spaces.

These alternative perceptions of time and space are perhaps most evident during the AIDS/HIV crisis of the 1980’s and 1990’s. A life marked by longevity was no longer a reality, and instead forced a focus on the present. However, Halberstam is keen to state that

²⁵ Halberstam, *Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies*, 4.

²⁶ Alison Kafer, ‘Time For Disability and a Future for Crips’, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2013), 25.

²⁷ Alison Kafer, ‘Time for Disability and a Future for Crips’, 27.

this radical rethinking of time and space as a resistance to (hetero)normative oppressions is one that is often only possible for more privileged groups. He notes that for straight and queers of colour, the experience of HIV does not necessarily offer helpful reinventions of time. Halberstam here draws from the work of Cathy Cohen, who outlines that for society, the premature deaths of some does not inspire a reorganising of our temporal and spatial perceptions, but rather is just ‘business as usual’. There are individuals and communities that are considered expendable due to their race, sexuality, gender and class, such as transgender women, poor drug addicts, poorer black communities and within Ireland, the Irish Travelling community.

In using these theories, I do not wish to say that the experience of refugees and migrants necessarily align with those who operate in queer or crip time. Differences occur in that refugee and asylum seekers living outside of normative spaces and temporal logics are something born out of the consistent regulation they face in how they spend their time and the control on what spaces they can inhabit. A part of the radical resistance in queer and crip discourse is the formation of new ways of living and community building. Yet, one of the consequences of the consistent regulation and segregation of migrant bodies is the breaking up of communities. How do we connect this radical rethinking of resistance in queer and crip time and space to other marginalised groups, such as refugees and asylum seekers?

Queer and crip time and space are useful in that they allows for an exploration of the creation of what constitutes (hetero)normative/non-normative time and space, significantly who is included and excluded and what are the politics and institutions that do this. They outline in a way that other theories on temporality and spatiality do not, that identity influences how one perceives time. This is largely as the logics and institutions which organise our daily lives are sexist, ableist, racist and homophobic. I use queer time and space as a tool to critique the structures and policies which use normativity as oppression through the regulation of bodies.

The Postcolonial Body in Queer Space and Time

In her publication, *The Postcolonial Body in Queer Space and Time*, Rebecca Romanow makes the connection between queer time and space and the post-colonial subject. She builds

upon Halberstam's opening up of the term 'queer' to include identities whose existence in time and space is marked by an 'otherness'. This has been something explored by other queer theorists such as Cathy Cohen and Evie Sedgwick. Halberstam's use of queer time encompasses 'non normative behaviours that have clear but not essential relations to gay and lesbian subjects.' He goes on to say that queer time and space can refer to 'non-normative logics and organisations of community, sexual identity, embodiment and activity in space and time.'²⁸ Romanow outlines how the postcolonial identity is linked to inhabiting non normative geographies and temporalities and therefore can be considered as occupying queer time and space. She defines the postcolonial in its inability to be defined by a fixed location, saying:

Perhaps, indeed, the 'postcolonial' is not best defined by the history of the nation from which the individual emerges, but, instead, by the non-normative modes of living which are produced and enacted by that individual as a response to normative temporalizations and spatializations of the cultures they inform.²⁹

It is of course worth noting in the context of this research, that when relating queer time and space to the postcolonial subject, an individual's status as a refugee or asylum seeker does not necessarily identify them with postcolonialism in terms of coming from a previously colonized nation. However, the concerns of postcolonialism are shared by those living within the asylum process, such as an 'othering'³⁰ created in the eyes of the 'Western' or 'civilised' society or identity fracturing discourses in relation to a movement from the nation state. The quotation above from Romanow outlines how one's identity as postcolonial, and as 'queer' can be due to an existence within non-normative temporalizations and spatializations. Could the heterotopic encampments Agier describes as being located on the border of normative society be considered as queer space? Despite their normativising regulations, can asylum centres be considered queer space, and can residents be considered as embodying queer temporalisations?

²⁸ Halberstam, *Queer Temporality and Post Modern Geographies*, 2.

²⁹ Rebecca F. Romanow, 'The Postcolonial as Queer Space', in *The Postcolonial Body in Queer Time and Space*, (Cambridge Scholars Press: Newcastle, 2006), 6.

³⁰ Stuart Hall, *When was the 'Post' Colonial? Thinking at the Limit*, <http://readingtheperiphery.org/hall>, accessed January 2020.

Romanow also marks the postcolonial subject as queer saying they are ‘never really ‘here’ and certainly no longer ‘there.’³¹ The liminality here she is referring to is the subject’s inability to connect to the idea of nation or inhabit the space of the homeland, whilst also not being able to define their identity in relation to a new country of residence. Drawing from Foucault, Romanov takes the site of the postcolonial body as the truly ‘queer space’, working against normative temporality and space, and modes of identification linked to the two. Romanow’s outlining of the postcolonial as queer in its embodying of non-normative geographies is relevant when we consider refugees and asylum seekers as being detached from the past and homeland and not feeling that they are participating in their present environment.

Romanow goes on to say that normative timelines are quashed with the weight of the past and a diminishing future, however for refugees and asylum seekers, a focus on the extended period of ‘present’ is certainly not always favourable.

Conclusion

Temporal and spatial frameworks are useful when interrogating the multitude of ways power can be enacted on the body. Taking the body as the immutable element, we see how normative structuring of time and space is utilised to fulfil heteropatriarchal and capitalist ideologies. The ordering of societal institutions facilitate the movement of bodies within a normative schema. Those whose life patterns fall outside of this, exist within non-normative temporalisations and spatialisations.

Both Halberstam and Kafer demonstrate the power of thinking of resistance through temporal and spatial terms. Halberstam theorises existence in alternative spatial and temporal frameworks as being out of ‘choice or necessity’. This is seen in the formation of subcultures, non-familial based community living, a bending of linear time narratives, and sexual and gender identities that are outside of the gender binary and heteronormativity. For Kafer, resistance lies in a bending of time and changing of space to fulfill disabled needs and not the

³¹ Romanow, ‘The Postcolonial as Queer Space’, 10.

bending of disabled bodies to fit normative structures. The question becomes how do we connect this radical rethinking of resistance in alternative temporalities and spatialities to other marginalised groups? In particular, to refugees and migrants living in the asylum system, whose existence in opposition to normative spatial and temporal frameworks is something which is born out of the regulation by normative institutions and bodies.

The following chapters interrogate two photographic works which represent life within asylum centres. They both visually represent this experience as heavily altering one's perception of space and time, and yet in their representation and documentation, they reflect on resistance.

CHAPTER TWO

The Asylum Archive: A Collaborative Documentation of Ireland's Direct Provision System

Introduction

In this chapter I will illustrate how *The Asylum Archive* uses temporal and spatial frameworks to interrogate the experience of asylum seekers and refugees within Ireland's Direct Provision (DP) system. The Direct Provision system is the method in which the Irish state houses and provides for asylum applicants. *The Asylum Archive* is a collaborative documentation of life within the Irish asylum system with contributions from DP residents, artists, academics and activists. The archive includes photographs, artefacts, essays, videos and diary entries. It has been exhibited across Ireland in different forms and exists online on its website where it can be freely accessed.³² As the archive contains many different mediums and is ever evolving, it is hard to grasp the scale of its material. However, the archive contains photographs from around 100 former DP and emergency accommodation centres and dozens of found objects.

The Asylum Archive was created by Dublin-based Serbian artist Vukasin Nedeljkovic. Nedeljkovic sought asylum in Ireland in 2007 and lived within the Direct Provision system for two years, being moved between four different centres in Dublin; New Ross, Co Wexford; Ballyhaunis, Co Mayo; and Ballaghaderreen, Co Roscommon. Nedeljkovic holds a BA in photography from Belgrade and began documenting his experience of Direct Provision from the beginning of his stay. He was granted 'leave to remain' by the Irish government in 2009.

I have chosen to analyse photographs from the archive that make visible the tension that asylum seekers must navigate whilst living an institutionalised life on the periphery of mainstream society. The suitability of spatial and temporal discourse to examine life within

³² An online edition of *The Asylum Archive* exists at <http://www.asylumarchive.com>.

DP is evident when one considers the system of consistent regulation in which residents' movements and habits are monitored and restricted for indefinite periods. This extreme form of control shifts individuals' comprehension of time and decentres their perspective of the environment around them.

The photographs chosen come from Nedeljkovic, photographer Rory O'Neill's contribution *19.10 & Other Stories* and researcher Zoe O'Reilly's *New Bridges*. Each image was chosen to reflect on a different aspect of life within Direct Provision, however they should be read as also being in conversation with each other. Themes overlap and the constraints and restrictions expressed in one photograph also exist in the other.

Furthermore I will argue that not only does *The Asylum Archive* provide a counter narrative to media representation of refugees, but in its collaborative nature creates a cultural identity. *The Asylum Archive* is an opportunity for solidarity and resistance within a system that works to prevent residents from making connections.

Direct Provision as 'Other Space', 'Non-Place' and the Heterotopia in the work of Nedeljkovic

The Asylum Archive began through Nedeljkovic documenting his own experiences of Direct Provision in his writing and photography. In his photographs and diary entries he uses temporal and spatial frameworks to reflect on his living conditions- expressing how an existence of 'otherness' is created through the regulating practices of the DP system. Nedeljkovic theorizes DP centres using spatial discourse on liminality or marginality. He uses the term 'non-places' from French anthropologist Marc Augé's description of (non)places of transience. Non-places can be defined as not being relational, historical or concerned with identity. Here individuals are anonymous.³³

Nedeljkovic's framing of the DP centre as a 'non-place' is a development on Augé. Augé uses non-place as those places that are not animated by interactions between inhabitants, but

³³ Marc Augé, 'From Places to Non-Places', in *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, (London: Verso, 1995), 77.

often directions from signage are what dictates our movements. In the non-place we are relieved of the usual duties associated with our identity. Significantly Augé states that this anonymity is only afforded after one confirms their identity stating, ‘In a way, the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence.’³⁴ The non-place can be a privileged experience, yet Nedeljkovic uses the term to describe the stripping of identity one experiences within DP centres. Residents are communicated with through signs, and the centres are designed to emphasise impermanence.

We can also think through DP centres using the Foucauldian concept of the *heterotopia*. The heterotopia is the place which exists outside of all other places, despite the possibility of locating it physically. It can be considered an epistemological decentering in which an ‘other’ or ‘outside’ is constructed.³⁵ In Michel Agier’s work on ‘urban encampments’ he interrogates the heterotopia as being identity constructing saying:

[...] heterotopias create an entity, real or fictional, which allows us to locate an otherness with which we can think the own self, or ‘us’ – thus made real, full, living, healthy, normal, citizens, active, etc.

It is the ‘other’ space against which we can identify the ‘us’ or ‘the inside’. The notion of non-space as also being identity constructing concerns Nedeljkovic in his work in *The Asylum Archive*.

³⁴ Augé, ‘From Places to Non-Places’, 102.

³⁵ Michel Agier citing Foucault, ‘Camps, Encampments, and Occupations: From the Heterotopia to the Urban Subject’, (Ethnos, 84:1, 14-26), DOI: [10.1080/00141844.2018.1549578](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2018.1549578).

Image of the Stained Window by Vukasin Nedeljkovic



Figure 1. Image of the Stained Window, by Vukasin Nedeljkovic. Included in the Asylum Archive, 2007.

Beyond illustrating the poor conditions of the room itself, I selected this photograph as the window makes physical the boundary between inside and outside- the us and the other. In this case the 'other' is inverted through the subversion of the gaze. The photograph is taken from the perspective of the 'other', from within the non-space. It is the world of the 'us' that is depicted as outside. The stained window, quite literally prevents Nedeljkovic from seeing out (in). In the distance we can see trees, in between are residential houses.

Whilst in DP, Nedeljkovic maintained a diary, his writings help to contextualise the photographs in his everyday life as a DP resident.

Diary Excerpt from Vukasin Nedeljkovic

[...] My window is divided in half. There are yellow marks at both sides of the window. The mark on the left side of the window is bigger and wider than the mark on the right side of the window. I can't see anything through the window in my room in the Centre. The yellow marks cover my view. The yellow marks are on the outside of the window. I can't clean the yellow marks. I don't look through my window. You can only see two big yellow marks if you look through the window in my room. [...]

I look through my stained window. There are fields in the distance. They seem too far away. I can't see the greenness of the fields. It rains almost every day. The fields are becoming greener every minute. I want to see the fields with my tired, sleepless eyes. I am afraid to leave Room 24. I can't smell the fields. I am not able to smell the wildlife. It is just round a corner. There are walls and barriers on the way. I can leave the Centre to see the fields and smell the wildlife; but I am afraid that if I leave the Centre, I won't be able to come into my room again. I could be stopped outside the Centre and asked by a stranger: 'How are things?' or 'Where are you going?'. I could be asked by a local the same question. I wouldn't know what to answer. I want to say: 'I am going for a walk to see the fields and smell the wildlife'. But I am afraid. I say nothing. I make few steps towards the greenfields. They are too far anyway. I will try tomorrow again. I go back to my room. I gently open the window; the smell of the canteen enters my habitat. [...] ³⁶

Nedeljkovic's documentation of his life within DP, both visually and written, demonstrate the effects his institutionalisation has on his relationship to space. It reveals how through the policies of the asylum system his perspective on the world has been decentred to centre around the asylum centre. The asylum centre he is describing is The Old Convent in Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo. Locating asylum centres in rural locations is common, with 120 asylum centres located across the country in former holiday homes, convents and military

³⁶ Vukasin Nedeljkovic, Diary Entries available at *The Asylum Archive*. Here they are quoted from an included essay by Karen E. Till, *Active Witnessing: Learning from The Asylum Archive, 2018*.

barracks.³⁷ Transportation to connect these areas to larger cities is infrequent and expensive. When Nedeljkovic lived in the DP system, asylum applicants received a weekly allowance of just €19.10.³⁸ A return bus ticket from Ballyhaunis to Galway, the nearest city, would have cost around €12. Meals are given at strict times with residents prohibited from cooking themselves, and with their small allowance prevented from buying food themselves. This alienation from local communities is compounded by the fact that DP residents must check in to their asylum centre at a specific time each day. Nedeljkovic writes of this experience saying ‘We can leave the centre but we always have to come back to get our daily meals. We have to come back to sign in a daily register.’

Nedeljkovic uses this moment to demonstrate the kinds of regulation and monitoring he lives under, relating it to his fractured sense of identity saying ‘Sometimes I sign using Cyrillic alphabet; other times I sign using a Latin alphabet. I am not sure who I am anymore.’³⁹ The anxiety of not knowing who he is, is expressed in Nedeljkovic’s photograph. An inability to answer the questions he fears he will be asked about where he is going or how he is illustrates an internalisation of a prolonged period institutionalisation. His identity has become defined by his relation to this non-place, to this indefinite waiting. This is what keeps him within his room, staring out of his window.

³⁷ Vukasin Nedeljkovic, *Asylum Archive: An Archive Asylum and Direct Provision in Ireland*, University of Oxford, 4th May, 2016, <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2016/05/asylum-archive>.

³⁸ Sorcha Pollak, *Asylum seeker weekly allowance rises for adults and children*, *The Irish Times*, March 25th, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/asylum-seeker-weekly-allowance-rises-for-adults-and-children-1.3837061>.

³⁹ Nedeljkovic, *Diary Entries*.

19.10 & Other Stories

Photographer Rory O’Neill contributed a series of photographs to *The Asylum Archive* entitled *19.10 & Other Stories*. The subject of the images revolves around €19.10, the weekly allowance asylum seekers had previously received whilst their claim was being processed.⁴⁰



Figure 2. *19.10 & Other Stories*. Taken by Rory O’Neill, as part of The Asylum Archive, 2015.

The image captures a direct provision resident sitting just out of frame. Three plastic cups, paper napkins and plastic spoons sit on a wooden serving tray beside them on the counter. In front lies a packet of Amber Leaf rolling tobacco, rolling paper and a plastic lid used as an

⁴⁰ As of 2018 when living in Direct Provision adults receive a weekly allowance of €38.80, with children receiving €29.80. This is an increase of €17.20 from the €21.60 adults previously received in 2018. The allowance for asylum seekers living in Direct Provision was introduced in 2000 at the weekly rate of IR£15 (€19.10) per adult and IR£7.50 (€9.60) per child. Pollak, The Irish Times.

ashtray. Behind, a bare white wall upon which we can see the shadows of the resident and the cups.

We typically associate plastic cups and cutlery with once off functions, a cheap alternative to glassware and crockery. The plasticware is disposable, minimising the clean up. The use of this disposable ware connotes a temporariness and quite literally highlights the lack of investment in making the residents' environment livable for the long term. There are currently 39 Direct Provision centres throughout the country. 7 centres are state owned with all being managed by private contractors who are paid by the state⁴¹. Some DP centres have a history of institutionalisation such as former convents or old military barracks', whilst others are associated with transience- hotels, guest houses and B&Bs. Conditions vary greatly between each DP centre, but what all have in common is their ability to be defined by their 'permanent temporariness'⁴².

For contractors direct provision is a for-profit system. They are responsible for the food provided within the centres, some services such as laundry, as well as the centres upkeep and furnishings. In 2018 these private contracting firms were paid €72 million by the state for running DP centres.⁴³ This 'for profit system' means that low spending on 'luxuries' are in contractors' best interests, further magnifying a sense of impersonality and temporariness.

A lack of investment in comfortable surroundings can be justified by contractors in the fact that residents are not supposed to stay in DP for long. DP was founded as a temporary housing solution in which asylum applicants would stay for no longer than 6 months. However, in 2014 a working group set up to examine the conditions of DP found that 4,000 people had been in the system for 5 years or more.⁴⁴ For asylum seekers in DP, this is a

⁴¹ Department of Justice and Equality, Spending Review 2019, Direct Provision: Overview of current accomodation expenditure, August 2019, <https://assets.gov.ie/25626/c666dab7df0849c59695e19b926b6204.pdf>.

⁴² Zoe, O'Reilly, 'Living Liminality: Everyday Experiences of Asylum Seekers in the Direct Provision System in Ireland', in *Gender, Place & Culture* 25, no. 6 (2018): 821-42. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2018.1473345.

⁴³ Gordon Deegan, Direct Provision Firms Paid €72m Last Year as Numbers Surged, The Irish Times, March 23rd 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/direct-provision-firms-paid-72m-last-year-as-numbers-surg-ed-1.3835544>.

⁴⁴ Sorcha Pollak and Mark Hillard, Direct Provision: The Controversial System Turns 20, The Irish Times, November 16th 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/direct-provision-the-controversial-system-turns-20-1.4081833?f>

prolonged, indefinite stay in a non-place in which they cannot relate their identity to their environment. In its creation of an illusion of impermanence, the ‘non-placeness’ of DP centres facilitates the erasure of asylum seekers’ identities thus making it easier to prepare and hold individuals for deportation.

The meager weekly allowance DP residents receive forces individuals to spend the majority of their time within the asylum centre. This coupled with a lack of activities or facilities for asylum seekers results in an aimless waiting. Whilst in image 1, the visual of the stained window places the viewer in the position of the photographer looking out, in image 2 by O’Neill we see a resident sitting to the side. This acknowledgment of an individual waiting just off frame is one which recurs in other images in the archive. It simultaneously reinforces the notion that the centre of DP residents’ existence is the asylum centre and that they face an indefinite period of waiting drawn out before them.

Reshifting the Focus

The choice for asylum seekers and refugees to not be captured fully physically on camera is a deliberate one by Nedeljkovic and *Archive* contributors. Their absence is overwhelmingly present and sharply places the focus of criticism on the Direct Provision system as opposed to an analysis of the refugee subject themselves. In a viewing of an exhibition of *The Asylum Archive* in Galway, NUIG drama lecturer Charlotte McIvor aptly accounts for this absence in saying,

Their inability to be seen, however, is not just an act of forced disappearance, but a defiant dissipation. By haunting rather than inhabiting, the asylum seekers not pictured in these frames refuse to perform from familiar repertoires of the bureaucratic performance of refugeeness.⁴⁵

belid=IwAR0hT_dVu_pwQMP9KOKAeVB2kWN7RkY92RwcpXN5ramsKulXq47BjCCC5FQ&mode=amp#.Xc_AAK11_Ok.facebook.

⁴⁵ Dr. Charlotte McIvor in interview with Lorna Higgins, Direct Provision: ‘Ghosts and Spaces’ Depicted in Exhibition, Feb 14th, 2015, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/direct-provision-ghosts-and-spaces-depicted-in-exhibition-1.2103401>.

What McIvor nods to here are the images of ‘refugeeness’ that saturate our media. As Liisa Malkki addresses, the construction of the image of ‘the refugee’ by both media and humanitarian groups results in the public acceptance of a general image of ‘refugeeness’⁴⁶. This performance of poverty, pain and a gratefulness for being rescued, is one that must be done to justify an individual’s seeking of asylum. *The Asylum Archive* refuses this.



Figure 3. 19.10 & Other Stories. Taken by Rory O’Neill for *The Asylum Archive*, 2015.

This image is from Lissywollen Direct Provision centre in Athlone. The image shows several prefabs on concrete. The three in a vertical line in the centre correspond with those on either side. This alludes to the idea that there are many prefabs in this location that are out of shot. The exterior of the prefabs is in poor condition, the walls a dirty off white and the paint is flaking off the bottom. The curtains are drawn of the visible windows, and there is no one present outside. In the background the tops of trees can be seen and the sky looks like early

⁴⁶ Liisa, H. Malkki, Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization, (Cultural Anthropology, 11: 377-404, 2019, doi:10.1525/can.1996.11.3.02a00050.

evening. The absence of any residents is noticeable, giving the sense of an abandoned or 'ghost' town. When looking at the photograph I am asking who lives here? Who has lived here? From the outside each individual prefab looks indistinct from the next. The symmetry between them and the absence of any bodies in the frame creates a sombre silence.

It is common for DP centres to be located on the outskirts of communities, in part due to hostility from local residents. There have been two arson attacks in recent years on Direct Provision centres in the Republic of Ireland, (November 2018, January 2019). Most recently in September 2019, controversy over the perception that there are plans to open Direct Provision centre in the small town of Oughterard in Co.Galway. In this town of roughly 1,300 rumors of a Direct Provision centre hosting 250 refugees circled, resulting in a large protest which halted the plans to build the DP centre. Concerns over the suitability of such small towns to host a relative 'influx' of refugees are unfounded. Through DP's restrictive policies, individuals are forced to remain in their centres, their isolated bubbles.



Figure 4. 19.10 & Other Stories. Taken by Rory O'Neill for *The Asylum Archive*, 2015.

As with Nedeljkovic's image, this photograph is taken from the perspective of being inside the 'non-place'. We are looking from the perspective of the resident of this prefab. The dim light and boxes on the bed makes the environment feel cluttered and cramped. Inside the boxes children's toys are visible. The walls have printed instructions taped on them and a fire extinguisher above the door. The door is covered by a thin, poorly fitted curtain behind which

stands what we can assume to be a resident of this prefab. Christmas fairy lights hang above a small tv.

When we take the image as being in relation to the previous, we get a sense of isolation within the already isolated non-place of DP. Within each prefab individuals live separate from those outside, outside there is nothing to centre a community around- only concrete. It illustrates how one room can become the entire habitat. When an individual is excluded from external spaces, their room becomes their world. However, as with many photographs in the archive, this image also illustrates that residents work with the resources they have.

Living in Liminality: Zoe O'Reilly's New Bridges



Figure 5. Taken by an asylum centre resident as part of Zoe O'Reilly's *New Bridges*, 2010.

This image is included in *The Asylum Archive* with a short quotation underneath saying 'This was the birthday of my friend's daughter. She is seven. She came here to this hostel when she was just almost a year. Since 2004. She is grown up now.'⁴⁷ The image was taken in 2010 as

⁴⁷ Zoe O'Reilly, *New Bridges*, <http://www.asylumarchive.com/zoeuml-oreilly.html>.

part of Zoe O'Reilly's doctoral project. It is part of a series of photographs taken in collaboration individuals seeking asylum and living in Direct Provision. The series is entitled *New Bridges*.

In her own research O'Reilly interrogates DP through a spatial and temporal liminality.⁴⁸ She describes this 'inbetweenness' as being inherent to the experience of all asylum seekers in their waiting, their existence on the threshold, and ambiguity around legal and political status. O'Reilly further goes on to describe the internalisation and existence of individuals within DP as an 'ontological liminality.'⁴⁹ This is to express the chronic feelings of anticipation, anxiety and fear that individuals experience in a prolonged liminal and highly controlled environment. However, O'Reilly's image demonstrates how individuals in Direct Provision do not accept this liminality passively.

The photograph was taken as part of a participatory photographic project in which DP residents document their daily lives. The photograph shows a young girl's birthday cake. This is a recognisable style of cake, one that can be bought in any local supermarket. In a different context it would simply denote the event of a birthday, connoting a pleasant moment of blowing out birthday candles and the excitement of the child turning seven. Time is represented through the seven candles. Here they mark not merely the growth of a child but also the time she has spent indefinitely incarcerated within DP. It's a passing of time marked by uncertainty, where the future projected isn't clear or stable. Birthdays are usually a time of looking forward and making well wishes however here birthdays are intertwined with the markers of time spent in the institution. Significantly however, the birthdays are still marked. O'Reilly's image highlights a persistence to exist within the constraints of DP and a desire to create an identity and project a future where there is considered to be none. DP residents here are negotiating the reality of existing within a permanent temporariness.

I am drawn when looking at this photograph to a statement from Nedelkovic's on the significance of *The Asylum Archive*.

⁴⁸ Victor Turner, "Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period in Rites De Passage," in *The Forest of Symbols*, edited by V. Turner, 93–111. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967.

⁴⁹ Zoe O'Reilly, 'Living Liminality'.

However, in my view, Direct Provision Centres cannot be exclusively perceived as sites of incarceration, social exclusion, or extreme poverty. More importantly, they can be seen to constitute oppositional formations of collectivity and resistance against State policy in which different nationalities and ethnic groups exist and persist despite the very conditions of confinement created by the state. [...]

Key questions remain. First, how can asylum seekers be less than strangers in a profit-making direct provision establishment? [...]⁵⁰

This image illustrates not just an individual persistence, but a collective one- the type described by Nedeljkovic. DP residents resist the system daily. This is seen in the many protests and activist collectives formed by residents but also in the seemingly simple act of creating connections and friendships. This institution works to remove the identity of the individual. Identity can be affirmed by those we come into contact with. The collective celebration of a birthday is an affirmation of identity.

Conclusion

In his creation of *The Asylum Archive* Nedeljkovic articulates the damaging effects of institutionalisation, poverty and isolation. He illustrates how life within a DP centre can alter one's temporal and spatial positioning. However, he does not solely characterise DP centres by these experiences. Nedeljkovic sees 'oppositional formations of collectivity and resistance' existing with asylum centres where residents unite against State policy. Within *The Asylum Archive*, Nedeljkovic asks the question 'how can asylum seekers be less than strangers in a profit-making direct provision establishment?'

The Asylum Archive is also a disruption of our shared language. The 'our' I am referring to here is white Irish. Objects and locations which hold a shared meaning in a different Irish cultural context are given new meaning in the photographs. Religious iconography, holiday resort locations, old convents, childrens toys etc., are presented in a new framework of interpretation.

⁵⁰ Vukasin Nedeljkovic, *Asylum Archive : An Archive of Asylum and Direct Provision in Ireland*.

We can then view the photography documentation in the Asylum Archive as a cultural production and a creation of a cultural identity.⁵¹ Vukasin Nedeljkovic's work and the extension of the Asylum Archive project by other DP residents is an expression of their shared interpretation of their environment, their world at that moment. It is a creation of meaning in a 'community' whose existence and formation is as a result of displacement and exclusion from other communities or cultures. The Asylum Archive is a contribution to a culture of a world that is considered to not be existing. It is a project actively 'making sense' of the world of Direct Provision. The documentation is a conversation between residents, making meaning out of a sense of not belonging.

⁵¹ Stuart Hall, 'Chapter One: The Work of Representation', in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (SAGE Publications and Open University: Northampton, 1997), 5.

CHAPTER THREE

Waiting Within the Dutch Asylum System: Represented in the Work of Haya Alsalama

Introduction

This chapter looks at photographer Haya Alsalama's series on *waiting*, examining the temporal and spatial frameworks used in its representation of the experience of living through the asylum process in the Netherlands. Locating her subject in liminal space, Alsalama also frames the series in temporal terms, describing her subject as waiting. In contrast to the photographs of the *The Asylum Archive*, where DP residents were represented through an 'absent presence', Alsalama's subject embodies the lived reality of existing in the in between. As *The Asylum Archive* illustrated, looking at EU migration policies of detention and segregation through spatial and temporal lenses offers a way in to interrogating such policies and their effects on asylum centre residents. In her rooting of the body in the 'in between', Alsalama gives an insight into an individual's experience of navigating these 'architectures of exclusion'⁵² and their impact on identity. Alsalama's photographs also offer a counter narrative to that of the refugee depicted in mainstream media.

A photographer and filmmaker from Syria, Alsalama lived for one and a half years in the AZC in Utrecht. I met Alsalama whilst organising an exhibition with De Voorkamer in the Lombok neighbourhood of Utrecht. De Voorkamer is an integration initiative which facilitates creative projects.⁵³ Their community consists of Dutch and non-Dutch, status and non-status holders, many of whom are current or former AZC residents. As part of a previous photography showcase, Alsalama exhibited her series in De Voorkamer. There was no set theme given to the photographers, with each free to photograph what they wished. Alsalama's photos were displayed with a short bio and description of her inspiration.

⁵² Zoe O' Reilly, 'Living Liminality': Everyday Experiences of Asylum Seekers in the 'Direct Provision' System in Ireland," *Gender, Place & Culture* 25, no. 6 (2018): 821-42.

⁵³ De Voorkamer's website can be found here: <https://devoorkamer.org/en/>.

The photos revolve around the concept of waiting. The feelings that connect to it. It tries to capture stages of what a person can go through. The feeling of frustration where you want to move forward but you keep standing still. The clashes between the emotions and behavior. On the other hand, when there is waiting there is hope. Hope for the dreams to come true, and hope for the spirit that does not want to surrender.

Haya is a photographer and filmmaker from Syria.

On seeing Alsalama's photographs, I read her work as ruminating on the experience of waiting as a refugee- waiting for status, for housing, for news of loved ones and for the many waitings associated with living precariously. I read her work as representing how this waiting alters one's perception of time. I came to the photographs having already begun my own research, using temporality as a framework through which to look at the experience of people living in asylum centres. While the photographs suggest a waiting rooted in 'in-betweenness', I must call attention to the description of the series, which outlines a non-specific waiting. It was with my own research in mind, and within the context of De Voorkamer that I read the photographs as exploring a waiting that is associated with being a refugee and seeking asylum. Alsalama came to the Netherlands to seek asylum following the Syrian revolution. After interviewing her about her work, she points out that whilst for her these photographs were an exploration of her experience of waiting as a refugee, that this is only one interpretation.

This series of five images shows the subject standing or sitting still in several positions on a building site. The location is largely unrecognisable with only one photograph showing an apartment building and a bridge, allowing one to locate the setting as being in Leidsche Rijn, Utrecht.

The Tension between Waiting as Inaction and Waiting for Progression

In image 2.1 the subject stands still, yet has one foot in front of the other. Her stance appears to signify a desire to move, but an inability to do so. Behind her we see houses in the process of being built. The building site is empty and no work is being done. It is clear that although completion of the project is far away, there is potential. Not only is the subject occupying a space that is not yet fulfilling its potential, but she is doing so at a time of inaction. To the left of the subject we see greenery, a signifier of life, however it looks unwelcoming. Sand takes up the majority of the photograph, covering over the land that was there before. The subject appears out of place having no connection to her environment. Her environment conveys no warmth for her. The subject confronts the viewer with her gaze, refusing to look away.



Figure 2.1. Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.

In its playing with the possibility of action and inaction, of possibility and static, the above photograph conveys a sense of liminality in which the subject is constantly stuck between states. When interviewing Alsalama, she related this first image to photographs that one often sees of people standing still in cities. The movement of passers by is captured through a long exposure and we see blurred coloured lines while the person standing still remains clear. Despite the subject's staging in different positions in each photograph in this series, one does not get a sense of motion but a sense of disjointedness. The subject is essentially stuck.

Alsalama frames this series in temporal terms as being concerned with a sustained period of waiting. In her staging of waiting as being a period of 'stuckness' or as an 'in between moment', Alsalama explores how value is placed on time. Time has been constructed in terms of a progression narrative with progression being defined in terms of capital accumulation, or inheritance.⁵⁴ Waiting is therefore considered a period of unproductivity and a waste of time. Emotive responses to periods of waiting, such as frustration or a feeling of stuckness is described by Harvey as often seeming to support the claim that the linear temporal narrative of capitalism is in fact natural. Alsalama's work highlights the pervasive nature of such temporal logics. In this case however, this period of waiting has been forced upon the subject. It is not a moment of leisure.

In 2018 there were 20,353 applicants for refugee status in the Netherlands, with 15,965 still pending at the end of that year.⁵⁵ A backlog in applications has resulted in the average wait time for an individual seeking refugee status being one year, until then applicants are kept in legal uncertainty. They are also kept out of the labor market. As illustrated by Harvey, this can create feelings of worthlessness. Their time is not being considered as valuable. After receiving status there may be a further waiting period within the AZC whilst an individual awaits social housing. Until an individual has received legal status there are restrictions on working. Similar to DP in Ireland, asylum centres are usually located outside of communities and individuals may be moved to centres in different towns after a period of time.

⁵⁴ David Harvey, 'The Experience of Space and Time, Chapter 12: Introduction', in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989).

⁵⁵ Asylum Information Database, Applications and granting of protection status at first instance: 2018, <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/netherlands/statistics>.

Alsalama's use of temporality as a framework emphasises how normative temporal logics can marginalize people further. As discussed in chapter one, this has previously been illustrated by disability and queer scholars. In Jack Halberstam's exploration of queer temporalities he illustrates this using the AIDS/HIV crisis, where illness and death were the reality of the near future. As Halberstam notes, the 'horizons of possibility'⁵⁶ were diminishing, and the creation of a temporality that is focused on the present became a necessary resistance. This is also seen in Lee Edelman's rejection of future's worth being measured in longevity and a move to an extension of the possibilities of the present. However, when we look at the process of seeking asylum, *waiting* as a temporal expression *emphasises* the significance of 'future', despite it being a future shrouded in uncertainty. For individuals seeking asylum, strict regulation and segregation results in the present as being a time of inactivity and with a narrative of progression placed on time, the present stretches out in anticipation, placing the future further out of reach. One thinks of phrases such as 'filling time' or 'passing the time'. Like Alsalama's subject on the building site, those seeking asylum are placed in a sustained temporal moment of inaction.

On August 2nd, 2019, I interviewed Alsalama on her photo series. As her description had stated that in waiting there is a 'hope', I had wanted to discuss how she saw this relate to waiting specifically in the context of the daily lives of those living in asylum centres. Other scholars who have theorised their marginality through temporal frameworks, such as queer and crip time, highlight how their mode of living is in resistance to normative structures and institutions. In this context however a shift in one's temporal orientation is born out of the regulating powers of institutionalised living.

In our interview Alsalama describes how in the context of seeking asylum, there is a tension between accepting the period of waiting and also wanting to fight it. She says,

Sometimes waiting is a good thing if you think I'm waiting for something good. Or you think I can grow in this experience. At the end of the day when I talk to my

⁵⁶ Jack Halberstam, 'Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies', in *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies and Subcultural Lives*, (New York University Press: New York and London, 2005), 2.

friends about my situation for example, or when I am frustrated with things and they say you are not the person you are today unless yesterday happened. It is part of you.⁵⁷

In her statement we see the influence of a linear temporal narrative in creating meaning out of waiting. Waiting must always be for something, and that something must progress your life so the time spent waiting can be considered worthwhile. Her past and present must be for her future. Alsalama clearly illustrates how one's perception of how they are spending their time deeply influences their perception of self-identity.

Waiting as Shifting One's Relation to Space



Figure 2.2 Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.

⁵⁷ Interview with Haya Alsalama, August 2nd 2019.

In image 2.2, the subject sits inside a cement container. It is the joint at which the pipes meet. This cement structure is visible in the background of image 2.1. Unlike the confronting gaze of the subject in image 2.1, here she has her head lowered with her gaze focused downwards. Her expression is not of despair but of introspection or rest. Her seat in the corner of the structure gives the illusion of shelter. The cement container sits in the sand of the building site which we saw in image 2.1, only here we are also able to observe the site's surroundings. There are built apartments in the background, cars, a bridge, a river- all signs of life. The subject's position within the cement container perhaps does not signify shelter but exclusion and invisibility, an invisibility caused by a sustained waiting.

The segregation of asylum seekers from local communities is created through the location of asylum centres in marginal spaces and the strict regulation of AZC residents movements. This results in a lack of integration within the local community. The Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), the governmental organisation tasked with the role of organising accommodation for asylum seekers, have described the conditions in these centres as 'sober yet human.' This echoes the asylum accommodation policies of other countries such as Ireland, where 'Direct Provision' states that the direct needs (food, shelter) of asylum applicants will be met in line with European law. These approaches are cost conscious, with the aim to spend as little money as possible on reception, and to deter people from seeking asylum in the country.

An apt comparison can be with Michel Foucault's theorisation of prison systems. The layers of walls in image 2.2, illustrate the levels of invisibility experienced by the subject. A purposeful ordering, as Foucault suggests, to create hierarchy.⁵⁸ This hierarchy is present between the organising of space between those outside and inside the centre, and also within the centre itself. As mentioned, single people share rooms with several strangers and families get their own room. In the AZC, Utrecht, apartments are available in a separate building for families who have been in the centre a long time.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, trans. Alan Sheridan, 'The Art of Distributions', *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 148.

When looking at image 2.2, I am drawn to how Alsalama, like Vukasin Nedeljkovic in *The Asylum Archive*, explores how a sustained period of waiting and segregation results in the asylum centre becoming the focal point of asylum seekers existence, and in a sense their entire environment. In our interview Alsalama says of this, ‘[...] You are trapped in your own world, in your space. You can’t escape this. You are living with it. This square where you are sitting or standing and waiting for something. You hate it but you make it your home.’⁵⁹ However, this making of ‘home’ can be seen as an example of the daily resistances enacted by asylum seekers against an environment architected to refute identity.

Identity on the Margins and the Creation of Possibility

What is also evident in Alsalama’s photographs and touched upon in the excerpts above is how the inability to identify with one's environment, or with a familiar temporal narrative, can result in a fracturing of identity. In image 2.2, we see varying layers of barriers between the subject and her surrounding environment. The subject sits within a walled cement container, a rest from the sanded over building site, the sand itself covers over any history of what was once before on the site. The site then sits alongside a residential community, yet it is separated by a cement path.

As mentioned in chapter 1, in *The Postcolonial Body in Queer Space and Time*, Rebecca Romanov discusses the postcolonial identity as being queer saying ‘Perhaps, indeed, the “postcolonial” is not best defined by the history of the nation from which the individual emerges, but, instead, by the non-normative modes of living which are produced and enacted by that individual as a response to normative temporalizations and spatializations of the cultures they inform.’⁶⁰ For asylum seekers and refugees living in asylum centres, there is an exclusionary normativity in the heavy regulation and monitoring of bodies. Yet this results in an enforced removal from the normative temporal and spatial markers through which individuals usually identify themselves.

⁵⁹ Haya Alsalama in interview with myself, May 2019 in Alaslama’s home.

⁶⁰ Rebecca F. Romanow, ‘The Postcolonial as Queer Space’, in *The Postcolonial Body in Queer Time and Space*, (Cambridge Scholars Press: Newcastle, 2006), 6.

In image 2.3, the subject appears to perform despair; her head is lowered in her hands as she crouches in the sand. It may also be an attempt to connect to her environment. The sand from the building site is where the earth should be. It has been used to cover over the memory of what was once there and has yet to be replaced by the new. This is a transitional space. There is an absence of life, but we see greenery attempting to burst through.



Figure 2.3. Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.

Whilst living in the AZC, residents have not necessarily received confirmation of being allowed to stay. In the Netherlands there is a legal distinction between ‘asylum seekers’, who are individuals going through the legal system for a temporary residency permit to stay in the country and ‘refugees’, who have received their permit to stay. Largely most asylum applications are rejected.⁶¹ If an application is rejected, the applicant has 28 days to leave the Netherlands but also the opportunity to remain and appeal. After five years a refugee can apply for Dutch citizenship. Without citizenship a temporary residency permit can be withdrawn. When an individual receives status they are placed on a social housing list. Individuals must accept the first offer they are given or face being taken off the housing list

⁶¹ According to the Asylum Information Database, rejection rates in the Netherlands stand at 65%. <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/netherlands/statistics>, accessed February 2019.

and having to reapply, putting them at risk of homelessness. The allocated housing may be in cities or towns outside of the area where individuals were an AZC resident.

This is an excerpt from an interview I conducted with Alsalama. Alsalama here discusses the question of identity. In this excerpt we see her struggle to identify with the community when she does not interact with the space in a typical way. She highlights a level of invisibility that AZC residents experience within local communities.

They live in that street, their names are there, they have an address there. But still they aren't really there. They are anonymous, they don't have names relating to everyone around them but when you count numbers, which isn't a great way, but they are there. So, maybe when you are waiting, or when you don't relate yourself to an existing setting, then maybe you are just observing. You are not adding something, but you aren't taking. I don't know if it would be the same without these people. Everyone always wondered that, I always wondered that. Am I part of something or not? Just because I am here in that place. I think this is a question a lot have, and if we are talking about waiting very related to refugees, just to them, the emotion that they are within something but not really within that thing is very, very strong or accurate. I lived like that for a year and a half so this year and a half you are a part of that thing but at the same time you are not. I don't know how to explain it but when you talk to people like that and they are sitting and waiting, they'll say, I'm just waiting. You know? I'm just waiting. It's their activity but it is the only thing they also can do. It is something not by choice but it becomes what they are.⁶²

However, Alsalama also considers what it actually means to participate in the extended environment and asks whether or not our measurement of participation or engagement is in fact quite narrow. Below is an excerpt from our interview in which Alsalama outlines how within waiting there are actions and inactions that can extend one into their environment.

You are not really integrated in whatever is around you but, [at] the same time you [are], you start looking at it or being part of it, just by observing what is around you. It is a big part especially if you are waiting for something that is a part of everyday life and everyday activities and you can't belong to any of them. For example with refugees, people who are living in the AZC. They wake up, they eat and they sit and then they go back to sleep. But the time frame when they are sitting, they are looking at people and people who are going to their work, chilling and going to school. They are part of that place and that existence and activities yet they are not really part of it.

⁶² In interview with Haya Alsalama.

I don't think it is a positive or negative. They are just standing and observing, but that doesn't mean they don't belong to that space.⁶³

Beyond Michel Agier's notion of 'the heterotopia' as forming the creation of the 'utopian' identity of society, here Alsalama asks further questions of what impact do liminal spaces have on their bordering communities? She asks for a reconsideration of waiting not as a time of inaction, but of subtle engagements. Can an individual participate within, whilst being without? Is simply the activity of observation whilst waiting adding to the local environment and, can it mobilise an individual from existing on the margins to being active within 'normative' space? Can normative space include those who are invisible and unseen?

Alsalama relates these questions to status as a refugee, but also her images represent how one's gender and race can affect what spaces one is included in or not. I am drawn to Nirmal Puwar's *Space Invaders*. Here Puwar discusses what happens when the outsider becomes 'included' in society. What must one do for their inclusion to be advocated for? What element of their 'strangeness' needs altering to be able to cross boundaries?⁶⁴



Image 2.4. Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.

⁶³ Haya Alsalama in interview, May 2019.

⁶⁴ Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders : Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=243523>.

Here the subject sits among the weeds, her head is cast downwards towards them. She does not engage with the plants other than with her gaze. Greenery is often used to signify hope or new life. The subject's inability to engage physically with the plants emphasises the distance between her and the community around her, and yet can this be considered a different form of engagement? Or, can it be seen as a refusal to engage?

Non-normative modes of living are born out of the precarious nature of living without status. Living within a heavily regulated environment would in other circumstances bring stability or security. However, the uncertainty created in not knowing how long you will live in, or if you will even be allowed to remain in a space, results in a fractured sense of identity within that environment. In her work, Alsalama represents the struggle associated with liminal existence and offers a way in to interrogating marginal identity. She opens up new possibilities for identity formation and engaging with the environment. Perhaps this is where the kind of resistance, that Halberstam theorised in *In A Queer Time and Place* as alternative relations to time and space, can be seen.

Conclusion



Figure 2.5 Untitled, by Haya Alsalama, 2019.

In this final photograph, Alsalama has chosen to photograph her subject whilst she is moving. In the other photographs in the series there is no sense of motion, with the subject seeming stuck in time, however here her blurred hands are clasped together seemingly in prayer. The movement doubles as an unsticking of the self and at the same time an unrooting of the body in its location.

Taking the body as an immutable space, despite it's imposed reorientation to space and time around it, can be seen as an act of resistance. Alsalama also rethinks what meaningful engagement with one's environment looks like. When crossing boundaries and borders comes only when one denies aspects of self-identity, is maintaining or forging identity outside of

these boundaries an act of defiance? This is not to idealise a life of segregation, but to illustrate that there is resistance in daily life within asylum centres in spite of everything.

Conclusion

Spatial and temporal interrogations of asylum centres offer unique perspectives on how policies of host countries can meet EU regulatory standards of provision, and yet deter individuals from seeking asylum. Inhibiting asylum applicants from participating within community life, or from forming communities, is a form of oppression. The work of Haya Alsalama and *The Asylum Archive* illustrate how segregation, regulation of movement and confinement affect the daily practices that we would consider as giving meaning to daily existence. Spatial and temporal thinking can seem to exist solely within the realms of academia, however, as Halberstam makes evident in his outlining of queer time and space, they are in fact how we form narratives in our lives. Halberstam's use of queer time and space opens up ways of describing in rich terms, non-normative modes of living and engagement.

The work of Haya Alsalama demonstrates that even in a more 'open' seeming system, daily abuses are enacted upon residents of AZC centres. Alsalama makes visual the distinct and yet, to the outside, seemingly abstract forms of oppression that asylum seekers face in the Netherlands. It is not enough to consider AZC centres as extensions of the local community, but once again there must be a complete rethinking on how insider/outsider identity is constructed, and the role spatial and temporal movements play in this. Integration cannot come at the cost of assimilation.

In the context of Ireland, where institutional abuse has been rampant, and where today calls for an abolishment of Direct Provision go unanswered, *The Asylum Archive* has forced the state to recognise these abuses. As of the end of 2019, *The Asylum Archive* will be preserved in the Digital Repository of Ireland. This is a national digital repository of Ireland's cultural heritage data. This is no small achievement, particularly when we consider that those living within Direct Provision are yet to be considered as citizens of the nation. Nedeljkovic and other activists calling for an end to Direct Provision also met with Irish President Michael D. Higgins. With the Irish political landscape shifting away from the parties which founded

direct provision, a demand for an end to deportations and an abolishment of this system is what one must advocate for.

In bringing these two bodies of work together, I hope to illustrate the ways in which those living within asylum systems navigate and form daily resistance. This photographic material makes visible existences which by their very nature must resist against processes working to make them invisible. Archiving and documenting this existence makes it impossible for state powers to deny their happening. These works call on individuals to act for an end to the dehumanising institutionalisation of asylum seekers.

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