9. Conclusion

The core argument of this book is that the lives of applicants become decisively re-corded in practices of governing asylum. The term 're-cording' both hints at the *records* of asylum case-making crucial for inscribing asylum and the bodily, material, and discursive associations or *cords* with which their lives become entangled in such practices. These powerful yet heterogeneous associations, I have suggested, compose a *dispositif* (Foucault 1980, 194–95). Such a *dispositif* is both constitutive of practices of re-cording and itself constituted in them. This is why it has been called "a kind of arrangement that is, paradoxically, constituted by its own effects" (Pottage 2011, 164). The *dispositif* enables and mediates asylum encounters through its associations. It has developed in response to a problematisation, to address the "urgent situation" (Foucault 1980, 195) asylum seeking has posed to government and has stabilised through the 'strategic imperative' (ibid.) of both resolving such claims and addressing the 'problem' of claim-making. Both those applying for asylum and those involved in resolving such claims enact it by drawing on its rationalities and technologies for the re-association or, in my terms, re-cording of lives. And to come full circle: it is in such associations or cords that power resides (Latour 1984).

It is important to point out that becoming enrolled in the asylum *dispositif* as claimant is both subjugating and empowering. While I have mainly emphasised the subjugating effects of its associations so far – the re-cording of lives in terms of exclusion and expulsion that loom large in asylum case-making – the often equally likely more inclusionary re-cording of lives in terms of asylum or subsidiary protection tend to be overlooked. The asylum *dispositif* is empowering in the sense of Latour (2005) as it offers a host of associations people with otherwise little rights can assemble to make their claim heard – and this is arguably why asylum governance has put so much emphasis on externalisation and preventing people (of a certain kind) from

claim-making. Because once a claim has been made, there is the need for a *legal* resolution of the claim: and this offers claimants a range of legal remedies to draw on; and discourses of human rights and the rule of law; and a chance to make their plea heard and convince a caseworker of their plight. Of course, some of the subjugating facets that come with claim-making and re-cording lives in terms of asylum need to be reiterated here too: the excessive scrutiny of applicants' lives in encounters that contrasts with the superficial grasp of life stories and their rendering in decisions*; the uneven stakes of applicants and caseworkers in defining what counts as knowledge and truth – and what is on the record; and the changing terms – and at times reversals – of practice* while the records remain immutable. Ultimately, the ways of knowing and inscribing asylum in enactments of the *dispositif* re-cord applicants' lives in decisive ways and become mediators of potentially "sticky spaces" (Murphy 2013) – the territories of asylum.

My study has addressed a number of research questions. The key question, how asylum is governed in administrative practice, has been addressed by looking into the forms of knowledge and technologies for case-making (in Part I), processual events of case-making (in Part II), and the (de)stabilisation of practices in key convictions and political rationalities (in Part III). I point out the key empirical insights of my reading of governing asylum below (9.1). Conceptually, I have provided a novel reading of asylum governance by decentring common entry points such as the 'state', 'law', or 'bureaucracy'. I have drawn on the notion of governmentality to illuminate how asylum officials are themselves governed in their work and on the notion of the *dispositif* to consider not only the discursive practices but also material technologies and non-discursive practices required for 'making cases' and their relationality. I will review here the key merits of such a perspective (9.2). All these conceptual 'suggestions' should be read as mediators of the book's aim to link studies of mobilities and studies of asylum administrations. This has been achieved by providing a reading of mobilities and borders not as merely the context but constitutive of asylum cases and their assembling – through the notion of re-cording (9.3). While I have been able to follow some threads in this book, others await closure or retain open endings and point towards avenues to be pursued in the future (9.4).

9.1 Governing Asylum

Empirically, I have offered in this book an answer to the questions what it means to "*realise* that people really manifestly need protection" and what it takes to actually "*grant* them protection"' (as when speaking with Jonas, the caseworker cited in the introduction). This has involved considering preassembled conditions of knowing and making cases, the pragmatics of case-making, and the stabilising and transformative potentials arising from caseworkers' sense-making and coping related to the need to resolve permeating the *dispositif*.

Formatting Lives in Terms of Asylum

Two notions have allowed me to grasp practical and internalised forms of knowing necessary for case-making: heuristics and exemplars. Heuristics refer to the often-tacit rules of thumb about how to resolve cases in legal terms that evolve in practical experiences of case-making (see also Gigerenzer 2013). Senior officials and experienced caseworkers, however, convey such heuristics to facilitate new caseworkers their start. Exemplars are cases that make abstract legal notions operational and memorable (see also Kuhn 1967) as well as give them texture and grasp of the 'real'. Their scope and effects vary, but they can both reiterate and transform the conceptual landscapes of caseworkers. The notions of heuristics and exemplars, I argue, account for the dynamic and fragmented conceptual landscapes of the *dispositif*.

Agentic Formations for Case-Making

In order to do casework, humans enacting the *dispositif* not only have to know how to navigate cases, but need some fundamental 'equipment' to act as caseworkers. They are equipped with devices for accessing the physical as well as virtual spaces of case-making (badges and smartcards). They are moreover enrolled in collectives of case-making that are enacted in meetings and forms of super-vision. In order to do casework, caseworkers need to be equipped with devices that enable case resolution. I have introduced recording devices such as case files and their directories as mediators of the visibility of records; inscription devices such as linguistic tests that inscribe the origin of applicants through associating them with spaces of language and cultural socialisation; coordination devices such as the guidelines

(called APPA) that coordinate hearing questions and decisions* for countries of origin by suggesting common persecution scenarios and their legal consequences; and writing devices such as boilerplates that offer prewritten sentences for arguing with legal notions in asylum decisions*. All these devices operate as crucial mediators of case-making, which becomes particularly visible if they fail (Latour 2005).

Assembling Associations to Resolve Cases

Five "processual events" (Scheffer 2007a) are fundamental for practices of asylum case-making: openings, encounters, assignments, authentications, and closures. What all of these processual events have in common is that they are about generating fundamental (dis)associations required for cases' assembling and potential resolution. In the first kind of processual event, *openings*, cases' trajectories are crucially moulded as applicants become bodily recorded in terms of asylum. The performance of biometric borders (Amoore 2006) through fingerprinting associates the applicant with spaces of Dublin competence and may result in the rapid closure of the case. Under specific circumstances, cases may not become officially opened at all and their preliminary material records dropped.

In the second processual event, *encounters*, applicants' identity and persecution stories become associated with their cases in significant ways. Applicants and caseworkers encounter each other in two different hearings in which the so-called 'facts of the case' become inscribed in protocols. These encounters need to be considered as strongly mediated by interpreters, but also by forms and the techniques of caseworkers related to their need for 'utilisable statements'. Such techniques encompass modulating on- and off-the-record statements and formatting narratives with particular forms of questioning, for instance to test their spatiotemporal anchoring and ordering.

The third processual event concerns cases' *assignments*. Such assignments associate a case and its material case file for a certain time (and for the accomplishment of one or several other processual events) with a caseworker, a secretary, or a superior. Without a case being assigned to someone in the office, it cannot be forcefully acted upon and no records can be assembled in the case file. However, the administrative division of labour renders assignments limited in (spatiotemporal) scope and turns the 'passing on' of cases very common. This results in a fleeting ownership and limited account-abil-

ity of caseworkers concerning cases. Both assigned and non-assigned case files can moreover be sent to the 'archive', where they not only passively await further assembling but may also be reassembled. Case files become in a crucial sense enrolled in the archive's topological ordering through their "gathering together".

In *authentications*, the fourth kind of processual events, various forms of associations speaking the 'truth' are 'summoned to testify' for or against the applicants' case. Authentications may be part of encounters if country of origin questions are used to compare applicants' knowledge about their home country with 'facts'. They may consist of laborious investigations in applicants' places of origin in the example of embassy enquiries. The applicants themselves may also submit them in the form of material evidence ('proof' of identity, such as a passport; or indications of a certain form of persecution, such as with a marching order). And caseworkers may grasp 'reality signs' in applicants' (protocolled) accounts generated in encounters.

In the fifth and last processual event, *closures*, decisions* are written. I have highlighted that positive and negative decisions* are quite different in terms of writing practice and audience. The writing of the more common and laborious negative decisions* is facilitated by partially preassembled modes of argumentation and compendia of tried and tested justifications. Closures associate (former) applicants with either spaces of asylum or potential expulsion.

Excursus: Open/ended stories

A few cases became rather prominent in this monograph and their resolutions deserve to be briefly raised here: Yassir's case has been finally resolved at the European Court of Human Rights. The court rejected his appeal against the (negative) ruling of the Federal Administrative Court in 2017, more than four years after I had encountered him in the reception centre. This has meant that his removal to Sudan will become enforceable.[1] Issa, to my surprise, revoked his application while I was still doing research in the administration: he signed a declaration of withdrawal and returned with IOM-assistance to Guinea-Bissau. Amadou received a paperless decision* (DAWES) which became legally effective – whether he has been deported, and to Mali or Senegal, or disappeared, I could not find out.

1 See ECHR Affaire N.A. c. SUISSE, 2017.

Steadying Convictions and Exceptional Overflowing

Reflexive, meta-pragmatic facets of the asylum *dispositif* are traceable in caseworkers' notions of truth and law. I have teased out such convictions by which the *dispositif* becomes steadied. The crucial associations of cases with 'reality' are produced in practices of "truth-telling" (Foucault 2014a; 2014c). These practices rely on caseworkers' convictions about where truth can be found and what associations have to be mobilised for it to be spoken.

Caseworkers' convictions about truth-telling tend to shift the scope and location of doubt unduly away from their own work towards applicants. In order to produce an effect in the 'real', governing asylum involves the truth to be (re)written in legal terms. Truth is thus inscribed in two essential ways: in law's terms of associating lives and in associating law with life. The first concerns law's superficial and generic and thus forceful grasp of lives. Its relationship to justice is ambiguous both for its circularity and uncertain scope and grasp of the world 'outside law'. The latter finds expression in the 'lure of law', which means either to deny the interpretative scope of law (and reduce it to the practice*) or to unduly dilate its interpretative scope as a means to maximise or minimise protection. I have suggested that it can therefore only produce a certain justice.

The second means that law's abstract language for governing lives needs to be grounded in non-legal notions for its invocations to become meaningful. While case-making usually remains dissociated from the consequences of its resolutions, cases may still have an 'afterlife': they may become revelatory or disastrous cases for caseworkers or the whole office. Such an "overflowing" (Callon 2007b) of cases may overturn or reinforce certain convictions and modes of inscribing truths. Cases' overflows are thus conjunctures that transform ways of knowing and doing asylum – at times profoundly. But the way they are interpreted may also sustain convictions and thus contribute to the *dispositif's* stabilisation. Overall, these different states of conviction are crucial for understanding the "world-making functions" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012, 59) of case resolutions.

Reasonable Grounds, Ambiguous Reasons

Different rationalities are crucial for caseworkers and their superiors to make sense of their work. Caseworkers often display ambiguous positionalities regarding the scope of personal authorship they have. They have 'good reasons' for their approaches and strategies of case-making. Yet, such 'good

reasons' appear fragmented along various lines of practice, most obviously between the headquarters of the office and reception centres or between the management and the productive sections, and nurture different 'styles' of resolving cases. This fragmentation of 'reasonable grounds' to act upon cases has consequences for the response-ability of everyone involved as it tends to undermine ownership. Furthermore, crucial rationalities of governing asylum beyond law sustain the *dispositif*: productivity and deterrence. By consequence, each case is not only encountered as a case to be assembled and resolved, but also as a means to increase the productivity of the office and to deter potential future applicants. Central for governing asylum in terms of productivity are centres of calculation as they aggregate cases in 'backlogs', input and 'output' measurements and targets, and forecasts. Cases-in-the-making need thus to be considered in a more or less animated relationship with cases in co-formation, cases preceding them, but also with (imagined) successive ones. These different rationalities not only shift considerations of encounters with cases but also crucially affect cases' trajectory, the "timing and spacing" (Gill 2009) of processual events and their potential outcome. These 'non-legal' and at times contradictory rationalities of governing have an impact on the atmosphere in the office: the spark anxieties in terms of reaching output goals or generating an unwanted 'pull effect'. Moreover, the rationalities implicate an anticipatory and experimental mode of government that I have called experimentality. It involves testing the limits of legality, of output pressure, and deterrence (see also Heyman and Smart 1999). Finally, certain 'unreasonable associations' are exteriorised from the *dispositif* and removed from view: it seems that only a certain historical and geographical myopia allows for the *dispositif*'s smooth enactment. Hence, while people involved in the governing of asylum have 'good reasons' for acting the way they do, such reasons are fragmented, contradictory, or become exteriorised. In effect, the *dispositif* of governing asylum is not characterised by coherent reason but rather by what I metaphorically call patchy asylums of reason.

9.2 The Need to Resolve

> As theory interprets the world, it fabricates that world (…); as it names desire, it gives reason and voice to desire and thus fashions a new order of desire; as it codifies meaning, it composes meaning. (Brown 2002, 574)

My conceptual perspective on asylum governance and its entanglement in a "relational politics of (im)mobilities" (Adey 2006) has entailed an analytical move from state to government, from agency to reside solely in humans to reside in the associations of a *dispositif*, and from decision- to case-making. I will here not reiterate the justification for these moves (see Introduction and Chapter 2) but rather briefly outline their consequences – or in Brown's (2002, 574) terms, what "world it fabricates".

My account of asylum governance has not only considered relations of knowing asylum, but also relations of power – and how the two are intertwined. It has done so by drawing on Foucault's (2006) notion of governmentality. As Rose (1999, 149) suggested, those involved in asylum case-making are themselves crucially governed through the technologies and rationalities of their work practices. Practices in the asylum administration are infused by a governmentality I have called the "need to resolve". It is related to the key rationalities informing the governing of asylum in the administration – a legal rationality that foregrounds the need to resolve individual applications; a bureaucratic rationality that foregrounds the need to resolve backlogs and sort case quantities for reasons of efficiency; and a political rationality that foregrounds the need to resolve 'pull effects' and lower Switzerland's attractiveness as a destination for future applicants. The need to resolve can account to some extent for the crafting of ever-new (techno-normative) solutions to 'problems' arising in these different 'domains' of governing asylum. This notion of the need to resolve is inspired by Li's (2007) *Will to Improve* developed in her study on development practices in Indonesia. Like Li's notion, the need to resolve points to a *rationale* of resolution pervading the asylum administration and at the same time to "the inevitable gap between what is attempted and what is accomplished" (ibid., 1). Analogous to the *Will to Improve* shaping the practices of experts around the government of development interventions, I consider the need to resolve a crucial driver for the establishment and transformations of governmental arrangements of the asylum *dispositif*. While the need to resolve is persistent, what the problems

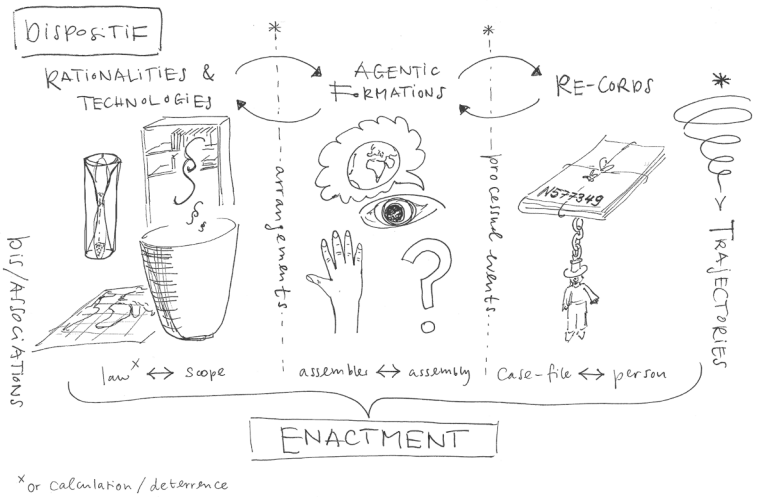
and resolutions are remains contested. What it can moreover highlight, as Li (2007) suggested, is that governmental arrangements have a "parasitic relationship to … [their] own shortcomings and failures" (ibid.): attempts for the resolution of one problem often produce new problems and thus novel 'needs for resolution'. The governmentality of the need to resolve thus offers an avenue to make sense of why certain things in the governing of asylum remain stable while others are constantly negotiated and changing. It moreover points to some of the "ontological politics" (Mol 2002) of governing asylum: the different rationalities and related technologies of government form all their own version of asylum and their 'vision' of cases. While cases are encountered in the evident sense – as cases to be further assembled towards their legal resolution in decisions* (i.e., material-discursive asylum orders) – in all cases reside other 'realities' too: they are associated with the output numbers they are a means to achieve, and associated with the pull effect to be avoided. These other realities fundamentally shift the 'signs' under which cases become assembled and resolved.

The *dispositif* of asylum has been reassembled in this book – but what does it look like? I offer two depictions of the *dispositif* that provide a partial view on it: a sketch and a list. The sketch allows one to grasp some of the relationality of the *dispositif's* enactment in practices of case-making that I have proposed (see Figure 18). The list gives an overview of the associations I traced while composing the *dispositif* of asylum:

- associations that tie practices of governing asylum to migration policy in particular ways
- legal associations for "juris-diction" (Richland 2013) – to speak the law and forcefully inscribe it: for instance, concerning relationships between the state and claimant subjects (administrative law), or between the state and noncitizen claimants asking for refuge (asylum law)
- administrative associations that allow for assembling people to speak to other people "in the name of the state" (Gupta 1995) under certain conditions – and by drawing upon certain equipment
- case associations that hold them together and allow for their smooth assembling across various places, namely case files themselves, but also file registers or database entries and assignments

- associations for telling the truth and knowing the scope and grasp writing the law that are partly preassembled in COI reports or APPA, but lie also in more fleeting convictions of heuristics and exemplars
- associations to tie applicants and their lives to cases such as forms, fingerprints, protocols, pieces of evidence, and decisions*
- associations of calculation and forecasting that tie cases and staff resources together in ways that they speak of backlogs, targets and productivity
- associations of deterrence that anticipate the effect of current case resolutions for future applications (pull effect) and mobilise technologies for the suspension of tenuous case categories (e.g. suspension management in case of changes in the situation of countries of origin)

Figure 18: Sketch of how things relate in the asylum dispositif's enactment



(Own drawing)

Importantly, both the sketch and the list of associations composing the *dispositif* should be read quite in the sense Law and Mol (2002) suggested: as open-ended and neither coherent nor extensive. It is merely an attempt to provide a synopsis of what I have encountered in certain variants and guises on my own trajectory with the *dispositif*. But one key argument is this: power lies in these associations – they render case-making possible and allow for

the re-cording of applicants' lives in terms of asylum. It is the enactment of these associations in case-making which produces "the complex geographies of connection and disconnection … through which asylum … governance is achieved" (Gill 2010b, 638) – or perpetuated and transformed. Notably, the representation of the *dispositif* is not only limited in its scope but it is also artificial in a crucial sense: I have assembled some of its associations in the three parts of this monograph, each providing a certain analytical outline of the *dispositif* – its agentic formations, enactment, and (de)stabilisations – which are in practice closely linked and cannot be dissociated.

9.3 Re-Cording Lives: Sovereignty, Territory, and Exteriority

I suggest abandoning the notions of the decision and decision-making central to most of the literature on asylum administrations as analytical terms.[2] The alternative I propose is to combine the perspective of case-making, as the prosaic practices of assembling cases, with the notion of the *dispositif*. The *dispositif* allows us to grasp the involvement of governmental practices of case-making in the reassembling of both 'inside worlds' (governmentality of knowing and doing asylum) and 'outside worlds' (re-imagined geographies and re-corded lives). This alternative perspective on asylum governance considers the relationality of space and power and has thus important consequences for the view of sovereignty, territory, and exteriority.

The shift from decision- to case-making has consequences for questions of sovereignty. I follow Hansen and Stepputat (2006, 297) in this respect who have advocated focusing not on sovereignty grounded in "formal ideologies of rule and legality" (ibid., 296), but on de facto sovereignty as "the ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity wherever it is found and practice" (ibid.). Sovereignty in their view needs to be considered "a tentative and always emergent form of authority grounded in violence that is performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear, and legitimacy from the neighbourhood to the summit of the state" (ibid., 296–297). In light of this notion, I have grappled with what I consider a slightly totalising gesture of sovereignty arguments in the literature related to exceptionalism, bare life, and

2 To be sure, the decision* remains crucial in many accounts – but for empirical not analytical reasons: as a material-discursive device of asylum case-making.

biopolitics which draws on Agamben (1998). Such arguments often presume the 'ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity' instead of considering it a fragile and laborious achievement. I suggest instead that in sovereign performances, law is not simply suspended, but opens up for interpretive and reflexive re-associations. It multiplies and becomes stabilised in 'states of conviction' of those enacting it. In effect, the "sovereign ban" (Bigo 2002) that renders people deportable cannot be simply uttered, but has to be meticulously assembled – at least in governmental arrangements of "liberal democracies" (see Ellermann 2010). We do not find the "raw decisional power exercised by the sovereign" (Salter 2012, 740) at the thresholds of admittance or rejection as Agamben posited, but fragile attempts of authentication and painstakingly written decisions* as exercises in sovereignty. In asylum procedures, sovereign performances, I have suggested, consist of juris-diction – practices of telling the truth and writing the law – both with a certain scope and grasp. Such governmental juris-diction enrols lives and space and inscribes – re-cords – them in asylum cases. Such inscription practices are stabilised in a *dispositif*. Yet, sovereign performances as inscriptions remain tentative and contingent in their outcome.

Focusing on the *dispositif* renders what is often considered to be the mere 'context' of asylum governance constitutive of it. It reveals administrative practices of granting and rejecting asylum to be crucially entangled with the governmentality of immigration (Fassin, 2011) more widely and involved in enacting a "relational politics of (im)mobilities" (Adey 2006). The notion of the *dispositif* offers an analytical avenue to attended to the material-discursive arrangements and governmental practices through which (im)mobilities are produced (Lin et al. 2017, 169) The asylum *dispositif* can be considered a particular form of "migration infrastructure" (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Its conceptualisation overlaps with the latter, since it considers (im)mobilities not only to be mediated by but also crucially produced in the networked material-discursive arrangements of their governance. Furthermore, both infrastructures and *dispositifs* can be fruitfully combined with perspectives from actor-network theory (ANT) and science and technology studies (STS), for instance the tracing of associations or the notion of "translation" (see Larkin 2013, 330–31). Nevertheless, the *dispositif* provides an alternative way of conceptualising such material-discursive arrangements of governing (im) mobilities: first, through its closer association with the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, it does not only foreground the importance of technol-

ogies, but also of rationalities of government; second, as it is closely related to problematisations and emerges and become stabilised in relation to an "urgent need" (Foucault 1980, 195) or crisis – it both enables and limits 'ways of thinking' in response to these problematisations, but also crucially 'ways of doing'; and third, its enactment is not only producing (im)mobilities of sorts, but importantly subjects and spaces as well.

The analytical moves of this study build on a certain ontological premise: of lives as inherently mobile – lives-as-flows; but also, of everything else – things, social correlates, and governmental arrangements – to be mobile. In this view, durability and immobility are always only relative (in light of less durable and more mobile things) moorings (Adey 2006). Consequently, this means also to consider space as relational (Massey 2005), as the evolving heterogeneous "set of relations" in which we live (Foucault 1986, 23). Combining these perspectives with the notion of the *dispositif* means to consider space as both relational and material-discursively reassembled in practices of governing. Such spaces of governing are not abstract and empty, but produced in, and at the same time limited by, the practices that associate things and people with it. Material-discursive webs of relations (dis)associate objects from living things in powerful ways – which is a relational notion of territory (Painter 2010; Raffestin 1980). The governmental technologies and devices thus form territorial associations that re-cord applicants geographically and may furthermore capture them (at least provisionally) in certain territories (Painter 2010, 1114). But in accordance with the notion of sovereign performances, such territories are to be considered multiple, overlapping, fragile and contingent. Furthermore, I consider them to be *mobile territories*, as the socio-material (dis)associations they are composed of have their own trajectory of becoming. The mobile territories of governing asylum are an effect of knowledge practices (telling the truth) and legal practices (writing the truth): these practices evoke and inscribe particular geographical and historical (dis)associations which not only re-cord the lives of those seeking protection, but at the same time rework geographical distance and proximity as well as insides and outsides.

This reworking of geography needs some further explanation. It relates to truth-telling and imaginative geographies. Gregory (2004, 17) considered imaginative geographies to be fabrications which are both fictional and real: as "imaginations given substance". I consider such imaginative geographies crucial for many of the knowledge practices in asylum case-making:

for instance, for identification practices via country of origin questions or the spatiotemporal ordering of applicants' accounts in encounters to 'know' their truthfulness. But imaginative geographies are equally at work when certain parts of situated life stories are removed from view as 'irrelevant' and thus rendering particular histories and geographies, namely those of "accumulation by dispossession" (Glassman 2006; Harvey 2003) and structural violence exterior to asylum (see also Fassin 2011a). Moreover, for their claims to become relevant, applicants are induced to denounce their societies (or nation-states) as defective, war-ridden, underdeveloped and corrupted. They thereby (re)produce an image of disorder and failure 'elsewhere' which makes it possible to *localise* alterity abroad and sustain a moral geography of Western superiority (Smith 2000). Governing asylum has thus to be read as being implied in a larger coloniality of governing (Walters 2015, 13) which is not to a small extent about erasing or suppressing the histories of other places through the powerful imagination of conquering of space (Massey 2005). Reading encounters with the asylum *dispositif* as a productive "meeting-up of histories" (Massey 2005) thus in turn requires to ask how encounters are mediated by particular (dis)associations: what geographies and histories are enacted in them? Yet, asylum seeking practices can be considered an ironic reversal in this "meeting-up of histories": they 'cross space' to reposition them in the (singularised) history of capitalist relations. Therefore, applicants are not merely passively subjected to such imaginative geographies but actively producing them – in encounters, but also through their (im)mobilities and "irreversible presence" (de Genova 2010b).

9.4 Closures and Open Endings

I started this research with a puzzle in mind: how can a human decide on such a weighty and difficult question as that about the granting or rejecting of asylum? I have learnt that a very short answer is that that person needs to become assembled as a caseworker in the asylum office: i.e. to become an agentic formation with the knowledge, equipment, and authority required to work on asylum claims. A caseworker does not 'take decisions', but rather assembles cases towards their resolution, record after record – none of which is only of one's making. A caseworker then sees what decision* can be 'edited' based on legal 'modes of argumentation' (partly readymade in

boilerplates) in light of asylum practice* that 'prescribes' a pre-set resolution for each country, and in light of highly limited time resources and expected outputs.

Theory, Critique, and 'Changing the Real World'

> A minimal goal of the academic world it is to inspire. A realistic aspiration, in my view, is to initiate a concrete change in one or two fields of the real world. (Email, key person, asylum office, 2018)

My research has evolved in close association with 'practitioners' of the asylum office: the different 'acts' of my fieldwork have required me to seek different engagements (see Introduction) and have involved a conversation with officials that is still on-going and to be continued in the future. In response to what one of my key persons in the asylum administration wrote me in an email (quoted above), I would sketch my position on the questions of how theory relates to practice and critique, and what avenues it offers for 'changing the real world'. Brown (2002) has highlighted in her essay "At the Edge" the irresolvable tension between what she considers theory to be about and the calls for theory to be 'utilisable' in practical terms:

> Theory's most important political offering is this opening of a breathing space between the world of common meanings and the world of alternative ones, a space of potential renewal for thought, desire, and action. And it is this that we sacrifice in capitulating to the demand that theory reveal truth, deliver applications, or solve each of the problems it defines. (Brown 2002, 574)

It is exactly such a "breathing space between common and alternative meanings" I aspired for in this book. It is in this sense that my reading of the asylum *dispositif* is inherently 'critical' in having highlighted for asylum procedures "on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest" (Foucault 1988a, 154–55). In other words, the first political opening of my account lies in what could be equally considered its nuisance – the (at times) painstaking ways it dissociates and exposes relations otherwise taken for granted. It does not provide straightforward answers or policy suggestions but raises

questions to rethink arrangements and practices of governing asylum: what counts as knowledge? What counts as legal? How are governmental technologies implicated in case-making, and with what consequences? What problematisations shape practices of case-making, and with what effects? How are the different perspectives on asylum cases weighted, and contradictory effects addressed?

A second avenue of engagement and potential change lies in this study's own association with the asylum *dispositif*: through my engagement with and through the written account. My encounters in the asylum office during and after my fieldwork affected or "worked the field" (Katz 1994, 69–71): my positionality as a strange inside-outsider enabled me to challenge people I talked to on their assumptions. This unusual exchange with caseworkers and superiors has arguably fostered a reflexive practice in the office in the sense of an ethics of virtues (see also Korf 2004, 220–23). Furthermore, in an important sense, the written account at hand does not merely provide a certain reading of the asylum *dispositif*, but *becomes* itself a form in which the *dispositif* (de)stabilises. Of course, this also means I have to consider my own 'response-ability' in such potential (de)stabilisations. I provide a new form of problematisation of practices and thus aim directly at the way it is taken up and turned into resolutions. This seems of eminent relevance as the *dispositif* continues to evolve – in light of ever-new crises – and is going to become crucially reassembled in the years to come.

The 'New Procedure'

A new, restructured asylum procedure has become operational in 2019. It aims at the acceleration of the procedure – which has been justified with an interesting discursive coalition between discourses of humanitarianism ("it's good for the asylum seekers not to wait too long for their decision*"), administrative rationality ("it's more efficient and cheaper") and protecting the nation ("it will deter those who do not deserve protection"). The restructured procedure was successfully tested in the pilot in Zurich and has then been scaled up. Switzerland is now divided into six 'asylum regions' in which new and larger federal centres [*Bundeszentren*] have been built or – more often – installed in former reception centres or other governmental buildings. In these federal centres, similarly to the former Reception and Processing Centres, new asylum applicants are hosted and their cases being processed. The acceleration of the procedure is achieved through optimising case assign-

ments and fixed rhythms for the key processual events (namely encounters of hearings and decisions*): separating cases conducive for rapid assembling early, such as Dublin and 'simple' cases, from those requiring 'further clarifications' that simply take longer. The latter exit the 'accelerated procedure' of federal centres and are still processed in the headquarters. A further crucial change is the incorporation of legal counsels in the procedure who are free of charge for applicants: they accompany applicants from the filing of the application until the cases' resolution in a decision* – including a potential appeal – and are officially considered a "remedy" for the quicker procedure and the shorter standard period of appeal (ten instead of thirty days).[3] Another crucial trend that affects practices of case-making in the asylum office is its increasing digitisation: for instance, e-case files were tested in the pilot and have been introduced in the whole office with the new procedure. According to internal voices of the asylum office, they have added another layer of concern for the daily practices of case-making as the digital filing of records has been unduly laborious. Overall, the reforms recently introduced appear to leave only a few stones untouched in the asylum office – new assemblies have emerged, new technologies and mediators introduced, and cases take different trajectories. How exactly the *dispositif* of governing asylum in Switzerland has shifted due to the latest reforms remains an open question for future empirical investigations. Yet, the governmental arrangements of the *dispositif* presented in this book remain nevertheless highly significant for practices of case-making in the new setup: the heuristics and exemplars for knowing asylum, the agentic formations and devices necessary for assembling cases, the processual events in which cases become assembled, and the convictions and rationalities sustained by and sustaining the need to resolve.

Contributions and Open Questions

This book intervenes in various fields of studies: first, it challenges mobilities studies to account for infrastructural power through the notion of the *dispositif*; second, it questions biopolitical narratives common in studies of asylum governance (and beyond) by introducing a practice-based notion of sovereignty; third, it contributes to border studies by suggesting to draw upon a relational conception of territoriality to grasp the effects of reassem-

3 For more information about the aims and considerations of the restructuring of the procedure see SEM (2018a).

bling lives and spaces through bordering practices; and, fourth, it complicates studies of administrations by suggesting an unusual take on agency, power, and materiality.

This study connects well with studies that focus on the interconnections of mobilities and the material-discursive infrastructures of governing them: it extends the notion of "migration infrastructures" (Lin et al. 2017; Xiang and Lindquist 2014) to the case of asylum. And it offers an account of how to read them as part of a Foucauldian *dispositif* of governing (im)mobile lives. It does so by combining the analysis of everyday practices of governing lives with their underlying rationalities and technologies. Such a combination could be promising in various other fields concerned with the production and politics of (im)mobilities, such as coercive measures related to illegalised populations but also in very different fields such as tourist mobilities. The focus on specific *dispositifs* of (im)mobility forces us to ask: how are certain forms of (im)mobility both mediated by governmental infrastructures and (re)produced by the practices within them? What problematisations sustain the *dispositif* in practice and what rationalities and technologies of government (de)stabilise it? What reality effects does the *dispositif*'s enactment produce for whom? Or, in other words, how are mobile lives re-wired or re-corded by it and with what consequences? For future studies, research on contemporary practices of governing (im)mobilities could moreover be fruitfully complemented by tracing the genealogical emergence, transformation and stabilisation of governmental practices (see Walters, 2012).

My perspective on asylum governance has complicated common narratives of biopolitics in which sovereignty is always already there and those seeking asylum become reduced to their "bare life" (Agamben 1998): I have considered sovereignty to be more tentative and practice-related – an always provisional "de facto sovereignty" (Hansen and Stepputat 2006). I thus look at sovereignty's fragile and ambiguous enactment and its temporary stabilisation in actual governmental encounters. Future research could thus ask: how do such little everyday 'acts of sovereignty' play out in other fields of governing the living, for instance, in the related fields of deportation (de Genova 2010a) and detention (Mountz et al. 2013), but also related to the medicalisation of lives (Wacquant 2009), the bureaucratisation of ever more spheres of lives (Graeber 2014), or transhumanist attempts of transcending 'defective' human biology with technology (Harari 2016)? Such a perspective on sovereignty could effectively revise all-too-powerful Leviathan fictions

of sovereignty common in political discourse and reveal the meticulous and contestable biopolitical (or necropolitical, see Mbembe 2003) practices required to produce time-spaces of "de facto sovereignty" (Hansen and Stepputat 2006).

The notion of mobile territories this book has introduced resonates well with current debates in and beyond geography about the "liquidity" of borders (Bigo 2014, 213), which emphasises borders' flexibility and mobility. It relates to suggestions in border studies to see borders as process (Johnson et al. 2011) and both borders and law in their relationality (Brambilla 2015; Nedelsky 1990; 2011). In contrast to the "liquid borders" metaphor, mobile territories shift the focus from the effect – the border(s) – to the practices of territorial fabrications (Klauser 2010a; Lussault 2007), which allows us to consider the interrelatedness of borderings and legal juris-dictions. Mobile territories emphasise the 'how' of the relationality of bordering lives, of reassembling the socio-spatial landscapes through particular governmental practices that enrol people in their categorisations. They enable us to consider the territorial effects of mundane governmental attempts of inscribing socio-spatial difference into people's lives. If the notion of mobile territories is combined with an understanding of territoriality as the socio-spatial relationality of governing lives in broad terms (see dell'Agnese 2013; Klauser 2010b; Raffestin 2012), the potential of such a notion has yet to be harnessed. One could, for instance, ask what (exclusionary) mobile territories the increasing digitalisation of socio-spatial relationships produces. And how a digital territoriality emerges from the ways in which lives become digitally governed.

For studies of administrative procedures, this study has three main implications: the first is to understand how power unfolds in such procedures, it might not suffice to merely focus on street-level bureaucrats' dilemmas and discretion (Lipsky 2010). This is the case because, as this research has pointed out, agency is not simply a matter of people becoming agentic as government officials. It is rather complex and emerging agentic formations – part human, part equipment – which are required to assemble cases. Of course, such a view complicates questions of responsibility. Yet, it balances accounts emphasising the considerable leeway officials have in administrative practices by considering the socio-technical arrangements that are both enabling and restricting practices. Acknowledging such technological facets of situated agency at the same time de-naturalises them and returns them to the sphere of the political, which renders them contestable.

The second implication of this study is that many administrative procedures are likely to be pervaded by a governmental need to resolve problems or crises related to their objects of government. Some of the resolutions invented and pursued may be contradictory and many of them will give rise to new problems (see Li 2007). An analytic of government with its focus on problematisations is thus particularly well suited to reveal some of the core stakes and trade-offs of governmental practices (see Gottweis 2003; Li 2007). This does not imply that a focus on the thought work (Heyman 1995) of officials who "put policy into practice" is not important. But it suggests that it is not enough. An analysis of people's convictions about governing and their ways of knowing needs to be complemented with an analysis of the rationalities underlying and sustaining certain modes of doing things.

Third, studies of administrative procedures need to find a way of accounting for the people and lives behind the claims made legible in records and resolvable in (legal) orders. In other words, it appears critical to find an analytic to see how the "government of paper" (Hull 2012b) is implicated in the 'government of lives'. The notion of re-cording lives I have introduced offers a fruitful avenue for grasping such implications.