

ARTICLE

Everyday digital dis/connection: Locating slow violence in (non)encounters with the UK asylum state

Hannah Morgan 

Department of Geography, University of Durham, Durham, UK

Correspondence

Hannah Morgan, Department of Geography, University of Durham, Durham, UK.
Email: hannah.morgan@durham.ac.uk

Funding information

Economic and Social Research Council, Grant/Award Number: ES/P000762/1

Abstract

Encounters with, within and between digital technologies have become characteristic of life in the contemporary moment. This is, often, no different for displaced individuals seeking asylum across European states. Smartphones have become part of the everyday 'doing' of life for individuals governed through asylum systems which now includes routinely encountering the state. Whilst smartphones are commonly said to offer the promised affordances of increased connection or communication, this paper aims to explore how everyday encounters with the UK asylum state fall short of these imagined expectations. In its place, the paper identifies how a series of ongoing (non)encounters—encounters that fail to manifest in expected ways; characterised by pauses, delays or voids—become characteristic of the everyday experience of being a digitally connected asylum seeker in the UK. Drawing upon a year-long ethnographic research project with people actively seeking asylum in the UK between 2022 and 2023, this paper thus explores how the increased uptake of smartphone affordances within the UK asylum system contributes to the ongoing administration of state slow violence: experienced as exhaustion through everyday digital (non)encounters. Developing the concept of the (non)encounter for geographic research, this paper outlines how forms of dis/connection become characteristic of the state encounter for asylum-seeking individuals. These modes of dis/connection are traced as slow violence along the contours of neoliberalisation and hostile assemblages of asylum governance within the UK context.

KEYWORDS

asylum, digital practices, encounters, neoliberal state, slow violence

1 | INTRODUCTION

Smartphones have become technological objects of everyday life in societies across the globe. Being and becoming a 'digitally connected' subject, however, is neither straightforward nor simple. Today, it has become commonplace for

The information, practices and views in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2024 The Authors. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers).

individuals seeking asylum within the European context to be or become ‘smartphone subjects’ (Morgan, 2023; Gillespie et al., 2018; Twigt, 2018). In this paper, I draw upon the UK context to highlight how smartphones have become part of the everyday ‘doing’ of life for individuals governed through the asylum system. Paying attention to everyday smartphone practices, I outline how smartphones are now routinely mobilised in encounters with the state (or, more precisely, with neoliberal non-state actors). Throughout this paper, I thus aim to articulate how the uptake of smartphone affordances in the governance of asylum now has implications for how we conceptualise the novel digital state (non)encounter and its impact on the everyday lives of those seeking asylum in the UK. Specifically, I will outline how the (non)encounter has become part of wider assemblages of neoliberal state-making and hostile forms of governance which seek to exhaust the asylum seeking subject through everyday digital dis/connectons.

As will be argued throughout this paper, the UK asylum state is now encountered, imagined and known through the cumulation of everyday digital practices. Although it is hard to quantify how many individuals seeking asylum in the UK own or have access to smartphones—for context, in my research of encountering over 90 different asylum-seeking individuals, all owned or had access to a smartphone in their daily life—the reality is that the vast majority of displaced subjects arriving in Europe and the UK are now what we might term digitally ‘connected migrants’ (Diminescu, 2008, p. 572, 2010). The smartphone is thus situated as one of the central technologies of the ‘doing’ of everyday life within asylum systems. Encounters with the state or state actors are no longer (only) at an immigration office, detention centre or interview room. Now, the UK asylum state is encountered through a constellation of everyday smartphone practices: in WhatsApp messages, calls, email chains, voice messages, digital documents, webpages, portals, links. Drawing upon research in the context of the UK, I suggest that smartphones have now become the default technological form of contact that is relied upon for communication and governance of asylum-seeking individuals and communities after initial screening interviews. Everyday digital practices such as contacting national advice helplines, maintaining contact with solicitors or housing managers, or outreaching to local charities are now taken-for-granted practices that come with being a digitally connected asylum seeker.

In centring the mundane, unspectacular or routine everyday digital encounters with the asylum state in this paper, we can shed light on how forms of state-administered violence are now digitally mediated. Going beyond clearer geopolitical moments where the smartphone is enrolled in governing irregular migrant subjects such as surveillance or data collection, I suggest that if we are to understand how the contemporary state is encountered in the everyday context, and how violence is produced through these encounters, we must look to the more mundane, routine, normalised ways in which the state is embedded and enrolled within everyday digital life. Considering everyday digital forms of encounter that are now enrolled within the asylum application period, I mobilise the concept of the (non)encounter to explore the impact of (non)action in novel digital space-times of the asylum application process.

After tracing my contextual and methodological grounding in Section 2, in Section 3, I will directly engage with the concept of the (non)encounter. Situating my arguments within wider geographical debates of the encounter, I suggest that Straughan and Bissell's (2022) pioneering work on the (non)encounter within geography offers valuable insight for how we theorise the novel digital state encounter in the context of asylum governance. Straughan and Bissell (2022) suggest that (non)encounters are characterised by experiences of loss or absence: where encounters once marked by their formative affective capacity (Wilson, 2017) have changed or shifted: where there is a distinct 'disappearance of sociability, rather than merely its non-appearance' (Straughan & Bissell, 2022, p. 537). Building upon this, I outline how—in the context of neoliberal state-making, and the increasing logics of hostility within asylum governance assemblages more broadly—modes of encountering the asylum state are best characterised as a form of (non)encounter. Despite a notable *increase* in the frequency of forms of digital contact with the state through the smartphone, I argue that the forms of dis/connection which characterise these (non)encounters—in pauses, delays and voids—are productive of a loss of accountability, continuity and progression through the logics of neoliberal state-making and hostile logics of asylum governance. In the context of this paper, the (non)encounter not only results in a loss of sociability, but is actively enrolled in producing and maintaining structures of violence.

Beyond the immediately visceral, material or embodied forms of violence that these forms of state (non)encounter produce, I locate violence in the novel digital mediation(s) of these problems: in chasing up emails, calling unknown numbers, being put on hold, refreshing portals, navigating broken links. Drawing attention to the juxtaposition between the hopes and/or expectations of what being a digitally connected asylum seeker brings, and the realities of being put on pause, delayed or subject to voids by the state, I argue we are presented with a particular novel kind of slow violence (Nixon, 2011). A mode of slow violence that is produced through the novel (non)encounters that occupy daily digital life for those seeking asylum in the UK; (non)encounters that ultimately exhaust the individual through their repetitive, cyclical and often ambiguous role within the asylum application process. Specifically, I highlight how the (non)encounters

that occupy everyday life within the asylum system exhaust individuals through the constant negotiation between the hopes of what smartphone connection brings and the reality of how smartphones are mobilised within the asylum application process by state actors.

Throughout this paper, I draw upon the wider argument that these digital modes of slow violence *are* novel in form, but less novel in wider logics and norms of asylum governance. The digital (non)encounter is necessarily embedded in the constellations of neoliberalisation of the state (Darling, 2016, 2022) and assemblages of hostility that are distinctive of European mobility governance (Ibrahim, 2022; Morgan, 2023). This manifests in this paper in two ways. First, in the experience that individuals encountering the 'state' in the everyday context never quite get to the state itself: at least, in the most traditional sense of the term. In the context of the UK's asylum system, this would be the Home Office. And yet, the Home Office is distinctly absent in the everyday ongoingness of the digital (non)encounter. Individuals may talk about, or refer to the Home Office, but it is very rarely a part of the everyday (non)encounter outside of the final interview. Instead, the digital (non)encounter is distinctly shaped by the neoliberalisation of state forms: of outsourced organisations acting on behalf of the state but are not quite the state itself. Second, the (non)encounter is simultaneously shaped by assemblages of hostile governance that have dominated the UK and wider European landscape over the past decade. In this paper, this is present in discussions around the role that waiting plays within the asylum application process. All three empirical sections in this paper—pauses, delays and voids—draw upon, and contribute to, this ongoing area of research; waiting becomes a specific tempo-spatial form of power that actively seeks to exhaust asylum seekers within broader systems of harm and violence (Griffiths, 2014; Kallio et al., 2021; Lipatova, 2022; Turnbull, 2016).

In the final section of this paper, I trace how forms of exhaustion are now produced, maintained and circulated through the digital (non): in missed connections, delayed emails, asymmetric communication, broken links. In the contemporary asylum state, hostility as an operational mode of governance permeates digitally through absence more than presence (Davies et al., 2017). In being subject to digital pauses, delays and voids, I argue that the wider legacies of hostile asylum governance seep into the seemingly mundane and taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life, where (non)encounters with state actors are actively productive of exhausting individuals. Developing the emerging geographical concept of (non)encounters, I therefore argue that paying attention to the (non)—what doesn't happen, is missed, delayed, slowed, is disconnected or detached from—can provide us with novel insights into how the contemporary asylum state is both encountered, and in the characteristic forms of these (non) encounters, violent affects are created and maintained through wider assemblages of hostile governance (Coddington, 2020; Howell & Richter-Montpetit, 2019; Morgan, 2023).

From the outset of this paper, it is critical to foreground that although the mundanity of these kinds of encounters is perhaps known or experienced by almost every smartphone user—in encounters with the state, or otherwise—it is the specificity of the forms of subjectivity that come with being politically categorised as Other (through various constellations of irregular mobility governance) that we must pay attention to here. This matters because indeed, citizens may encounter the state through a variety of digital interfaces commonly accessed through smartphones, and these encounters may be slow, asymmetric or delayed (Sebal, 2020). However, the consequences of these non-encounters do not have the same generative force in producing or compounding forms of violence as those with highly precarious rights to be in the UK legally (Alencar et al., 2019; Greene, 2020; Twigg, 2018).

2 | RESEARCHING EVERYDAY DIGITAL LIFE AND THE UK ASYLUM SYSTEM

This paper draws upon ethnographic research with individuals actively seeking asylum in the UK between September 2022 and August 2023. Although frequently changing or being amended in the context of current affairs, Figure 1 outlines the current major simplified steps in the process of claiming asylum in the UK. It is important to note that there is no time frame provided in Figure 1. With extended periods of waiting becoming inherent to the asylum application process, many of my research participants had been in the UK over 2 years without being given a date for their substantive interview. So, although Figure 1 sets out simplified steps of the process, the actual experience of being inside this system is often not clear, defined by confusion and the unknown (Tazzioli, 2021).

The individuals involved in this research had (1) completed their screening interview and were either (a) waiting for their substantive interview or questionnaire response, or (b) the final decision of their case. After having completed an in-person screening interview with an immigration officer (most commonly in South London), individuals are dispersed throughout the UK into cities and towns. In this period of the asylum application process, individuals have no right to work and often face multiple barriers to integrating within communities: from being moved around in short time

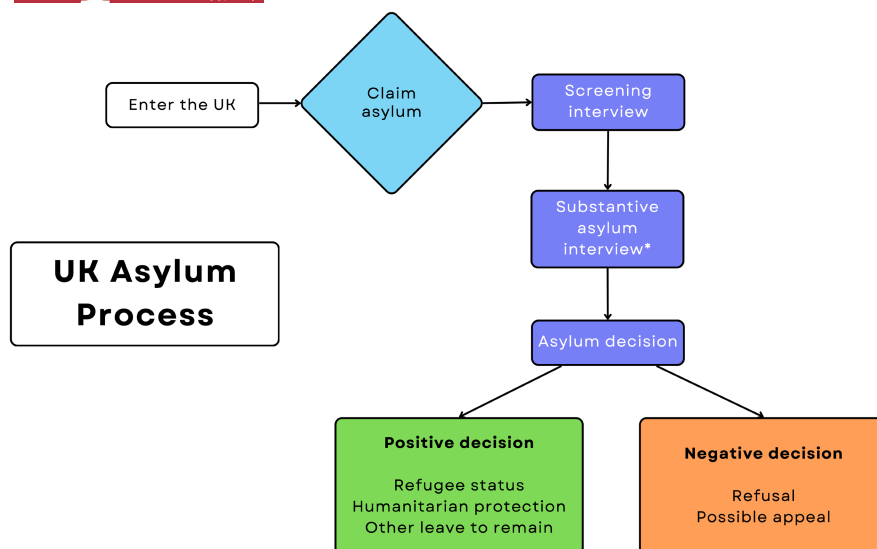


FIGURE 1 The UK's asylum application process as of December 2023. *As of March 2023, the UK's *Streamlined Asylum Process* introduced a new questionnaire in place of an interview. This policy applies to adults from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria and Yemen who claimed asylum before 28 June 2022 and who have not had substantive asylum interview. From May 2023, this scheme was extended to adults arriving from Iraq and Iran.

frames, to language barriers, to simply carrying the stigma of seeking asylum (De Genova & Roy, 2020). The impact of such measures has extensively been examined by scholars interested in the experience of waiting (Kallio et al., 2021; Lipatova, 2022; Rotter, 2016; Turnbull, 2016). It is in this context of extended waiting (and the uncertainties that necessarily come with it) that the smartphone—amid wider assemblages of technological connectivity—becomes crucial to living out daily life as an asylum seeker in the UK.

Carrying out research that has the smartphone as a central technological object of inquiry may seem straightforward. The smartphone has become so central to everyday life—at least within the Global North context—that it is now almost impossible to distinguish between on/offline forms of life. What we do, or how we use smartphones in our everyday lives can often be taken for granted or become common-sense as a mode of living. For individuals seeking asylum in the UK, this is no different. Yet, it is exactly the production of 'common-sense' digital forms of encountering the state that this research aimed to capture. With the aim of this research being to engage with individuals' everyday digital lives—forms of life that are often taken-for-granted, mundane and routine, but also highly intimate and private (Haber, 2019; Koch & Miles, 2021)—building trust and rapport with asylum-seeking individuals themselves became the foundations of this project.

This paper draws upon a year-long ethnographic project co-designed and conducted with a major registered charity providing support to asylum seekers and refugees in the North-East of England. The ethnographic research was carried out between September 2022 and June 2023, with a dissemination period between July and August 2023. Ethnography was mobilised as a method for this project to engage with the grounded, complex and often messy realities of everyday digital life. Simply being with individuals over the period of research—getting to know them within and outside of the research focus—became critical to creating the space for individuals to open up and share their digital practices. Any ethnographic project must have periods of trust-building and rapport (Brankamp, 2022; Halilovich, 2013). However, this is acute when working with well documented over-researched groups or communities (Scheel, 2019) who are frequently exposed to (often exploitative) research or data collection (Omata, 2020).

Between September 2022 and June 2023, I took on a quasi-volunteer-ethnographer role within the organisation. During this time, over 90 different individuals became part of the research. At the start of the project, this was mainly through informal conversations and interviews at drop-in sessions. Yet, after December 2022, the 'field' of research expanded more broadly into spaces of everyday life: in homes, shopping centres, cafes, football pitches, theatres. It is important to acknowledge when working with a precarious population like asylum seekers—at least in relation to their position with the state—research methods will always have to be adaptable to ongoing changes that happen to individuals' lives with very limited agency. Participation in the ethnographic element of this study thus varied: some individuals stayed with the research project over the entire 11 months (approximately 30 individuals), being involved in multiple aspects of the

research, including a formal interview. Other individuals participated only partially for a variety of different reasons—being moved onto another city, receiving decisions on their cases, no longer attending drop-ins for personal reasons.

Additionally, 26 formalised interviews were conducted in collaboration with the organisation. These interviews aimed to allow individuals the space and time to narrate their experiences of digital life in the UK in a deeper and more focused form, but also to create an actionable evidence base for future participatory action within the organisation during July 2023–September 2023. A range of individuals were invited to interview: 20 men/six women, an age range between 18 and 56, and a wide range of home countries across the MENA region, South Asia and South America. Most of the interviews were conducted in English (20) with six being translated by volunteer interpreters from the organisation. Interview questions were co-developed with the collaborating organisation and were focused on two main themes: how smartphones were used in the asylum application process and how smartphones are important technologies of broader ‘everyday life’ in the UK.

In the following sections of this paper, I draw upon the narratives and experiences of individuals actively seeking asylum in the UK by centring ethnographic extracts and interview transcripts. All quotes and ethnographic extracts used throughout this paper are fully anonymised, with pseudonyms given to individuals: alternative names that were chosen by interviewees. This is a deliberate choice in this research to retain the ‘humanness’ of each individual; resisting the tendency to reduce the asylum experience to faceless numbers.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the experiences drawn upon here are always going to be situated and grounded for individuals through the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and caring responsibilities. There is too little space to elaborate in this paper; however, I mobilise these extracts to speak to the broader ways in which digital state (non)encounters are cumulative in producing exhaustion through everyday digital practices. This too speaks to the affective and material implications of curated hostile environments in which asylum seekers now live in the UK. Digital (non)encounters with the UK state are embedded in wider assemblages of violence, harm and erasure that this paper cannot fully articulate in one homogenous account. Rather, this paper aims to trace these assemblages through the testimonies and stories of the individuals included.

3 | GEOGRAPHIES OF THE (NON)ENCOUNTER

Before detailing the role that the (non)encounter plays in contemporary asylum governance, it is first critical to examine the encounter itself. Drawing upon the contributions of affect, the encounter is a formative experience; where bodies are changed in their ‘capacity to affect and be affective’ (Wilson, 2017, p. 463). Wilson (2017) argues that geographical research, in a sense, has always engaged with the concept of the encounter and sets out three ways that geography has traditionally worked with the encounter: first encountering the Other in a postcolonial tradition (Said, 1993), second in encountering strangers or difference in urban contexts (Massey, 2005; Thrift, 2008; Valentine, 2008), and third encountering more-than-human geographies of everyday life (Darling & Wilson, 2016). Tracing its appearance in seminal geographic work, Wilson (2017) thus shows how the encounter is a core concept within geography today, despite our tendency to take it for granted in the background of geographical debates. I suggest here that the encounter is critical for digital migration scholars who are interested in grounding the everyday experience of relations to the state. Moreover, it is important to note here that the specific mode of digitally encountering the state centred in this paper is one among many that individuals have in their experience of claiming asylum in the UK.

When engaging with the concept of the encounter in this paper, I suggest we might also look to novel work across digital geographies and digital social theory more widely, where the concept of the encounter has experienced renewed theoretical interest with the rise of everyday technologies such as social media (Bork-Hüffer & Yeoh, 2017; Koch & Miles, 2021). Echoing the concern of Wilson (2017), scholars working with the digital have equally expressed the need to direct attention to the concept of the encounter: ‘the ways in which the politics of cultural difference and encounter are played out across digital spaces have remained understudied’ (Leurs, 2014, p. 253). In previous examinations of the encounter, encountering the Other has been presumed to be face-to-face; spontaneous; mediated by the public. And yet, in the rapidly changing digital world in which we now live, how we theorise the encounter must be able to evolve with these changes where encounters with strangers are now a normal part of everyday life: in higher frequencies, normalised digital practices, and novel ephemeral temporalities (Koch & Miles, 2021). How novel digital technologies affect the traditional conceptualisations of the encounter are thus critical for this paper, and future work taking this forward.

Moreover, novel modes of digital encounter have serious implications for how we might attempt to conceptualise the contemporary state encounter. Gupta and Sharma (2006, p. 11) suggest that everyday encounters with the state become

the 'primary arena in which people learn something about the state'. The forms that these encounters take are thus critical affectual experiences that shape how individuals learn about, know and imagine the state as an entity mediated through everyday experience (Jones, 2012). In a genealogical account of digitalised asylum governance in the UK, we have moved from a system almost entirely dependent upon in-person communication, paper communication and basic mobile phone calls (Darling, 2014), to now a system in which the novel affordances of the smartphone are enmeshed within the experience of applying for asylum itself. For example, over the past 5 years, there has been a transition to app or platform-based interactions such as WhatsApp, Viber or IMO across a wide range of processes and services that are present within the UK's asylum system. In the post-pandemic context of the UK, smartphones have now become the default technological form of contact that is relied upon for communication and governance of asylum-seeking individuals and communities after initial screening interviews. This, therefore, has profound implications for how we conceptualise the state encounter and its everyday mediations of the UK asylum application process.

An external force that we must consider when conceptualising the novel state encounter in this context is the impact that neoliberalisation has had on state forms. In the background of neoliberal state-making and rollback of the 'big state' forms (Darling, 2016, 2022; Martinez, 2023), how asylum seekers now encounter the state has been significantly changed. In the UK context, processing asylum applications and providing support throughout this process is now governed through a complex web of organisations at the national and local scale, private and public bodies, alongside non-state organisations such as NGOs or charities. As Darling (2022) warns us, it would be a mistake to characterise the 'asylum state' as one homogeneous entity, either united through a sole vision of administering a 'hostile environment' or mobilising smartphones in particular ways. Therefore, shifts to digitalising existing forms of communication or processes must also be contextualised within broader shifts to neoliberal state forms.

It is precisely the combination of the neoliberal fragmentation of the state and the mobilisation of novel digital practices in state communication that leads me to introduce the concept of the (non)encounter in this paper. The concept of the (non)encounter is relatively novel within geographic research. Translated by Straughan and Bissell (2022) from work engaging with disability (Bigby & Wiesel, 2019; Blonk, 2021), the authors argue that geographic work has focused very little on the *loss* or *reduction* of encounters. Using research focused on the bodily capacities of food delivery drivers in Australia, the authors explore how (non)encounters with customers have intensified the affective experience of boredom.

In the context of this paper, I am interested in drawing our attention to instances in which in-person encounters with the asylum state have been replaced by modes of mundane digital encounters. And, moreover, not simply replaced, but disproportionately expanded in novel spatial-temporal digital experiences. Despite an increase in frequency and perceived ease of encounter with the modern digital state, I argue that in the sustained neoliberalisation of the asylum state form(s), individuals can no longer clearly pinpoint where they are and where they are not encountering the state (for example, having communication directly with the Home Office in a letter [Darling, 2014]), but are instead exposed to a wide variety of organisations acting on behalf of the state: externally contracted housing officers, hotel managers, case workers, solicitors, charitable organisations, volunteers—all of which are now encountered through a wide range of everyday digital practices. This landscape is one of confusion and obstruction (Tazzioli, 2021); where the state lies, what counts as the state, and who, and in what capacity, is acting upon the state is unclear, and in constant flux.

The (non)encounter for this paper is thus not exactly the loss of sociality as Straughan and Bissell (2022) suggest, but found in the juxtaposition of what smartphone encounters are expected to bring (such as increased connection or ease of communication) and what they can do in the context of applying for asylum in the UK. Embedded within wider assemblages of hostile mobility governance, where inaction becomes a form of governance (Davies et al., 2017; Davies & Isakjee, 2019), I highlight how distinct spatial-temporal experiences of waiting characterise the (non)encounter for asylum seekers in the everyday context. It is in this dynamic, where the imagined affordances of smartphone communication are broken down, disassembled and (re)built through the everyday state (non)encounter that I suggest we can locate novel forms of slow violence that become present through the cumulation of everyday digital practices.

In this case, the (non)encounter is not simply a case of reducing face-to-face contact with the state (Straughan & Bissell, 2022). In the current asylum system, individuals now have more frequent contact with and (perceived) access to various state actors through their smartphones. Rather, the modes that this kind of contact takes place within have their own relation to producing violent effects. Specifically, how these encounters characteristically play out (often with delays, slowness, asymmetry, voids, pauses) are illustrative of the disappearance of personal contact (ibid.). The (non)encounter becomes critical here to highlight that what is missing, or what has been lost, is the *expectation* of how everyday digital encounters routinely transpire outside of state relations. Practices that were once part of a constellation of digital life-affirming practices—keeping in contact with family, documenting new lives via photography, searching the internet—now are entangled with, and muddled within, state encounters.

4 | (NON)ENCOUNTERS AS SLOW VIOLENCE

As many have highlighted before, violence from the state is not always fast, visible or instant: the forms of slow violence that characterise certain forms of Othered life are gradual, encroaching and often barely recognisable in the ongoing doing of everyday life (Christian & Dowler, 2019; Nixon, 2011; Weheliye, 2014). Extending the traditional geopolitical register of what counts as violence (Bickerstaff, 2022; Davies & Isakjee, 2019; Laurie & Shaw, 2018), slow violence demands a re-examination of the hidden, accumulative forces that harm, erase or kill (Davies et al., 2017). Within research on asylum, waiting has been examined as a specific form of slow violence (Hyndman & Giles, 2011; Kallio et al., 2021; Lipatova, 2022). Actively suspending subjects in the space–time(s) of the asylum system has become a mode of governmentality that seeks to suspend, slow and drain Othered subjects of potentiality (Lipatova, 2022; Van Houtum, 2010). Waiting has thus become a common-sense governance technique within asylum systems; mobilised as a technique of control (Tazzioli, 2021). In the context of the UK and the ever-increasing hostile affects that are rooted within Hostile Environment policies (Morgan, 2023), almost all areas of life for an individual seeking asylum are drained of potentiality or hope through the experience of prolonged waiting. In experiences of prolonged waiting within the asylum system—where the material and imaginary attachments of what ‘life’ in the broadest sense should be lived like are gradually eroded—*exhaustion* becomes a specific affective embodiment of slow violence (Darling, 2022; Tazzioli, 2020).

Despite seminal work highlighting how waiting is not *empty* time (Ramachandran & Vathi, 2022; Rotter, 2016), it is still clear that forms of waiting are a result of an *absence* of action on behalf of the state itself. For example, the increasingly extensive periods of waiting that are inevitable whilst waiting for a case decision to be made. In this paper, I am interested in drawing our attention to how smartphone practices get embedded within wider power-laden structures of waiting through state (non)encounters: where pauses, delays and voids compound and are productive of slow violence. Extended periods of waiting that are traditionally associated with applying for asylum in the UK are now mediated by everyday digital practices. Smartphone practices have affective capacities that both mediate the experience of waiting itself (detaching from boredom or anxiety, for example) and produce novel forms of waiting themselves (through novel [non]encounters). In the navigation of both forms of waiting, what is evident is the (non)presence of the state, at least in its highly visible form. The enrolment of smartphones into the everyday systems of asylum processing has produced a system in which individuals rarely encounter the big state (in this case, the Home Office), but instead frequently encounter the organisations that act on behalf of the state in their everyday digital lives.

Here, I argue that it is what is *not* happening in digital space/times of the (non)encounter—in delays, pauses or voids—which provides insight into the kinds of violence that have now become characteristic of everyday life under the conditions of seeking asylum in the UK. The kinds of exhaustion that are produced through everyday digital encounters are therefore not new themselves, but rather represent novel ways through which slow violence is administered, compounded and altered in a digital age of claiming asylum. What it means to be a digitally connected asylum seeker in the UK is to be enrolled in routine (non)encounters with the ‘asylum state’. In this experience, the slow violence already inherent in waiting is compounded through everyday digital practices. This violence is slow, almost invisible, as it is these very practices that give a sense of moving forward, or getting somewhere with an asylum-related case, and yet simultaneously reveal that individuals remain stuck in the sticky present-ness of this kind of manufactured Otherness. Practices like calling, emailing or searching mediate the affective embodiment of waiting under systems of asylum (boredom, stillness, disaffection, frustration ...), yet simultaneously intensify them through (non)encounters that are characterised by slowness, repetitiveness and circularity.

It is in this context, I argue, that slow violence is produced precisely between the hopes that get attached to the imagined affordances of smartphones, and the affective capacity they have in the context of the UK asylum system. There are two novel ways through which slow violence permeates everyday digital life for asylum-seeking individuals living in the UK: first, in imaginaries of the digital state and, second, in the practices that become part of the (non)encounter. In order to illustrate these two arguments, I mobilise Sammie’s experience of seeking legal advice. In an interview, Sammie tells me: ‘I talk to my lawyer a lot during some weeks on WhatsApp ... I send them questions, documents ... it is a very easy way to communicate, we video call for our meetings ... I have never met them in person ... It’s all given through my phone’. Later in this interview, Sammie* also tells me how WhatsApp is important for staying in contact with their family: ‘everyday we use WhatsApp ... we have a group chat with my brothers and sisters and sometimes we will do a group video call, maybe one time a week. This is so important for me to be able to see them and catch up’. During the interview, Sammie* shows me examples of these encounters in the form of group chat threads: both those with his lawyer and his family include ‘similar digital practices such as reacting to messages with emojis, sending/receiving voice notes, or sending GIFs’.

The first argument here is how the state is now imagined or known by individuals is now almost entirely dependent upon everyday smartphone encounters. The state is no longer (only) encountered in an interview room, solicitor's office or council building: it is in your hand, at the end of your fingertips—in emails, WhatsApp messages, voice notes, videocalls, GIFs, stickers. What we might term the *everyday state* (Painter, 2006) is now encountered in everyday digital practices in the most banal sense; the majority of which are already familiar, so normalised and routine to daily life that their mobilisation in the context of applying for asylum has become a common-sense shift in state governance today. The state's novel mundane digital form(s) in a post-pandemic context has thus been productive of particular *kinds* of banal state imaginaries. Imaginaries that hinge specifically upon the forms of digital encounter that individuals are having in their everyday lives: forms of encounter that are highly intimate—bodily, physically, affectively—due to the kinds of practices that are now mobilised. Being a *connected* digital subject comes with a vast range of expectations and norms that users have been exposed to, and trained by, in their everyday digital lives.

In making this argument, it is important to note that many asylum-seeking individuals are digital subjects (in varying and complex ways) *before* becoming classified as an asylum seeker. This is important, precisely because individuals become accustomed to everyday digital practices, interactions, cues that are now an integral part of the asylum application process. Taking WhatsApp as an example, users are accustomed to responding to a variety of digital cues that produce forms of online intimacy: ranging from the 'number or colour of ticks' (Gamal) attributed to sent messages, to being labelled as 'online [or] not to saved contacts' (local charity worker). It is specifically these forms of digital intimacy that are now being translated into state encounters, and thus productive of particular kinds of intimate state imaginaries through the banality of the (non)encounter itself. From seeing state-sponsored adverts on personal social media feeds, receiving update emails from the Home Office, or having regular contact with solicitors through WhatsApp instant messages, the state has become personal, intimate even; encountered as part of the normal digital space/times that are part and productive of everyday digital life. The banality of the everyday state has therefore been compounded specifically through the mobilisation of digital platforms mobilised in this period of the asylum application process.

Second, these digital encounters enrol *particular kinds* of digital practices of users. The novel everydayness of the state is perpetuated by specific digital practices that are being mobilised by a multitude of UK state actors. In the digital (non)encounter, the lines between asylum application (political) and general everyday life (private) get blurred: the same practices that one might associated with family intimacy, care or even love through the smartphone screen (Ellis & Tucker, 2020; Longhurst, 2013), are also now being mobilised with state actors. Beyond phone calls, which are traditionally perceived as being a formal mode of contact that is disconnected from the person on the other end, video calls, instant messaging, scrolling through social media all elicit a particular kind of intimacy through the practice itself (Handyside & Ringrose, 2017; Longhurst, 2013; Witteborn, 2015). Being digital subjects *before* being produced as an 'asylum seeker' when arriving in the UK, individuals are, once again, accustomed to the multitude of digital practices that are cumulative towards the doing of everyday life (Morgan, 2023). The informal nature of these kinds of practices provides individuals with a sense of familiarity or closeness that arise from the nature of how these encounters are mobilised. For example, sending stickers, GIFs or voice notes over WhatsApp are two of the ways intimacy with different state actors was identified by my participants in interviews. In such intimate digital practice, the banal imaginary of the state is compounded further: where an affective sense of closeness in different digital spaces is produced and maintained.

In both dynamics, the digital state thus becomes a normal, mundane part of everyday life for individuals seeking asylum: a presence on their smartphone screens that can be as common as friends or family. However, the imaginaries of the state that are elicited through the everyday encounter—and thus, the hopes and expectations that get produced about the digital state as easily contactable, intimate, even caring—get broken down and fragmented through the very practices that construct the imaginary in the first place. It is precisely this dynamic (the affirmative promises and various forms of hope that get attached to smartphone use for asylum seekers but are inevitably gradually eroded through everyday (non)encounters with state actors) that produces a novel form of digital slow violence. In the everyday experience of living through the UK asylum system for months, if not years, the (non)encounter becomes increasingly normalised for individuals through the cumulation of waiting, repetition and circulation. It is in this context that the smartphone becomes critical infrastructure to remaining connected, whilst equally becoming a technological object of governance which exhausts and harms: exhausting individuals through the (non)encounters that characterise everyday life within the system.

5 | PAUSES, DELAYS AND VOIDS

I now aim to substantiate three specific ways through which slow violence in the UK asylum system is produced through the novel digital (non)encounter. These three manifestations of slow violence are traced along broader experiences of waiting which are endemic to the current UK asylum application process. *Pauses* highlight the modes of short-term waiting that accumulate within the everyday digital practices, building up frustration and resentment. *Delays* are indicative of the longer-term experiences of waiting characteristic of the asylum application process: delays in decisions made about housing, or cases, for example. And finally, *voids* draw attention to the extended forms of waiting that are intensified by the distinct (non)presence of the state.

In the background to the modes of (non)encounter presented here, it is critical to acknowledge the highly visible lack of encounters with the 'big state'. In the UK's case, the Home Office. Instead, what is evident in the transcripts and ethnographic extracts is a series of (non)encounters with non-state organisations that have been contracted by the state to fulfil various everyday functions within the asylum system (from housing to case management, to well-being or health). The absence of the 'state', or indeed the visceral presence of neoliberal state actors, pushes us to consider the role of the (non) encounter within broader assemblages of neoliberal state-making practices and wider logics of hostility that underpin asylum governance today.

The extracts centred in this section highlight the highly banal role of the (non)encounter in everyday life for digitally connected individuals. Based in a city in the North-East of England, the organisations and non-state actors referred to are often highly localised, dependent upon local government contracts and broader contractual arrangements through the Home Office. For clarity when reading this section, Migrant Help is a national telephone hotline service that offers advice on most areas of life within the asylum systems. Additionally, MEARs is a national organisation that is contracted locally in the city of study, providing and managing housing at the time the research was conducted.

5.1 | Pauses

Hafiz: 'I contact Migrant Help many times about my house or case ... but sometimes you have to wait over an hour or two hours for them to answer your call. You end up just waiting around. This happened last week, I was very agitated ... I had been waiting for them to call me back about my case and they didn't. It is annoying waiting around, wasting my time. I was ... on edge waiting for them to call me back, it was important to me to get it sorted that day'.

One of the most frequent experiences that individuals spoke about was being put on pause in their various encounters with state actors during their asylum application process. Distinctive in its shorter-term temporal nature, being put on pause was a core, and often expected, mode of the (non)encounter. Much like Hafiz—a man in his late 40s from Syria—explicit moments of short-term waiting, particularly being 'put on hold' (Hamid) when attempting to contact organisations via phone calls or 'waiting for responses to WhatsApp messages' (Yad), were brought up in day-to-day conversations or interviews. These forms of waiting may appear extremely banal, perhaps even expected in any form of encounter with the state, for citizens and non-citizens alike. Despite mainstream narratives of digital encounters that focus predominantly on speed, velocity or instantaneity (Duclos, 2017), shorter term forms of waiting are almost always part of digital encounters with other (non)(post)human subjects—from waiting for your WhatsApp message to be delivered, read, and replied to, waiting for another person to 'open your Snapchat [or] wait[ing] for your Instagram story to be viewed by other people' (Gamal). As digital subjects, we become accustomed to these forms of waiting in our everyday digital practices. Yet, when these everyday practices of waiting become incorporated into how individuals now encounter the state in the everyday context, the boundaries of what acceptable forms of waiting include are unsettled; where the imaginaries of a caring or responsible state emerge through the digital mode of contact (using a familiar app such as WhatsApp, for example) but are simultaneously juxtaposed with experiencing the (non)encounter of being put on pause.

Although short-term forms of waiting are perhaps characteristic of any bureaucratic encounter with the state, the repetitive nature of having to do this work of complaint, of being held in limbo for hours or days—with the added material impacts of having no heating, electricity or broken appliances—is productive of particular modes of enduring forms of quiet, gradual or slow violence within the asylum system. For individuals seeking asylum in the UK, one of the only ways of making complaints² such as Hafiz's is through everyday smartphone practices: calling, messaging, scrolling through websites, filling in forms. It is in staying with these everyday forms of digital dis/connection—through mundane

experiences of repetitive and circular waiting—that we can locate the violence of the (non)encounter. The violence here is in the gradual wearing down of individuals. Individuals are forced into positions of accepting less-than-human living conditions *and* being expected to continue engaging in the digital encounter as a connected subject. This is not only a temporal form of violence, but spatial too: in the experience of being made to wait, individuals are often spatially suspended: either to infrastructural networks of connection (public Wi-Fi, good data signal ...) or more commonly in their space of living. For days, people I interviewed described being ‘stuck at home for many days’ trying to get through to Migrant Help or Mears (Solin).

It's also important to note that it is not only organisations such as Mears or Migrant Help that are involved in producing exhausted subjects through digital (non)encounters:

Do you ever use your phone to stay in contact with organisations that help asylum seekers here?

Gamal: Yes WhatsApp mainly ... I volunteer at one of them fixing bikes for asylum seekers in the city.

Does using WhatsApp make it easier to stay in contact with the organisation?

Gamal: Of course, how would I without it? Sometimes it can take a while for them to get back to me ... sometimes they say ‘I'm really busy today I will call you back later’ or ‘I can't answer now’ because they are busy ... busy all the time.

In Gamal's experience—a man in his early 30s from Syria—volunteering with a local organisation can also be productive of forms of waiting that can be characterised as a pause. In cases such as these, although organisations are genuinely interested in the health and well-being of asylum seekers, the capacity to be ‘digitally connected’ at all times is simply not possible. Local charitable organisations and NGOs are already known to be filling the gaps of the asylum state (Darling, 2016, 2022), particularly in the context of increasingly hostile rollbacks of state responsibility (Morgan, 2023). Now, local organisations have the added task of maintaining digital communication with individuals and groups. When speaking with individuals who worked for organisations, they frequently mentioned getting ‘WhatsApp messages from people in the middle of the night’ (19 April 2023) or having to coordinate group chats to ‘send out information about different things going on this week or month’ (9 January 2023). In such instances, forms of dis/connection in digital encounters are not being used in ways to intentionally harm or cause stress to individuals seeking asylum, but are more broadly connected with and embedded within the wider impacts of decades of hostile forms of governance that these organisations are now stretched to fill.

Being put on pause then, is a highly common experience for asylum seekers in the UK who digitally encounter the state: one that can often be taken-for-granted as a normal part of everyday life. However, if we are to consider how we might locate forms of violence here, it is in the repetition and circulation of mundane digital practices: calling, searching, being put on hold, waiting, doing it all over again. Individuals are exhausted through the cumulative and repetitive practices of this kind of (non)encounter: short-term issues may indeed be solved, but the emotional and physical work—in terms of digital practices—of getting to that point takes its toll on individuals. Often to the point where waiting is pre-empted by individuals, ‘planning their day around’ it (Solin) or ‘dreading [having to] do it again tomorrow’ (Ishan). Being put on pause as a form of (non)encounter, then, is a direct result of first, the neoliberalisation of state forms, where the capacity to act or provide continuity to individuals is reduced; even where this is not intentional in the case of local charities. And second, in the logics of hostile governance, where the continuous exposure to harmful material living conditions forces individuals to engage in exhausting digital practices which are also simultaneously harmful in themselves.

5.2 | Delays

Yad: I called Migrant Help because my bed broke, it was very painful ... they sorted out the problems, but you know ... sometimes they are very slow to fix things, for the bed I was waiting 21 days ... on the last day I called them again and I was told to call Migrant Help ... I called them and I was on hold for almost two and a half hours ... eventually ... picked up and told me to go back to Mears ... hours on the phone, waiting ... when you are waiting for them to pick up the phone, it drives you crazy listening to the music they play [laughs].

A second characteristic experience of the digital (non)encounter is that of being exposed to prolonged delays distinct from simply being put on pause in the short term. In the conversations I had throughout this research project, delays in the context of the digital (non)encounter can be more obviously tied to violence produced through neoliberalisation of state forms. Individuals seeking asylum in the UK become accustomed to the experience of being moved *between* multiple organisations or *within* organisations for one particular problem or concern. The result of externalised contracts that draw boundaries between where different actors' responsibilities lie (Darling, 2022), one single issue that an individual seeking asylum has—whether that be related to living conditions or their asylum claim—often requires back and forth between multiple contacts within *and* between multiple organisations.

The impact this had on individuals in the everyday context was that of life being put on hold, or suspended. As can be seen in Yad's experience of a broken bed in his room—a young man in his early 20s from Iran—the issue does not simply end at the physicality of the bodily pain caused by sleeping on this furniture but extends to the exhaustion of the repetitive and cyclical digital (non)encounters that are produced by the limits of responsibility by both Mears and Migrant Help. Due to the highly specific roles of each different face of the state involved here, many problems that individuals raise therefore demand individuals to 'go around in circles' to solve the problem (Gamal). Yad's account, and the experience of being passed around between different organisations and different forms of digital encounter, is reminiscent of Tazzioli's (2021) analysis of governing through disorientation. The temporal experience of being passed around between different touchpoints of the state—in calls, messages, digital limbo space-times—has detrimental effects on the health and well-being of individuals having to engage in this kind of encounter on a regular basis. Specifically, Yad spoke about being physically tired: commenting on their lack of sleep and emotional tiredness of having to live with broken furniture in the one space they felt at 'home' (Darling, 2011). Even though individuals working for larger organisations or institutions often do not intend to cause harm or delays to individuals' cases, the cumulative effect of being passed between different touchpoints of the state is productive of a particular kind of digital disorientation: one in which the individual has little knowledge about who to contact, when to contact them, or how to contact them to effectively resolve their problems or concerns.

In a similar vein, Asad—a man in his late 20s from Afghanistan—tells me:

A couple of weeks ago ... it was snowing very bad ... our heating stopped working. It was so cold. We went four days without any heating ... we were using our blankets in the living room to try and stay warm ... we called Mears ... our housing manager... on the first day many times and sent messages on WhatsApp ... all of us [talking about the three other men living in the house] were on hold, calling Migrant Help for one, maybe two hours each time for three or four days to get it fixed.

Again, here Asad highlights his and his housemates' frustrations that arose in being exposed to delays when contacting Mears and Migrant Help about their heating and electricity: in this case, being put on hold on a phone line for hours at a time (similar to previously discussed experiences of pauses) *and* going multiple days without access to heating in the middle of winter. Beyond the obvious forms of violence actively produced through non-action, Asad stayed with the frustration he felt when being paused and delayed. In our interview, he told me that 'this is normal ... any time you call you expect to be waiting for an hour or two, it is very annoying because you cannot leave or do anything else because if you miss the answer you have to do it all again ... and then they tell you to call somebody else on a different number'.

We can see here how multiple modes of the digital (non)encounter compound one another within the everyday experience of being an asylum seeker. It is not simply a case of being paused or delayed occasionally, but instead an ongoing active process of being worn down, and exhausted, through the intersections of digital dis/connection. Much like pauses, delays are characteristic of the everyday state (non)encounter. Yet, beyond the highly visual and material consequences that being delayed has on the body (broken beds, lack of gas or electricity ...), the additional toll that chasing up, moving between, and pursuing these issues through smartphone affordances produces exhausted subjects enrolled in ongoing digital practices. As we can see in the case of Yad and Asad, the prolonged ongoingness of these issues (both in terms of the materiality of the problem *and* the modes of digital contact they have been enrolled within) are productive of disaffection that is a typical manifestation of exhaustion. Delays as a form of (non)encounter thus suspend individuals within the constellations of hostile assemblages: where (non)action becomes an active form of maintaining prolonged harmful conditions (Davies et al., 2017) and a tactic of exhaustion; wearing down individuals to acceptance or expectations of less-than-human conditions.

5.3 | Voids

Today at the drop-in, Kaamil is holding his phone in his hand and unlocks it, and begins to swipe through photos of his flat, where his kitchen roof has collapsed from damp ...

... he shows me a long chain of emails, and a series of WhatsApp messages, from Mears which tell him a plasterer will be coming to fix it. He is given a date for four months into the future ... he simply laughs, locks his phone and shrugs his shoulders.

A final spatial-temporal manifestation of the (non)encounter I wish to centre in this paper is the experience of voids. The account above with Kaamil—a man in his late 20s from Syria who arrived in the UK in 2019—begins to track a series of (non)encounters he had with Mears about ongoing problems with his kitchen roof. To speak of violence here, again, the most obvious debilitating issue in this account may be the corporeality of living in and through substandard, and in some cases dangerous, accommodation. For many individuals, the material conditions of broken homes² are directly connected to experiences of violence (Glorious et al., 2016). Whether that is through leaking roofs, ‘broken appliances’ (Nala), ‘damp walls’ (Gamal). Many asylum seekers I spoke to, and *all* who were interviewed, had lived through these kinds of material issues throughout their time in the UK. Yet, what I am interested in drawing our attention to here is how we might also locate violence in the less obvious sense of *how* this form of encounter—or series of (non)encounters—manifested through everyday smartphone practices. With smartphone practices becoming the norm for state encounters, those applying for asylum in the UK are expected to do the work of complaint through taken-for-granted practices such as phone calls, WhatsApp messages or filling in online forms. For Kaamil, the issue of his roof was reported and dealt with entirely through mundane forms of encounter in email chains and WhatsApp messages with regional housing contractors Mears.

Kaamil took me through a connected thread of (non)encounters with Mears in our interview, directing me towards two experiences of voids: the first where no encounter manifested (emails or WhatsApp messages with no replies, for example), and the second where an encounter *did* occur, but where the agent on the other end of the encounter changed (a series of different Mears contractors answering an email, for example). Both experiences of voids are emblematic of the (non)encounter within a neoliberalised asylum state: where emptiness or non-continuity between state and (non) subject is commonplace (Kingsbury & Secor, 2021). Not only are there multiple non-state organisations acting on behalf of the state (the consequences of which can be found in pauses or delays), but neoliberal reforms *within* organisations have direct impacts on producing precarious workforces that have discontinuous workstreams in the name of efficiency. In the UK asylum system, this often impacts individuals like Kaamil* who have no clear point of contact with a named individual who can be held accountable for tracking complaints.

Now it is important to acknowledge here that there are situations in which the state cannot always respond to every email or message, the labour of doing so is stretched in the context of neoliberal rollbacks and welfare reform (Dajani, 2021; Guentner et al., 2016). However, the common experience that stays with individuals seeking asylum is that these (non)encounters are often unnecessarily prolonged and disjointed. For example, Nala—a woman in her 50s from Pakistan—tells me, ‘you have to be patient because you will wait a long time sometimes to get things done ... either when you call them you have to wait, or then you have to wait for the problem to be fixed ... weeks it takes sometimes with lots of calling and messaging’.

For Kaamil and Nala, as much frustration and tiredness were located in composing, sending, and replying to email chains or WhatsApp messages as the physical issue itself. The experience of filling in extended periods of nothingness—either physical action or digital mediation—with attempts to resume or reignite the digital encounter became a common way of dealing with the uncertainty and anxiety that comes with being exposed to voids. In the months between raising the complaint and it being dealt with, what was *absent*—in this case, email responses and more detailed information about the decisions that were made—was productive of anxiety and frustration, resulting from periods of (non)action in the form of voids: both in the sense of physical issues being fixed, but simultaneously in waiting for the digital encounter to resume, reform or resolve. Over the course of the email correspondence, Kaamil’s responses took on a more emotive tone, directly highlighting the stress and anxiety caused by this form of (non)encounter:

Kaamil: I am psychologically because of this, you will tire me ... and my heart is tired a lot.

Mears representative: I am sorry to hear the situation is causing you distress. I have spoken with the plumber who attended and he has advised the leak isn't a plumbing matter, he will refer to his manager with regards to the next steps.

Regards.

In the following conversations, Kaamil continued to talk about how he would 'constantly check for a reply' or 'always [be] thinking about the reply'. For those routinely encountering the state in this way, as much anxiety and frustration can be located in the exhaustion of engaging with the digital (non)encounter(s) as physical issues themselves. In this mode of encounter, everyday life is subject to voids—suspended both in waiting for responses to digital forms of communication and in the physical fixing of the material issues. Forms of being put on pause are thus productive of wearing down individuals—both in the ability to deal with the realities of living in debilitating conditions, *and* to simultaneously continue chasing up the problem through further email chains, calls, or WhatsApp messages.

Moreover, experiencing voids was also spoken about by those relying upon official government websites for information about their asylum claims, rights or expectations of the UK asylum system. Formal and informal websites have shown to be critical resources for asylum seekers to strategically source information (Gillespie et al., 2018). Yet, this is not always a straightforward form of digital connection. In their interview, Palesa—a woman in her 30s from Ethiopia—spoke about the voids or broken or missing links when attempting to source information on government websites:

Palesa: The phone for me it doesn't always mean positive things ... for example, one time I was trying to renew my identification card, but ... it can sometimes be very difficult to find the answer you are looking for, especially on websites like the Home Office, sometimes the links don't work and you cannot find a simple answer. What they have on there is ... very basic ... or sometimes too complicated to understand.

For Palesa, the experience of searching and scrolling on different official government websites, following invalid links, or attempting to find answers to her questions was productive of exhaustion through confusion and disorientation in these digital spaces/times. Although these government websites are the main trusted source for individuals seeking reliable information about their case or life in the UK, the everyday experience of using them can be exhausting: moving between pages and links to find answers; many people, like Palesa, instead 'gave up'. The experience of voids as a manifestation of the digital (non) encounter—which can be tangibly traced to the direct impacts of neoliberalisation of state forms—is thus productive of forms of exhaustion: of either attempting to fill the void (ending the *non[ness]* of the encounter) or detach from it entirely (then with implications for either mental or physical health).

6 | CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to draw attention to the novel forms of digital slow violence that characterise the contemporary UK asylum application process. Centring the experience of the (non)encounter within everyday digital life, I have drawn our attention to how experiences of pauses, delays and voids in everyday (non)encounters with the state are productive of exhausting subjects through everyday digital practices. This paper has highlighted how the novel uptake of smartphone affordances within the everyday roles and responsibilities of the asylum state has had significant impacts on individuals governed within these very systems. Despite the imagined affordances of smartphones bringing increased connection, speed or ease of contact, the reality is often that these imagined affordances stand in stark juxtaposition to how smartphones are now enrolled within the state encounter. Taking this paper forward into future work, work within geography must take seriously the digital mediations of everyday life for subjects: particularly those who are disproportionately exposed to violence on behalf of the state. Without careful consideration for how violence is now produced and accumulates in the constellations of digital dis/connection, we risk obscuring the everyday consequences of what it means to be a digitally connected subject.

One of the major contributions of this paper is mobilising the concept of the (non)encounter for a geographical understanding of digital slow violence, allowing us to carefully trace where forms of inaction—in pauses, delays and voids—become characteristic of how states now govern Othered populations. Embedded within wider assemblages of hostile governance and neoliberalising forces, I have traced how asylum seekers in the UK are actively exhausted through their everyday (non)encounters with the state through everyday smartphone practices. Despite

more traditional accounts of slow violence being present throughout this paper—the impacts of inhumane living conditions, broken appliances or confusing state communication for example—I have drawn our attention to how these already-existing forms of violence are now *compounded* through novel everyday digital practices such as reporting problems via WhatsApp, calling national helplines, or navigating information on government websites. Although distinct in their individual affective capacities, the experience of pauses, delays and voids that are present in this paper direct our attention towards the mundane forms of violence that are now regularly produced through taken-for-granted everyday digital practices. For geographers to fully appreciate what it means to be exposed to hostile forms of governance or violence, taking note of the digital geographies that condition everyday life on, with and between smartphones will become crucial.

Finally, I have highlighted how forms of exhaustion are acutely felt by individuals claiming asylum, precisely due to the reliance on smartphone technologies for the doing of everyday life *outside* of the asylum application itself. Smartphones are critical technological infrastructures through which asylum seekers can remain connected to other parts of everyday life: family, friendships, communities, resources. However, being enrolled within contemporary forms of governance that mobilise smartphones, means that individuals are constantly being exhausted—even if the (non)encounter has not yet happened, or has happened in the past. In the extracts drawn upon throughout this paper, individuals are so accustomed to experiences of digitally encountering the state, that many are caught within a cycle of anticipating future, or staying with past, forms of the (non)encounter. Suspended within a system that is characterised by forms of waiting, the digital (non)encounter becomes part of this wider technique of power that holds Othered individuals within the stickiness of the present. In this experience, the smartphone itself serves as a constant technological marker of the dis/connection(s) that tie the Othered individual to the state. This tension between the simultaneous affirmative affordances of smartphones *and* the ongoing subjectification to forms of violence must be taken seriously when attempting to engage with the everyday context of what it means to live digitally (Morgan, 2023) today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the collaborating organisation and individuals involved throughout this research project for their time and willingness to share insight into their everyday lives in the UK. Without you all, this research would not have been possible. I would also like to thank the reviewers and my PhD supervisors for their time and effort towards the publication of this paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The Home Office data that support findings of this study are available publicly at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1156826/section-95-support-local-authority-datasets-mar-2023.xlsx.

The interview and ethnographic data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request due to ethical considerations.

ORCID

Hannah Morgan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5547-1326>

ENDNOTES

¹ The term complaint here is not neutral, but reflective of how asylum seekers' needs or wants to live a humane life in the everyday context (in terms of shelter, health, well-being) are often met with disbelief or distrust. The wider hostile mode of governance that asylum is currently governed through in the UK distinguishes these demands as forms of extraordinary complaints.

² The term 'home' is not used here without acknowledgement of its political implications. For many individuals living in the UK, hotel rooms or rooms in shared houses can never fully be associated with a sense of home—even if the accommodation is occupied individually or as a family.

REFERENCES

- Alencar, A., Kondova, K. & Ribbens, W. (2019) The smartphone as a lifeline: An exploration of refugees' use of mobile communication technologies during their flight. *Media, Culture and Society*, 41(6), 828–844. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718813486>

- Bickerstaff, K. (2022) Living on with Sellafield: Nuclear infrastructure, slow violence, and the politics of quiescence. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 47, 955–970. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12540>
- Bigby, C. & Wiesel, I. (2019) Using the concept of encounter to further the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities: What has been learned? *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 6(1), 39–51. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23297018.2018.1528174>
- Blonk, L. (2021) Micro-recognition, invisibility and hesitation: Theorising the non-encounter in the social inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 46(1), 6–14. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2020.1812179>
- Bork-Hüffer, T. & Yeoh, B.S.A. (2017) The geographies of difference in conflating digital and offline spaces of encounter: Migrant professionals' throwntogetherness in Singapore. *Geoforum*, 86, 93–s102. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.09.002>
- Brankamp, H. (2022) Feeling the refugee camp: Affectual research, bodies, and suspicion. *Area*, 54(3), 383–391. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12739>
- Christian, J.M. & Dowler, L. (2019) Slow and fast violence. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 18(5), 1066–1075.
- Coddington, K. (2020) Incompatible with life: Embodied borders, migrant fertility, and the UK's 'hostile environment'. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Spaces*, 39(8), 3–14. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654420968112>
- Dajani, D. (2021) Refuge under austerity: The UK's refugee settlement schemes and the multiplying practices of bordering. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(1), 58–76. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1715453>
- Darling, J. (2011) Domopolitics, governmentality and the regulation of asylum accommodation. *Political Geography*, 30(5), 263–271. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.04.011>
- Darling, J. (2014) Another letter from the Home Office: Reading the material politics of asylum. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 32(3), 484–500. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1068/d13067p>
- Darling, J. (2016) Privatising asylum: Neoliberalisation, depoliticisation and the governance of forced migration. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41(3), 230–243. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12118>
- Darling, J. (2022) *Systems of suffering: Dispersal and the denial of asylum*. London, UK: Pluto Press.
- Darling, J. & Wilson, H.F. (2016) *Encountering the city: Urban encounters from Accra to New York*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Davies, T. & Isakjee, A. (2019) Ruins of empire: Refugees, race and the postcolonial geographies of European migrant camps. *Geoforum*, 102, 214–217. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.09.031>
- Davies, T., Isakjee, A. & Dhesi, S. (2017) Violent inaction: The necropolitical experience of refugees in Europe. *Antipode*, 49(5), 1263–1284. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12325>
- De Genova, N. & Roy, A. (2020) Practices of illegalisation. *Antipode*, 52, 352–364. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12602>
- Diminescu, D. (2008) The connected migrant: An epistemological manifesto. *Social Science Information*, 47(4), 565–579. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018408096447>
- Diminescu, D. (2010) Présentation du dossier: les migrants connectés. TIC, mobilités et migrations. *Réseaux*, 159, 9–13.
- Duclos, V. (2017) Inhabiting media: An anthropology of life in digital speed. *Cultural Anthropology*, 32(1), 21–27. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.1.03>
- Ellis, D. & Tucker, I. (2020) *Emotion in the digital age: Technologies, data and psychological life*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Gillespie, M., Osseiran, S. & Cheesman, M. (2018) Syrian refugees and the digital passage to Europe: Smartphone infrastructures and affordances. *Social Media + Society*, 4(1), 1–12. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118764440>
- Glorious, B., Doomernick, J. & Darling, J. (2016) Asylum in austere times: Instability, privatisation and experimentation within the UK asylum dispersal system. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(4), 483–505. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/few038>
- Greene, A. (2020) Mobiles and 'making do': Exploring the affective, digital practices of refugee women waiting in Greece. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(5), 731–748. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549419869346>
- Griffiths, M.B.E. (2014) Out of time: The temporal uncertainties of refused asylum seekers and immigration detainees. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40(12), 1991–2009. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.907737>
- Guentner, S., Lukes, S., Stanton, R., Vollmer, B.A. & Wilding, J. (2016) Bordering practices in the UK welfare system. *Critical Social Policy*, 36(3), 391–411. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018315622609>
- Gupta, A. & Sharma, A. (2006) Globalization and postcolonial states. *Current Anthropology*, 47(2), 277–307. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1086/499549>
- Haber, B. (2019) The digital ephemeral turn: Queer theory, privacy, and the temporality of risk. *Media, Culture and Society*, 41(8), 1069–1087. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719831600>
- Halilovich, H. (2013) Ethical approaches in research with refugees and asylum seekers using participatory action research. In: Block, K., Riggs, E. & Haslam, N. (Eds.) *Values and vulnerabilities: The ethics of research with refugees and asylum seekers*. Toowoong, QLD: Australian Academic Press, pp. 127–150.
- Handyside, S. & Ringrose, J. (2017) Snapchat memory and youth digital sexual cultures: Mediated temporality, duration and affect. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(3), 347–360. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1280384>
- Howell, A. & Richter-Montpetit, M. (2019) Racism in Foucauldian security studies: Biopolitics, Liberal war, and the whitewashing of colonial and racial violence. *International Political Sociology*, 13(1), 2–19. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/oly031>
- Hyndman, J. & Giles, W. (2011) Waiting for what? The feminization of asylum in protracted situations. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 18(3), 361–379. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2011.566347>
- Ibrahim, Y. (2022) *Migrants and refugees at UK Borders: Hostility and 'unmaking the human'*. London, UK: Routledge.

- Jones, R. (2012) State encounters. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 30(5), 805–821. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1068/d9110>
- Kallio, K.P., Meier, I. & Häkli, J. (2021) Radical Hope in asylum seeking: Political agency beyond linear temporality. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(17), 4006–4022. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1764344>
- Kingsbury, P. & Secor, A.J. (2021) *A place more void*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Koch, R. & Miles, S. (2021) Inviting the stranger in: Intimacy, digital technology and new geographies of encounter. *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(6), 1379–1401. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132520961881>
- Laurie, E.W. & Shaw, I.G.R. (2018) Violent conditions: The injustices of being. *Political Geography*, 65, 8–16. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.03.005>
- Leurs, K. (2014) Digital throwntogetherness: Young londoners negotiating urban politics of difference and encounter on facebook. *Popular Communication*, 12(4), 251–265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2014.960569>
- Lipatova, M. (2022) Waiting for what? Hope and endurance in situations of uncertainty for asylum-seekers in Greece. *European Journal of Social Work*, 25(6), 1093–1103. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2022.2115979>
- Longhurst, R. (2013) Using skype to mother: Bodies, emotions, visuality, and screens. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 31(4), 664–679. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1068/d20111>
- Martinez, C. (2023) Waiting in captivity: Slow borders, predatory bureaucracies, and the necrotemporality of asylum deterrence. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 39(2), 1–17. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.41069>
- Massey, D. (2005) *For space*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Morgan, H. (2023) Living digitally like a migrant: Everyday smartphone practices and the (Re)mediation of hostile state-affects. *Progress in Human Geography*, 47(3), 409–426. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325231174311>
- Nixon, R. (2011) *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2jbsgw>
- Omata, N. (2020) ‘Over-researched’ and ‘under-researched’ refugee groups: Exploring the phenomena, causes and consequences. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 12(3), 681–695. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huaa049>
- Painter, J. (2006) Prosaic geographies of stateness. *Political Geography*, 25(7), 752–774. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.07.004>
- Ramachandran, N. & Vathi, Z. (2022) Agency in waiting? Everyday tactics of asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow. *European Journal of Social Work*, 25(6), 1104–1116. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2022.2117135>
- Rotter, R. (2016) Waiting in the asylum determination process: Just an empty interlude? *Time & Society*, 25(1), 80–101. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X15613654>
- Said, E.W. (1993) *Culture and imperialism*. London, UK: Chatto and Windus.
- Scheel, S. (2019) *Autonomy of migration? Appropriation of mobility within biometric border regimes*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Sebald, G. (2020) “Loading, please wait” – Temporality and (bodily) presence in mobile digital communication. *Time & Society*, 29(4), 990–1008. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X20916566>
- Straughan, E.R. & Bissell, D. (2022) Working in the gig economy is boring: Non-encounters and the politics of detachment in platform capitalism. *The Geographical Journal*, 188, 534–545. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12453>
- Tazzioli, M. (2020) *The making of migration: The biopolitics of mobility at Europe's borders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Tazzioli, M. (2021) The technological obstructions of asylum: Asylum seekers as forced techno-users and governing through disorientation. *Security Dialogue*, 53(3), 202–219. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106211026080>
- Thrift, N. (2008) *Non-representational theory: Space, politics, affect*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Turnbull, S. (2016) “Stuck in the middle”: Waiting and uncertainty in immigration detention. *Time & Society*, 25(1), 61–79. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X15604518>
- Twigt, M.A. (2018) The mediation of Hope: Digital technologies and affective affordances within Iraqi refugee households in Jordan. *Social Media + Society*, 4(1), 1–14. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118764426>
- Valentine, G. (2008) Living with difference: Reflections on geographies of encounters. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(3), 323–337.
- Van Houtum, H. (2010) Human blacklisting: The global apartheid of the EU's external border regime. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28, 957–976. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1068/d1909>
- Weheliye, A. (2014) *Habeas viscus: Racializing assemblages, biopolitics, and black feminist theories of the human*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wilson, H.F. (2017) On geography and encounter: Bodies, borders, and difference. *Progress in Human Geography*, 41(4), 451–471. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516645958>
- Witteborn, S. (2015) Becoming (Im)perceptible: Forced migrants and virtual practice. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 28(3), 350–367. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feu036>

How to cite this article: Morgan, H. (2024) Everyday digital dis/connection: Locating slow violence in (non) encounters with the UK asylum state. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 49, e12674. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12674>