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The political mobilities of reporting: tethering, slickness and asylum control

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the coerced mobilities associated with reporting, meaning the mandatory requirement to regularly check-in with authorities for the purpose of control. Drawing on recent calls for a politics of mobility and advances in carceral geographies, we attend to the forces, movements, speeds and affective materialities of reporting with a focus on deportable migrants and the UK Home Office. In doing so we develop two conceptual lenses through which to further understand the politics of mobility. First, we develop the concept of 'slickness' in the context of the process of becoming detained at a reporting event. We understand slickness as a property of bodies and objects that makes them easier to move. Second, we argue that reporting functions to 'tether' deportable migrants; thereby not only fixing them in place, but also forcing the expenditure of energy and the experience of punishment. The result is that reporting blurs the distinction between detention and 'freedom' by enacting the carceral in everyday spaces.

KEYWORDS

Mobility; asylum; tethering; slickness; reporting; detention

Introduction

As part of the security apparatus that is applied to them in the UK, asylum seekers and foreign national offenders (FNOs) must 'sign on' either at police stations or reporting centres operated by the UK Visas and Immigration Agency (UKVI; a branch of the UK Home Office). Failure to report can be met with the threat of detention, loss of accommodation and financial support, a criminal record, as well as creating a permanent blot on one's Home Office case files (see [Figure 1](#)). Reporting plays a key role in the UK government's strategy of controlling the mobilities of asylum seekers within its borders by providing a space of contact between asylum seekers and the Home Office. Reporting centres act as the spaces in which a person can be detained while hidden from public view and are, therefore, 'located at the intersection between deportability and deportation' ([Hasselberg 2014, 472](#)). Nonetheless reporting centres and the mobilities associated with the practice of reporting have thus far received little academic attention.

Our analysis of the mobilities associated with the practice of reporting takes place amidst the call for a deeper engagement with the 'politics of mobility'. For [Cresswell \(2010\)](#) both the forms of mobility as well as the aspects of mobilities (movement, representation, and practice) should be considered as political and implicated in the production of power. Possibilities of motion depend on the existing 'governance structures, histories, power relations, and embodied experiences' of those on the move ([Nikolaeva et al. 2018, 8](#)). Following [Moran et al's \(2012\)](#) research on prisoner transport in Russia, scholars of carceral geography have become attentive to the mobilities

If you've missed your appointment

You must contact your caseworker within 7 days of your missed appointment.

If you can't contact your caseworker, use the contact number that's on your immigration paperwork.



You may face penalties if you don't attend your appointment. Your asylum support (money and housing) could be withdrawn. You could receive an unlimited fine, a criminal record or a 6 month prison sentence.

Figure 1. Shows a snapshot taken from the UK Home Office website. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/immigration-reporting-centres>.

inherent within carceral spaces and their disciplinary effects. Gill et al. (2018) have developed the concept of 'circuits' in order to follow and make sense of the movements of people, objects and practices in the carceral milieu. Meanwhile Moran, Turner, and Schliehe (2017) trace the carceral beyond the confines of prison spaces and contend that *carcerality* is achieved in spaces where detriment, intentionality and spatial confinement coalesce. As with any body of work, however, there remain both conceptual and empirical gaps to be filled.

Salter (2013), for example, has argued that the 'new mobilities turn', while making large strides away from state-centrism and the romanticisation of mobility, has not sufficiently engaged with critical border studies and recent research concerning security. Where much of the scholarship that has sought to combine work on individuals' mobilities in the context of cross-border migration and asylum has predominantly focused on developing a politics of waiting and stasis (see Bayart 2007; Bourdieu 2000; Hage 2009; Gray 2011), here we attend to the roles that micro-mobilities play in the enforcement of stasis and the control of asylum seekers. We offer two advances in this direction through our analysis of reporting; namely 'slickness' as a quality that facilitates movement and 'tethering' as a strategy of mobility control. We focus on the case of people seeking asylum in the UK as a specific category of deportable migrants.

First, with respect to slickness, there has been little attention paid to the mobilities associated with the process of becoming detained. While there has been much exemplary work on the debilitating effects of detention on the physical and mental wellbeing of detainees (see Bosworth 2014; Conlon and Hiemstra 2014) and the transportation and confinement of asylum seekers to island detention centres and 'hotspots' such that they can be spatially, temporally and legally 'fixed' (Mountz 2011; Mountz et al. 2012; Tazzioli 2018), the movements, speeds, forces, affective intensities and governmental intents of *detaining* have rarely been placed at the forefront of analysis. In this paper we introduce the concept of 'slickness' in order to understand the mobilities that accompany the transformation of an asylum seeker into a 'detained asylum seeker'. Not a distinctive form of mobility, 'slickness' instead refers to a *quality* of a person or thing that allows their movements to be more easily facilitated. In the context of detention, therefore, slickness is a desirable property of a detainee from the perspective of the authorities. While being 'slick' might be perceived as positive in another context (e.g. for commuters or shipping containers), when applied to asylum seekers, the result is that they can be more easily inserted into the covert flows of immigration removal.¹

Second, concerning tethering, although there has been much critical work published regarding the governing of asylum seekers in the UK, there has been little consideration of the role that regular, coercive, short-distance movements play in the control of asylum seekers. Attention has instead predominantly focused on longer-distance, infrequent forced movements between detention centres (Gill 2009), the effects of the UK government's policy of 'dispersing' asylum seeker

accommodation to areas outside London (Zetter, Griffiths, and Sigona 2005; Darling 2011),² and the role that letters from the Home Office (Darling 2014) as well as smart identity and spending cards have in limiting asylum seekers' movements (Klein and Williams 2012; Fisher 2018a). A central aim of this article is to demonstrate how the regular enforced movements of reporting serve to enact the carceral in the daily lives and everyday spaces that asylum seekers inhabit outside of detention centres (see Coddington 2017). To do this we have developed tethering as a type of mobility control. We take tethering to refer to the imposition of stasis through the enforcement of regular circular movements. The concept allows us to draw attention to both the role that reporting plays in 'fixing' asylum seekers in place (Michalon 2017), as well as the separation it enacts between asylum seekers and society. Focusing on the draining physical and mental effects of this form of mobility control, moreover, we argue that friction is intentionally applied as a governmental effect through the practice of tethering.

The article is organised as follows. In the next section the ways in which coerced mobility have been conceptualised by geographers and mobility scholars are critically reviewed, with particular attention paid to the disciplining potential and intensities of mobility. In the third section, the methodology we have employed to examine reporting and the process of detaining asylum seekers in the UK is set out. The fourth section focuses on the generation of 'slickness' by following the experiences of two former detainees as they describe the traumatic mobilities they experienced when being detained. In the fifth section we elucidate further what we understand by tethering; specifically focusing on how the micro-mobilities associated with reporting deplete the reserves of asylum seekers, effect their immobility, and are both intended and experienced as a form of punishment. As a result, we argue that reporting centres and the practice of 'signing on' function to enact the carceral in asylum seekers' everyday lives and spaces. We conclude the article by considering how the concepts of slickness and tethering might further inform mobilities and carceral scholarship in more general ways.

Coerced (Im)mobility

The mobilities turn has worked to un-romanticise mobility and to deconstruct the association between freedom and mobility (Hyndman 1997; Adey 2006). Mobilities scholars have, in particular, worked to unpack how the movements of some people are closely tied up in the immobilities of others. In the modern world of elite travel, therefore, the phenomena of immobility and stasis feature as background: both subordinate and essential to high-speed mobilities (Urry 2003). Salter's (2013) work on global circulation furthers our understanding of the relationship between mobility and immobility by viewing both as techniques of the same assemblage rather than as opposite sides of the system. As a result, spaces such as the 'Jungle' in Calais or off-shore detention centres (Mountz 2011), should not be thought of as antithetical to the production of global flows (Hyndman and Giles 2011). Instead, the governmental mobile biopolitics that manages circulation does so by both facilitating movement as well as immobilising potential threats.

Despite the call for a 'politics of mobility' (Cresswell 2010), however, Moran, Piacentini, and Pallot (2012) argue that the mobilities turn has largely overlooked the issue of how mobility can be forced upon others. More specifically, Moran, Piacentini, and Pallot (2012) contend that the mobilities literature has predominantly conceptualised mobility as a 'thing' which is either possessed or not, rather than viewing mobility as an instrument of power. Perhaps counter-intuitively, it is in this context that the body of work in carceral geographies has done the most to push the 'new mobilities paradigm' forward (Moran, Gill, and Conlon 2013). Though the fixed walls, visible security systems and imaginaries of immobile prisoners 'doing time' give the impression of static environments, spaces of incarceration are nonetheless underscored by mobilities (Peters and Turner 2013; Philo 2014). Routines and schedules, rather than enforced stasis, are what produce 'prison time' (Martel 2006). Key to these routines is that they have a 'coercive edge, as inmates are shunted through the spatio-temporal conveyor belt of (some variant of) cells, canteen, work, recreation, showers and back to cells day after day' (Gill et al. 2018, 189).

Peters and Turner (2015; Turner and Peters (2017)) have used the convict ship as a means of both challenging the binary thinking that maintains a separation between moments of fixity and movement in carceral logics, as well as overcoming the horizontal bias in mobilities literatures. Elsewhere, Gill et al. (2018) contend that carceral space is constituted through a landscape of 'circuitry'; the prison and detention-industrial complex being dependent on the swift movement of people and objects between sites. The practice of forced movements of persons between prisons, often referred to as 'ghosting', for example, has long been a strategy of the penal system to disturb, disorient and threaten prisoners into submission (Collins and Burns 1992). Aside from working to discipline prisoners, 'ghosting', has also been recorded as a common tactic used in detention centres in both the UK and North America – where it functions to sever ties between detainees and support groups or detention staff (Gill 2009; Hiemstra 2013). In other words, space should not be considered according to a binary of carceral or non-carceral. Instead Moran, Turner, and Schliehe (2017) argue that 'carcerality' is a continuum dependent on the enactment of three conditions: when detriment is *experienced*, there is *intent* to punish and cause detriment, and there exists a carceral *space* in which intent and detriment can be enacted, experienced and contested.

By following Moran, Turner, and Schliehe (2017) in considering the carceral to be a gradient rather than binary, new spaces, logics, temporalities and mobilities of carcerality can be interrogated. In their study of the electronic monitoring (EM) of former detainees, Klein and Williams (2012) demonstrate how the carceral is enacted in the everyday lives of former detainees through the humiliation, physical irritation and stigma that ankle tags create. Due to the pains of imprisonment with EM and the disciplinary logics of self-betterment that it engenders, Gill (2013) argues that EM strategies fundamentally disrupt the relationship between mobility and freedom.

It is in this context, where carceral spaces have become blurred with everyday social spaces, that we introduce the concept of tethering. In relation to EM, the ankle tag functions as the physical device which ties a person to a specific location, enacts the governmental intention of disciplining mobilities from a distance and ensures that the wearer experiences tagging as a punishment (Gill 2013). Through developing the concept of tethering, however, we can question where and how this form of carcerality has been achieved without the use of physical devices attached to the body. Michalon (2017), for example, details how the governance of asylum seekers in Romania is aimed at incentivising asylum seekers to self-limit their movements. This self-limitation is accomplished through the tethering of asylum seekers to specific accommodation centres which they must return to each night. If asylum seekers are found to not be sleeping in the centre, their asylum applications can be rejected on the basis of 'non-sincerity' (Michalon 2017). We develop the concept of tethering further by detailing the ways in which the practice of reporting functions to enact the carceral in the everyday lives of asylum seekers. In particular we use the concept of tethering to maintain a fourfold focus on the ways in which reporting functions to discipline the mobilities of asylum seekers, punish their continued presence, spatially fix them in order to facilitate their detention and, at the same time, deplete their energies by requiring repeated micro-movements.

Now we turn to the concept of sickness. The spaces through which asylum seekers and undocumented migrants must travel are, in the vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), 'striated' as opposed to 'smooth': such that their mobilities are regulated and moulded by rules, obstacles and boundaries. As we demonstrate later in the paper, moreover, the mobile acts of reporting and becoming detained are extremely 'intense experiences' – where intensity refers to the extent to which one becomes involved in a mode of travel (Bissell, Vannini, and Jensen 2017). In writing of the intensities of supercommuting, for example, Bissell et al. (2017, 807) state that 'involvement [...] arises from having to constantly negotiate risk, accidents, fatigue, stress, anxiety, and discomfort with the variable atmospheres and surfaces travelled through, as well as having to continuously assess and monitor conditions, and having to repeatedly anticipate, decide, act, and react to those changing travel dynamics.'

While mobilities scholarship has been successful in developing understandings of the variable intensities of involvement required from numerous types of traveller (see Bissell 2010; Sharma 2013), this focus has been predominantly centred on regular forms of voluntary transport (e.g. commuting

and business-related travel). In contrast, here we attend to the politics of coerced movements. We discuss what happens when people become detained and, unlike supercommuters, our research points towards the importance of instances in which they are unable to cope with the intensities involved in the process of becoming detained. In these cases, the mobilities detainees experience demand more from them than they can provide (see Sheller 2008). Key to our discussion is the intentionality behind the forces and affective materialities encapsulated within these movements, which we interrogate by introducing the concept of slickness. Where space can be rendered smooth or striated (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), we argue that people and things can be made slick in order to facilitate their movement through space. Where slickness is achieved for the kinetic elite through the possession of travel documents from wealthy nations, money and knowledge of transport systems, we demonstrate how slickness can also be achieved through violent interchanges of speed and stasis in hidden spaces such that a detainee can be traumatised into a state of temporary docility that renders them moveable.

Context and methods

The regularity with which one can be expected to report to the UKVI can appear arbitrary, though it is roughly dependant on the progression of a person's asylum case as well as their perceived risk of absconding. Recent claimants are often given weekly reporting dates, while those whose cases have become protracted are sometimes not required to report for up to six months. While the actual appointments can last just a few minutes (ICIBI 2017), frequent delays inside reporting centres mean that going to sign on can take hours beyond the stipulated two-hour time slot and result in lengthy queues, often standing outside the reporting centres in all weather conditions. In many police stations in the UK, UKVI officials are given space at the reception desks a few days a week. Reporting centres, by contrast, are located within Home Office buildings and are dedicated spaces in which asylum seekers and foreign national offenders must check-in with authorities. From the moment of their entry, those who have been called to sign on are subjected to intense scrutiny. They are forced to pass through a metal detector, remove their belts and sometimes their shoes, and to have their bags searched. In 2013 an image taken from within the reporting centre in Glasgow sparked widespread controversy, as it showed the barrage of advertisements plastered around the reporting centre encouraging asylum seekers and FNOs to accept voluntary return to their countries of origin – including a poster with the tag line 'Is life here hard? Going home is simple' (see Figure 2).

The process of reporting often involves more than the simple signing of one's name. UKVI officials frequently use the face-to-face meetings at reporting events to probe asylum seekers' stories without their lawyers being present (Burrige 2019). Similarly the meetings can be used to interrogate those living without support in order to draw out a confession of illegal work or convincing them to accept Assisted Voluntary Return (Fisher 2018a).³ Reporting and the spaces in which people are forced to report, therefore, play a much larger role in the UK government's management of the asylum population than the simple monitoring of their whereabouts. According to a Home Office spokesperson: 'Reporting centres are a vital part of our work to progress cases as quickly as possible, to encourage the voluntary return of people who have no basis of stay in the UK and enforce returns where necessary' (The GazetteLive, 19 November 2014).

Reporting spaces also provide the means of detaining and removing individuals without resorting to potentially media-worthy immigration raids. The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICBI 2017) found that, between 1 April and 30 September 2016, 2,646 people were detained whilst reporting (ICBI 2017); a figure which Corporate Watch (2018) estimate equates to 18% of detentions at this time. Detentions at reporting events, therefore, are not uncommon occurrences. Worse, the ICIBI (2017, 20) also reported that '[s]taff at the London Reporting Centres worked on the basis that to meet their removal targets they needed to detain twice the number of individuals, as around half of those detained would later raise a barrier to



Figure 2. Shows an image taken from within the reporting centre in Glasgow – the chairs and walls have been canvassed with material convincing those reporting to enquire about ‘going home’ (credit Robert Perry).

removal and be released from detention.’ Such policies illustrate the de-humanising prioritisation of numbers and metrics over the discomfort and trauma of those involved that typifies the British asylum system (Gill 2016).

Reporting spaces form a link between the city, the detention estate, the covert flows of immigration enforcement and spaces beyond the territorial boundaries of the UK. When we consider that around 80,000 people are required to report on a regular basis in the UK (ICBI 2017), the reporting centre can be considered the emblematic institution of the carceralisation of the city. The reporting centres and police stations where reporting take place have a complex geography that extends beyond the waiting areas and glass-fronted booths (Schmid-Scott 2018). The buildings in which reporting takes place must have the capacity to detain persons, classified by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) as “short-term holding facilities” (STHFs) for reporting centres and “custody suites” for police stations. These are used to detain persons before transfer to immigration removal centers (IRCs; more commonly referred to as detention centers). Despite the significance of reporting centres, to date the UK government has provided little publicly available information on the use or location of STHFs and custody suites for immigration and asylum reporting. A Freedom of Information Request found that in June 2016 there were fourteen individual reporting centres located within Home Office buildings across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland as well as three regions in England where reporting is held in police station custody suites.⁴ Neither the location or number of police stations have been disclosed. While over half of all people required to report sign on at one of the three centres in London, 10% sign at a local police station (Corporate Watch 2018).

The empirical material used in this article is based on participant observation and critical engagement with solidarity groups working with people seeking asylum in the UK over a combined three-year period. Critical engagement ‘attempts to create a place within resistance from which to write, recognizing that the voices of those involved in struggles are distinct from the social science literature that seeks to study and explain such struggles’ (Routledge 1996, 406). Our positionality, therefore, is in solidarity with those who are regularly forced to report to the UK Home Office and who face detention. The research we conducted included accompanying asylum

seekers to their reporting events, upon their request to be accompanied, acting as the first point of contact for people recently detained and providing emotional support for those on their way to or from reporting. Recorded interviews were also conducted with asylum seekers who had previously been detained in order to gain a better understanding of the detention procedures that occur in spaces inaccessible to the general public. The interviews took place in safe locations chosen by the participants. Some interviewees also requested that a friend accompany them or remain nearby for the research interviews. For each participant either verbal or written consent was sought⁵; specifying our research interests, the anonymisation of their identities and that they were free to end the interview (and the recording device) at any time.

As we were accompanying within previously established support groups, ethical protocols to assure the safety of those reporting were already in place, and the authors ascribed to these. Further ethical clearance was established both at Exeter University and Edinburgh University. All interviewees were anonymised, no reference is made to their country of origin, and no information was recorded regarding their specific asylum appeal. Further specific dates of interviews, locations and interviewees' nationalities are not attached to their responses, to remove the ability to connect quotes to interviewees by the Home Office or any other authority.

Our requests for a formal interview with the Home Office were rejected, as were informal requests for information from officials at reporting centres whom we met while accompanying those signing on. We also had numerous Freedom of Information Requests asking for the locations of reporting sites at police stations rejected. As a result, we have researched the actions and intents of the Home Office through our observations and interviews with asylum seekers, documentary analysis of Home Office regulatory guidelines and independent inspection reports.

Access and involvement was negotiated with two support groups. The first group, *Bristol Signing Support* emerged from a request for accompaniment in 2011 by several asylum seekers attending *Bristol Refugee Rights*, a local user-led organisation that provides support for asylum seekers who have been dispersed or have chosen to live in Bristol. The second field site and group have been anonymised due to the author's separate agreement with the support group for anonymity.⁶ Although our presence and involvement was negotiated with the groups, our dual identities (as group members *and* researchers) were not always immediately evident. Where necessary we would remind both those reporting and the other volunteers of this. One of the benefits of being involved with the groups for an extended period of time was that we would frequently meet the same people during calmer circumstances in which we could clarify our position and ask for their permission to write about what we had seen.

To make 'slick'

As Urry (2007) and Peters (2015) have demonstrated, there is value unpacking mobilities into component parts in order to think through the specific politics and power relations that result from, and become contested through, particular typologies of motion. We draw on this approach in order to argue that the speeds, routes, forces and affective materialities that are enrolled in the turbulent process of becoming detained at reporting events serve to impose the desired quality of slickness upon detained asylum seekers such that they might be more easily removed from the UK.

Detention can come as a surprise – especially as people can be detained prior to their first claim being rejected or before they have reached the end of their appeals (Gill 2009). While a person who is not detained must be issued with a 'notice period' of seven calendar days prior to entering their 'removal window' – a three-month period during which they can be removed – they can still be detained prior to receiving notice (Home Office 2016, 2017). For those in detention, however, the notice period is just 72 hours (Home Office 2018). The notice period is a vital time for asylum seekers as it is the period in which they must work with their legal representative (or find a legal representative⁷) in order to stall and halt their potentially-immanent deportation.⁸ Yet the notice period often coincides with a time when asylum seekers are at their most distressed if they have been detained.

Most of our respondents who had been detained previously at a reporting event spoke of being asked to move from the semi-private booths in the reporting centres to a private room ostensibly in order to sign 'confidential documents' – following which they were informed of the fact that they were going to be detained. From the private room they were subsequently transferred to a secure holding facility within the reporting centre, from which they could then be transported to a detention centre. Below we follow an extended account of Maria,⁹ who was detained at her regular reporting event at a police station in England. The purpose of recounting her experience in detail is to demonstrate the extent to which deportable migrants are forced into a position of extreme precarity not only through entering a state of administrative detention, but also through the violent (im)mobilities that surround the act of detaining.

Maria: I was taken to the back of the police station, to take finger prints and personal information [...] I mean the whole thing was really traumatising... I was thinking that the whole time [...] 'why am I even put in jail when I haven't committed any crime?' Then I think they jailed someone who was drunk on the street and maybe got into a fight [...] and he was banging on the door the whole time, [...] PAM PAM PAM! I [just kept] on shaking and thinking 'What's going on?' [...] it was really awful to hear doors closing really hard.

DF: Did they come to collect you in the evening?

Maria: Yes, they did. They came to collect me, they woke me in the middle of the night. I guess it was like 3am. And they came to pick me up, and I was like, 'I don't understand!' They were saying, 'You are going.' But, 'Where am I going? I just woke up and you are telling me that I am going. Where am I going? With who? To where?' They were again, 'You have to check out.' It was not the driver, maybe the escort and she was asking me things and I was like, 'I don't understand what you are saying at all.' She said, 'You just woke up?' I replied 'Yes, I just woke up and I don't know where you are taking me. I don't understand anything anyway.' So I was put into a van [...] and I was taken to Dungavel [IRC in Scotland] in the middle of the night. So I arrived in Dungavel around 6am, checked in again, picture taken, finger prints, medical record [...] The experience was all really shocking and it pulls you down in such a terrible way. I was taken on Wednesday and brought to Dungavel on a Thursday and I remember I was crying from Thursday to Sunday. I just couldn't stop at all...

Throughout Maria's ordeal she understood almost nothing of what was happening to her, where she would be taken, how long she would be there for and, most importantly, what her rights were. Worse, as a result of being transported almost two hundred miles away and into Scotland, she had also to find a new legal representative to handle her case and halt her removal directions. Yet, as Maria recounts above, she was in such a state of shock from having been kept for hours in the police station and transferred at night that she was unable to act and contact a lawyer for an additional four days. Under current legislation this meant she had only three days remaining to fight her possible deportation.¹⁰

Maria's experiences point towards numerous other areas for concern, in particular the levels of exhaustion and disorientation that people experience upon arriving at detention centres overnight. In a recent report written by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIP 2018), 200 people (20%) arrived at Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) overnight between July and September 2017. Over a third of detainees were found to have arrived at Yarl's Wood IRC overnight in a similar inspection (HMCIP 2017). This form of transportation can have severe effects on peoples' mental wellbeing at a time when they are most at risk of being removed. Further, 85% of those interviewed in the Harmondsworth inspection stated they had experienced problems upon arrival concerning loss of property during transportation, access to legal advice, health issues and loss of contact with family, while over half claimed to have felt depressed and/or had suicidal thoughts (HMCIP, 2018). In the interview excerpt below, Deborah, a former detainee at Yarl's Wood IRC and survivor of torture,¹¹ recounts her experience of being detained in the morning and

transported late at night. Like Maria she arrived physically and mentally exhausted, yet Deborah reveals another key consequence of this form of violent movement:

Deborah: They put you in the back like a criminal [...] You get [to the IRC] around 11pm, when everybody is sleeping. And you are SO TIRED. They said, 'Go and see the nurse.' [...] My mind couldn't register anything: 'Where am I? What is happening? What's going on?' I just couldn't understand it. It was strange, it was traumatising [...] They search you and give you all these forms. They tell you to go and see the nurse. The nurse will be asking you questions... I was so tired.

DF: So did you manage to tell the nurse everything you had to tell them?

Deborah: No, he will just ask you about your medical record and whether or not you have had an operation and things like that. If you forget to tell them your Rule 35, the one where you have to tell them if you have some marks on your body, if you don't tell them they'll take it that you don't have evidence. And if you ask for it later, they might refuse because they'll say, 'Whatever you told the nurse on the first day, we'll take that information.' Because they know you are tired, what you're thinking is bad. So they have drained you out already, so that by the time you get there you are tired. You just want to finish up and go.

Rule 35 of the Detention Centre Rules concerns anyone whose health is likely to be 'injuriously affected' by detention, survivors of torture and anyone suspected of suicidal intentions.¹² It requires that medical professionals in the detention centre healthcare units bring such people to the attention of the Home Office case owners responsible for deciding on their continued detention (Phelps 2014). The failings of the 'Rule 35' reporting process in detention centres in the UK have already been discussed in detail in the Shaw (2016) review of welfare in detention of vulnerable persons and in various independent inspections of detention centres (HMCIP, 2017, 2018). In particular, these reports have focused on the lack of training available to medical staff to conduct satisfactory 'Rule 35' reports, the Home Office's refusal to acknowledge rape as a form of torture and the Home Office's frequent refusal to release detainees who have produced medical evidence of torture. None of these reports, however, have questioned the strain put on detainees due to their enforced movements prior to arrival and the effects this has in contributing to the failure of the 'Rule 35' procedure. In Deborah's case, in particular, the combined stress of having been held in a secure room for over ten hours, the disorienting movements and her transportation 'like a criminal' overnight in the back of a securitised Home Office van, as well as the hasty interview with the nurse, meant that it was two weeks before she could tell anyone in the detention centre of her previous ordeals. During these two weeks, Deborah recalls feeling traumatised, as she refused to eat, leave her room, or organise a meeting with her legal representatives.

The UK government has consistently defended the use of (indefinite) detention as a means of creating a 'firm but fair immigration system, helping to ensure that those with no right to remain in the UK are returned to their home country if they will not leave voluntarily' (Nokes 2018, 1). The logic behind detention is simple: render a person immobile in a detention centre such that they can be removed swiftly once travel documents have been arranged. In other words, the disciplinary power of the state, in this respect, is not solely to 'fix' in place. Rather, it is to fix in order to make move. The imposition of violent movements assist in this gambit; serving to discipline detainees into a state of traumatised docility such that they might provide little resistance during their removal windows. The speed produced through discipline in their cases was not of their *autonomous* bodily movement, rather it was of the extent to which their bodies had been made slick to the point they could be swiftly transported to an airport and removed from the country. Slickness, therefore, refers not to the smooth running of the Home Office's logistics, rather we understand slickness to be a quality forced upon the bodies of asylum seekers to encourage their swift coerced mobility. Importantly, this process of rendering Deborah and Maria docile commenced long before they entered their respective detention centres. For both women, the violent stasis they experienced in the secluded areas of the reporting

centres and transfer vans replete with blacked-out windows and security cameras had a profound effect on their bodies and minds such that they were already in a state of comparative docility and cut off from sources of support upon their arrival.

The consequences of being made slick at the point of becoming detained have become even more serious in recent years, following the Immigration Act of 2014. Under this policy asylum seekers can now be removed from the country without first spending a night in detention if they do not manage to communicate to the centre staff that their circumstances have sufficiently changed, they wish to contact their legal representation, submit a new asylum claim or challenge the decision to remove them through the courts (Home Office 2017). At the time of writing, people can legally be transported from reporting centres (in which there are no lawyers present) and taken directly to an airport to be removed. This new policy has created concerns that the practice of immediate removal to an airport will become more commonly applied, severely reducing the ability and necessary time to advocate for persons detained, who legally may still have a right of appeal.

Tethering

While the border has often been conceptualised as a 'sifting apparatus' designed to sort 'embodied flows of travellers according to their mobility entitlements' (Weber and Bowling 2008 360), those we accompanied at reporting centres had not been sifted out altogether, nor were they kept immobile in a camp-like space. Their every move was not being monitored either, though neither were they completely free to circulate. Instead they were tethered to a particular place through the regular requirement to report. Given these properties, reporting, we argue, should be understood as a distinct form of mobility control which works through restricting peoples' ability to travel or leave their homes for any amount of time. This fixes people to known locations for the UK government and immigration authorities whilst simultaneously both permitting and requiring micro-mobilities. There is a need to understand the functions of these micro-mobilities in the overall system of governance.

For most asylum seekers, the time it takes to fulfil their reporting requirements is dependent on whether or not they have access to a travel allowance, which is only provided for asylum seekers receiving Section 95 support (i.e. those who are still awaiting a decision on their first asylum claim). Travel allowances are withheld from those receiving Section 4 support (for 'refused asylum seekers' classified as destitute by the Home Office), those considered self-sufficient or eligible for work and those who are ineligible for any form of support and are thus often destitute and with no recourse to legal employment. For these groups the only means of reaching their reporting requirements is often to walk or cycle if they can access a bicycle (Smith 2018). Yet those without travel support are typically also required to report most frequently, often on a weekly basis, due to their high susceptibility to being deported. Reporting, therefore, can be extremely physically demanding for those who live on £36.95¹³ per week or who, if they receive no support, often rely on the assistance of food banks for sustenance. The result of being forced to regularly report to the Home Office when living on little or no funds is that travel beyond the immediate area to visit friends and family can become almost impossible. Maria, for example, has never returned to the city in which she first lived in the UK and where she had developed numerous friendships.

Occurring within the wider politics of privatising asylum and the framing of asylum seekers as a 'burden' (Tyler et al. 2014; Darling 2016), several Home Office buildings and local police stations have in recent years undergone closure in efforts to consolidate resources and cut costs. In Bristol, for example, the reporting location was changed in 2014 from a police station in the centre of town to a new regional police 'super center' in Patchway, located seven miles north of Bristol in South Gloucestershire. The move to Patchway, despite fierce local campaigns and lobbying (Burrige 2019), has drastically increased the distances that people are required to travel – to the extent that some who are homeless sleep wherever they can nearby in order to cut their journey times. Other

examples of cities where reporting has been relocated include Newcastle, Birmingham, and Leicester (ibid). Aside from highlighting the fundamental inequality of who and what can move in this context, these relocations also demonstrate the manner in which attrition and the imposition of distance can be used as governmental strategies to fix people in place, which deserve closer scrutiny.

Friction and, more specifically, the ‘friction of distance’ have been utilised in mobilities literatures and critical geopolitics in two ways. For Scott (2009) friction can threaten the establishment of state power: the ‘friction of distance’ refers to the challenges posed by terrain to state control and which can be manipulated by local groups as a ‘weapon of the weak’ (see also Fisher 2018b). For Cresswell (2015), friction can, conversely, be deliberately used by the state in order to impede the movements of those that threaten it:

This is the friction of the national border or the gate of the gated community. It is often territorial in form and protects the strategic interests of those who are invested in limiting the mobilities of the multitude.

What we discovered in Patchway, however, is a third relation between friction and state power. Specifically, we came across the use of distance and friction as a means of dissipating asylum seekers’ energies without the use of a physical ‘border’. Friction, is applied to wear down bodies and personal mental reserves. The requirements of reporting produce friction which comes to dominate the lifeworlds of the marginalised and depleted. The relation between slickness and friction is also apparent from our findings. Just as sandpaper smooths abrasive wood, the friction applied to asylum seeking subjects is aimed at rendering them slick and poised for movement – such as deportation – at the behest of sovereign power.

Thus distance and friction are used to further the ‘politics of discomfort’ (Darling 2011), aimed at creating a hostile environment for asylum seekers. The added distance and disorientation of moving reporting centres increases the risk of people failing to meet their reporting requirements – as well as the physical effort required to meet them – thus increasing the risk of being detained for ‘non-compliance’. While attending reporting requirements can be physically demanding, reporting can also become mentally exhausting as people regularly fear the threat of detention at each event. George, a former detainee, recounted how he would read into any slight change of reporting requirements, or even the lack of changes if they had been waiting for a long time:

The more you go to sign at the Home Office, the more stress you have... the more you think: [...] ‘Why are they asking me to come sign every day? Maybe they want to detain me. Maybe my travel documents, they are nearly there. Why don’t they give me six months, or three months? Oh my God, they’re going to kill me, they’re going to deport me!’

For many recent arrivals in the UK, reporting is one of the few times when they leave the comparative safety of their homes. As a result, they are regularly threatened by the country in which they had hoped to find safety. Arman, an Iranian asylum seeker who was detained upon arrival at Manchester airport, for example, reflects on the hardships of weekly reporting over five years in the following terms:

Whenever [I] ask to change it, they say, ‘No, because you are outside [on] bail. You can’t change it.’ But it’s not true, because they can change it, but they don’t want to. Because I think it’s like harassment. They just want to put us in a difficult situation, to make us give up and decide to go back.

For people in Arman’s position, the threat of being detained is no longer the worst aspect of their reporting requirements. In being forced to return to the reporting centre every week, Arman and others in the same position are forcibly reminded of their difference, their Otherness routinely reinforced. Aside from asserting this invisible barrier between asylum seekers and the community (Khosravi 2010), reporting also forcibly enacts their exclusion. Arman must find excuses for his colleagues to explain his regular absences as, like many others in his situation, he keeps his status secret from those he knows. Asylum seekers and FNOs are not therefore completely excluded from

circulation. Their stasis and exclusion from society are, instead, enforced by the Home Office through their tethering to reporting centres.

Conclusion

A tree once stood in the slave-trading port of Ouidah, Benin, called the 'Tree of Forgetfulness'. Prior to being incarcerated on the ships headed for South America, slavers would force their captives to walk around the tree; nine times for men and seven for women and children. The purpose of this tree-circling was to enforce amnesia; to make the soon-to-be slaves forget their previous lives, families and names (Rowlandson 2010). Such was the fate of the 'abject citizens' of the first iteration of the modern world – their exclusion from society initiated and performed through a ritualised form of walking. In this article we have examined the practice of reporting as another form of ritualised movement for the purpose of controlling. In contrast to the slaves in 17th and 18th century Benin, however, the asylum seekers and FNOs that we encountered on their (mostly) circular journeys were being forced to remember, rather than to forget. With every repeated journey to the reporting centre or police stations, asylum seekers' exception is performed and (re)made visible to them.

Through our focus on reporting, our aim has been to enhance the links between migration, carceral and mobility literatures and, as a result, to further knowledge of what Cresswell (2010) has termed the 'politics of mobility'. Following Peters (2015), we have considered reporting as a distinct typology of mobility in order to identify its specific politics and the power relations that sustain and result from it. In attending to the various speeds, routes, forces and affective materialities that are involved in reporting and the process of becoming detained at reporting events, we are able to put forward two distinct contributions to mobilities scholarship.

First, we have introduced the concept of slickness as it applies to the mobilities involved in the process of detaining asylum seekers and FNOs at reporting centres. We understand slickness to be a quality of a body or object that facilitates its movement. In using the concept, we have drawn attention to the intentionality of its production. We have argued that detainees are purposefully primed for further movement through the intense and violent forces that are applied to them in the process of becoming detained.

Second, we have explored the phenomenon of tethering as it relates to mobility and immobility. Tethering refers to the simultaneous constraining and affordance of mobility: wider mobilities are constrained but micro-mobilities are allowed, encouraged or required. This configuration of mobilities within immobilities, we have argued, is related to the dissipation of energy. Requiring constant micro-mobilities achieves the depletion of personal resources, acting as part of a wider politics of exhaustion that contains unruly migrant subjects (for a discussion of the politics of exhaustion, see Ansems de Vries and Welander 2016). In the context of reporting, the concept of tethering (and its links to electronic tagging) also allows us to demonstrate how the carceral has become enacted in the everyday spaces that asylum seekers pass through.

The concepts of slickness and tethering are applicable to mobilities other than reporting. First, the politics of corporate slickness and in particular the readiness of global elites to move, offers one promising line of enquiry. The ethics of tethering animals in order to deplete their 'unwanted' energy, render them docile and facilitate their controlled movement also promises to shed more light on the politics of mobility that we have been discussing and, more broadly, to contribute towards recent advances in the study of animal welfare and carceral geography (Morin 2016). Another interesting direction is to consider forms of slickness and tethering that are resistant to state power. We might recognise the bodily preparedness of irregular migrants to flee and evade state power that is manifest in border control authorities' deportation attempts and dawn raids, for example, as a positive form of slickness. Concerning tethering, meanwhile, by monitoring who becomes detained and by acting as the contact point between recent detainees, their families and lawyers, support groups can be seen to act as anchor points linking detainees to their communities as they are transported throughout the detention estate (Fisher 2018a).

Finally, the two concepts demonstrate the necessity of re-centring the scale of (geo)political analysis to that of the body and to be attentive to the (enforced) movements of individuals in order to unpack the intents, effects and strategies of state power. If mobilities scholars have privileged the properties of surfaces in accounting for mobility in the past (via Deleuze and Guattari's 'smooth' and 'striated' spaces for example), slickness and tethering refocus attention upon the properties of the objects and people that move across them. We hope the arguments presented here will add to the exemplary work aimed at drawing out the connections between the intimate, global politics (Pain 2015) and the expanding spaces of capitalism (Conlon and Hiemstra 2016). There is already an urgent need for more critical research to investigate the politics, increasing speeds and profit-making of charter flights and other immigration removal practices.

Notes

1. While we recognise that that it is of great importance to think critically about the language used concerning asylum and migration (see Blommaert et al 2009), we have chosen to use the legal term 'removal' in order to reduce potential confusion. This term is also used by the organisations with whom we were volunteering.
2. The government's dispersal policy was designed to reduce 'the burden' of asylum seeker accommodation in areas of London. Dispersal to economically deprived and ethnically homogenous regions has created racial tension in these areas (Zetter, Griffiths, and Sigona 2005).
3. Incentives are offered to asylum seekers to accept return through 'Assisted Voluntary Return' (AVR) programs, where returnees can be eligible for a cash payment and some 're-integration support' upon arrival. Since 2015, the Home Office has run the AVR program directly.
4. The three regions listed were East of England, South Central England, and South West England.
5. On a few occasions the respondents were fearful of an official-looking document with their name on it declaring that they had partaken in the research.
6. The empirical material of this article is based on the combined experiences of two of the paper's authors – each of whom conducted separate participatory action research.
7. New Home Office (2018, 17) guidance does acknowledge the need to potentially extend the notice period where there is a delay caused by a change of legal representative, subject to 'the merits of the case [...] or there is cause to believe that the motive for the change is to bring about a postponement of removal.'
8. This removal policy is, at the time of writing, subject to a temporary block by the High Court following a legal challenge by the charity Medical Justice.
9. All interview respondents' names have been anonymised.
10. As the 'removal window' lasts for a period of three months, Maria would not have known when she might be forcibly returned.
11. Unlike Maria, Deborah was put on Detained Fast Track when she first reported to the Home Office for her 'Screening Interview' in London. While the fast-tracked system was deemed unlawful in 2015, victims of torture are still regularly detained by the Home Office (HCIP 2018).
12. Rule 35 of the statutory Detention Centre Rules can be read at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2001/238/contents/made>.
13. Equivalent to roughly €42.00 or US\$51 at the time of writing.

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