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Outsourcing asylum reception

Street-level organizations and the privatization of state action in Switzerland

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Submitted by

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P.O.

Neuchâtel, le 11 mars 2021

Le doyen
Pierre Alain Mariaux

Abstract

Focusing on the contracted provision of accommodation, supervision, and care to asylum seekers in Switzerland, this thesis sheds ethnographic light on the day-to-day discourses, practices, and effects of outsourced asylum reception on the ground. It proposes a thorough analysis of the subcontracting of a sovereign task to the private sphere, not only in terms of the conception of public policy, but also in terms of accountability and opportunities for negotiating politics.

Drawing on a qualitative, multiple-case study research conducted between 2016 and 2018, this dissertation examines the daily work of state-mandated organizations (a for-profit company, a non-profit organization, a charity) responsible for the cantonal (local) operational management of reception. It investigates how these organizations, and their agents, negotiate daily the reception of asylum seekers under the influence of shifting governance and managerial regimes. It sheds light on the critical location of street-level organizations – structurally situated at the interface between the state, its policies, and individuals – and on the way they determine the actual content of public policy through informal and discretionary practices.

On this basis, this thesis explores the process by which reception policy is governed by and through *private intermediaries*, namely, street-level organizations, but also instruments and logics from the private sphere. It shows that if this configuration of government is banal in its principles and has long prevailed in the Swiss reception landscape, it is instead in the distribution and proportion of public and private, but also in the articulation of the rationalities that run through it, that such configuration is specific. Similarly, by adopting a meso-political perspective including the structural, organizational, infrastructural, and individual dimensions which inform the governance of reception, this thesis goes beyond a purely individualizing understanding or, conversely, one that focuses solely on structure, to articulate a plurality of actors and spaces in the analysis of asylum reception.

Overall, this research highlights the intricacies of the broader dynamics of *the privatization of state action*, that is, the sophisticated, yet also (in)visible processes of diffusion of private intermediaries in the governance of reception. It shows how privatization – at first sight a coherent and homogeneous process – is composed of several transversal dynamics, sometimes unintentional or contradictory, produced by public and private actors. These include, for example, the contractualization, commodification and neoliberal bureaucratization of reception, its managerialization and humanitarianization, but also its depoliticization.

In addressing these issues, this thesis puts forward other dimensions of outsourcing processes that remain obscure in the social and political science literature. It illuminates the processes at

work in the neoliberal redeployment of the (welfare) state in governing reception, in particular through the shifting of the political task of implementing reception policy – and its contradictory objectives – to the operational sphere, the diversification of street-level organizations, and thus of the moral dispositions towards reception, the proliferation of bureaucratic and neoliberal formalities, and the resulting dilution of responsibilities. It is thus the account of the deconstruction of binary categories: the state, the non-state, the public, the private, the formal and the informal, but also proximity and distance, welfare and repression.

Keywords: asylum reception, outsourcing, street-level organizations, intermediaries, privatization, neoliberal bureaucratization, interface, Switzerland, ethnography

Résumé

En mettant à l'épreuve de l'ethnographie les questions posées par la sous-traitance, cette thèse apporte un éclairage sur les discours, les pratiques et les effets quotidiens de l'accueil externalisé des personnes relevant du domaine de l'asile en Suisse. Elle propose une analyse approfondie de la sous-traitance d'une tâche régalienne à la sphère privée, non seulement en termes de conception de la politique publique, mais aussi en termes de responsabilité et d'opportunités de négociation politique.

Sur la base d'une étude de terrain qualitative et multi-située menée entre 2016 et 2018, cette thèse se penche sur le travail quotidien de trois organismes (une entreprise à but lucratif, une organisation à but non lucratif, une organisation caritative) mandatés par les autorités publiques pour la gestion opérationnelle cantonale de l'accueil. Elle examine comment ces organisations, et leurs agents, négocient au quotidien la politique d'accueil, d'hébergement et d'accompagnement des demandeur-se-s d'asile sous l'influence de régimes de gouvernance et managériaux changeants. Elle met en lumière le rôle central des organisations de proximité – structurellement situées à l'interface entre l'État, ses politiques et les individus – dans l'élaboration du contenu réel des politiques publiques par des pratiques informelles et discrétionnaires.

Sur cette base, cette thèse explore le processus par lequel la politique d'accueil est gouvernée par et à travers des *intermédiaires privés*, à savoir des organisations d'interface, mais aussi des instruments et des logiques issus de la sphère privée. Elle montre que si cette configuration de gouvernement est banale dans ses principes et a longtemps prévalu dans le paysage suisse de l'accueil, c'est plutôt dans le dosage du public et du privé, mais aussi dans l'articulation des rationalités qui la traversent, qu'elle est actuellement spécifique. De même, en adoptant une perspective méso-politique incluant l'environnement structurel, idéologique, mais aussi technologique, matériel et spatio-temporel dans lequel cette politique est aujourd'hui gouvernée, cette thèse dépasse une compréhension purement individualisante ou, à l'inverse, axée uniquement sur la structure, pour articuler une pluralité d'espaces et d'acteurs dans l'analyse de l'accueil quotidien des demandeur-se-s d'asile.

Ainsi, cette recherche met en lumière la complexité et la diversité de la dynamique plus large de *la privatisation de l'agir étatique*, c'est-à-dire les processus sophistiqués, mais aussi (in)visibles de diffusion d'intermédiaires privés dans la gouvernance de l'accueil. Elle montre comment la privatisation – à première vue, un processus cohérent et homogène – est dans ce domaine composée de plusieurs dynamiques transversales, parfois involontaires ou contradictoires, produites par les acteurs publics et privés. Il s'agit, par exemple, de la contractualisation, de la marchandisation et de la bureaucratisation néolibérale de l'accueil, de sa managérialisation et de son humanitarisation, mais aussi de sa dépolitisation.

En abordant ces questions, cette thèse s'intéresse à des dimensions du processus de sous-traitance qui restent obscures dans la littérature en sciences sociales et politiques. Elle met en lumière les processus à l'œuvre dans le redéploiement néolibéral de l'État dans la gouvernance de l'accueil, notamment par le déplacement de la tâche politique de mise en œuvre de la politique d'accueil (et de ses objectifs contradictoires) vers la sphère opérationnelle, la diversification des organisations de rue, et donc des dispositions morales vis-à-vis de l'accueil, la prolifération de formalités bureaucratiques et néolibérales, ainsi que la dilution des responsabilités qui en résultent. Il s'agit donc de la déconstruction, de la construction et de la reconstruction de catégories binaires, à l'apparence fixe et homogène : l'État, le « non-État », le public, le privé, mais aussi le formel et l'informel, le managérial et l'humanitaire, la proximité et la distance, le social et le contrôle.

Mots-clés : politique d'accueil, asile, sous-traitance, organisations de proximité, intermédiaires, privatisation, bureaucratisation néolibérale, interface, Suisse, ethnographie

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Abbreviations & Acronyms

ABR	*Asile Bienne & Région /Asyl Biel & Region*
AO1	Asylum Ordinance 1 on procedural aspects
AsylA	Swiss Asylum Act
B-Permit	Foreign Nationals' residence permit – Recognized refugees
CDAS	*Conférence des directrices et directeurs cantonaux des affaires sociales* (Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Affairs)
CFA	*Centre fédéral pour requérants d'asile* (federal asylum center)
CHF	Swiss francs
CRS	*Croce Rossa Svizzera* (Swiss Red Cross)
Cst.	Swiss Constitution
DES	*Direction de la sécurité du canton de Berne* (Security Directorate of the Canton of Berne)
DSAS	*Direction de la santé et des affaires sociales du canton de Fribourg* (Health and Social Affairs Directorate of the Canton of Fribourg)
DSSI	*Direction de la santé, des affaires sociales et de l'intégration du canton de Berne* (Health, Social Affairs and Integration Directorate of the Canton of Bern)
F-Permit	Temporary admission
FAC	Federal Administrative Court
FDJP	Federal Department of Justice and Police (*Département fédéral de justice et police*)
FNIA	Swiss Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (*Loi fédérale sur les étrangers et l'intégration*)
LSEE	*Loi fédérale sur le séjour et l'établissement des étrangers* (Federal Act on the Residence and Permanent Settlement of Foreign Nationals)
N-Permit	Permit for asylum seekers undergoing procedure
NEM	*Non entrée en matière* (non consideration)
NPM	New Public Management
OFS	*Office fédéral de la statistique* (Federal Statistical Office)
ORS	ORS Service AG
OSEO	*Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés* (Swiss Refugee Council)
SASoc	*Service de l'action sociale du canton de Fribourg* (Department of Social Action of the Canton of Fribourg)
SEM	State Secretariat of Migration
SLO	Street-level organization (*organisation d'interface*)
SOS	*Soccorso Operaio Svizzero* (Swiss Workers' Relief Agency)
UMA	Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
URAR	*Ufficio dei richiedenti l'asilo e dei rifugiati del cantone Ticino* (Office for asylum seekers and refugees of the canton of Ticino)

1. Introduction

Asylum reception outsourced: setting the scene

In Switzerland, the diversification of the agents and agencies interacting in the governance of asylum has been a reality for several years now. The state, as a heterogeneous and diffuse entity, is embedded in a broader political and legal configuration in which a complex web of charities, non-profit institutions, specialized entities, and for-profit companies also participate in defining the social and political order. Yet, the involvement of private organizations in what has been called the "coveted market"[1], the "juicy business"[2] and more generally the "privatization"[3] of the housing and reception of asylum seekers raises pointed questions. Who exactly are these "private" entities? What are their interests in taking this "public" responsibility? How is it that the state can subcontract a public service that concerns human beings? How transparent are the activities delegated to the private sphere? To what extent do they remain under public control? What are the effects of this transfer on the reception policy, but also on its recipients, the asylum seekers? Privatization in this field is indeed disconcerting, as it is a matter of state sovereignty. Nevertheless, it is also frequent, especially in the context of the neoliberal restructuring of many countries since the 1980s. Therefore, what these entanglements of actors seem to indicate is the multidirectional transformation of the state: The entities that act in its name evolve and form complex chains of actors, and these reconfigurations of government imply new forms of relations between the public and private sectors, yet at the same time challenge these nominally distinct categories.

These observations also echo two dominant, closely related theses in the study of migration policies: that of their increasing outsourcing and commodification. A growing number of studies have demonstrated that states delegate to external actors – whether private or outside the geographical boundaries of a state – entire areas of migration policy (Guiraudon & Lahav 2000; Infantino 2017; Lahav 1998; Menz 2009; Scholten 2015), thus resulting in the outward rescaling (Brenner 2004) of the modern state. Further, social science research has demonstrated the emergence of a "migration business" (Rodier 2014) or "migration industry" (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sorensen 2013), particularly in the context of border surveillance mechanisms. In so doing, these studies offer a broad understanding of "migration industry actors" by including a large spectrum of public and private, for-profit and not-for-profit, specialized and non-specialized actors who perform various migration management functions. These manifold and diverse entities may have a role formally recognized by the public authorities, just as they may act informally. In other words, they may be either directly

[1] Goumaz, M. (2016). L'asile, un marché convoité. *Le Temps,* 13.06.2016.
[2] Monnat, L. (2015). Le business juteux de l'asile. *Tribune de Genève,* 11.11.2015.
[3] Wälti, C. (2007). L'asile à l'heure de la privatisation. *swissinfo.ch,* 22.11.2007.

involved in the "state system", for example under contract, or work outside, or even in opposition to, public action.

It is on this first category of actors that this thesis focuses, that is, actors *mandated* by public authorities for the implementation of the state's reception policy. Structurally situated between the state, its policies, and individuals, they are indeed key players: They are critical locations in which the day-to-day work of policy delivery takes place (Brodkin 2013). More specifically, this thesis investigates the role of *private contractors* in providing services to asylum seekers. The choice to focus on actors with private status[4] stems from a desire to break with the normative considerations commonly associated with this category of actors (for example, the fact that they are solely profit-making), but also to highlight their continuities and discontinuities in performing a state mission daily. Yet, following Valluy (2009) and d'Halluin-Mabillot (2012), one can assume that the increased recourse to contractual logic generates a cleavage: Actors mandated by the state are limited in their means of action and their freedom of expression to what is considered acceptable (and therefore fundable) by the public authorities, whereas non-contracted organizations have a much wider field of action (ideological and political). Hence, the role of organizations providing reception services in what S. R. Smith & Lipsky (1993) have termed "the age of contracting" is particularly delicate because of the tension between their roles as helpers – or even advocates – and as service providers (see also Fyall 2017; Kalir & Wissink 2016).

Accordingly, this research focuses on outsourced asylum reception in Switzerland by looking at contracted organizations (a for-profit company, a non-profit institution, and a charity) increasingly operating under the influence of shifting governance and managerial regimes. Such a perspective allows the multiple agencies involved in the everyday implementation of governmental activities not only to be disentangled, but also to reveal the effects of subcontracting on the outcomes of public policy. By investigating processes of delegation, but also managerialization and bureaucratization, it seeks to deconstruct the public-private divide, and their allegedly distinctive logics of action, in the framework of the asylum reception "battleground" (Campomori & Ambrosini 2020). It is therefore in a relational way that it proposes to apprehend the outsourcing of asylum reception: on the one hand, by analyzing how contracting processes and the involvement of private actors impact the governing of reception, and, on the other hand, by investigating how the neoliberal tendencies of the state impact the everyday provision of reception services. In so doing, this thesis highlights the intricacies of the *privatization of asylum reception*, which is deconstructed through

[4] Within the framework of this thesis, the notions of "private actors" or "private organizations" primarily refer to the *status* of these entities, i.e., to the fact that they are governed by private law. In other words, this means that, contrary to public entities, the questions relating to the internal organization of private entities are essentially beyond the control of the legislator, even if the mandated entity implements a public task. However, less normative categories such as "mandated" or "contracted actors", "service providers", "intermediaries (of state action)", and "street-level organizations" will be privileged throughout this thesis.

the analysis of the actors, instruments, and logics, from the private sphere, which currently partakes in it.

This introductory section presents the main thematic, theoretical, and methodological foundations on which this thesis is built. It introduces the main threads that I follow to understand the dynamics currently shaping the governing of asylum reception in Switzerland.

Conceptualizing and situating the field of asylum

Before introducing the questions that guide my reflection and sit at the heart of this thesis, I shall begin by offering a brief conceptual introduction to asylum governance to situate the field of reception more precisely. To this end, I propose a funnel-shaped conceptualization of the asylum field. I fix myself on the following hierarchy in descending order: migration regime, asylum governance, and apparatus[5].

Overall, the backdrop to this research is that of regulation, control, and management of population movements – in this case, refugees[6] seeking protection. The theme at the heart of this thesis, i.e., the reception of persons undergoing asylum procedure, is therefore part of the broader conceptual framework of the *migration regime* (Pott et al. 2018). This captures the various forms of regimentation or technologies that align bodies in regulated formation (Korteweg 2017: 430) and affect individual mobility (Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013: 189). In other words, it is the set of policies and regulations that aim to control, select, care for, incorporate or naturalize populations understood as foreigners or immigrants.

Asylum reception is, in turn, a particular feature of *asylum governance* (Glorius & Doomernik 2019), a sub-component of the migration regime. The governance of asylum involves the construction and definition of legal and discursive categories (Crawley & Skleparis 2018) – notably those of "asylum seekers" and "(recognized) refugees" – according to which a person is assigned a status corresponding to differentiated access to certain rights, services and goods (Eckert et al. 2003: 19). Importantly, governance also refers to "processes of ordering and the capacities of steering and allocation in which various organizations have a claim" (ibid.). In this sense, asylum governance refers to a process in which various heterogeneous elements, including individual actors, institutions, laws, infrastructures, and rationalities have a common underlying strategic imperative (Hess et al. 2016), namely the aim to deal with people seeking protection.

[5] As detailed later in this thesis, apparatuses are, in turn, made up of manifold infra-apparatus dimensions, such as actors, infrastructures, technologies or rationalities.

[6] The notion of "refugee" is understood in the broad sense of the term and not only as it is constructed and defined by legal categories, i.e., as a person to whom a nation-state grants political asylum on the basis of the criteria established by the Geneva Convention. I use this notion to refer to any person who has been forced to leave his or her country or region of origin to escape from a context that endangers his or her physical and psychological integrity, as well as his or her daily life, and who is seeking any form of protection and solidarity.

More specifically, I assume that asylum governance consists of four distinct but overlapping *apparatuses* (C. Alberti et al. 2018). An apparatus is a device of government, constituted by manifold and sometimes contradicting elements, yet oriented toward the same "problem" (Malkki 1995). Thus, each apparatus functions as a complex system of relations oriented towards a substantive goal and a specific object of government, in this case, a population, subjects of law, bodies, individuals.

First, the *apparatus of flow management* consists of the deployment of a restrictive and selective policy instituted in the country of asylum (Hassan 2000: 185-186), the stated objective of which is to limit the number of "unfounded" claims so that the asylum system can effectively manage refugee claims considered as being legitimate. It is not only materialized through procedural aspects, but also through an infrastructure of control built around sorting mechanisms, deterrence tools, and processes of categorization that contribute to the filtering of asylum applications (e.g., Aas & Gundhus 2015; Andersson 2014; Lindberg & Borrelli 2019a; Mountz 2010; Rodier 2012; Stünzi 2018).

Second, it is accompanied by an administrative apparatus, or *apparatus of case (or file) management*, aimed at rationalizing the processing of asylum applications. This widely documented apparatus – in Switzerland (Affolter 2017; Miaz 2017b; Poertner 2017; Rosset 2019a), Europe (Akoka 2020; Dahlvik 2018; Gill & Good 2019; Johannesson 2012), Canada (Tomkinson 2018) and the United States (Bohmer & Shuman 2018) – is reflected in the succession of legislative revisions, the evolution of ordinances and guidelines, as well as in the multiplication of international agreements and the administrative and judicial bodies responsible for their implementation.

The third apparatus of asylum governance – the *apparatus of bodies management* – is materialized in the placement of individuals undergoing the asylum procedure in reception (Campesi 2015; Darling 2011a; Kobelinsky 2010; Kreichauf 2018; Thorsaug 2019) and detention centers (Bosworth 2014; Conlon & Hiemstra 2014; Gill 2009; A. Hall 2012; Rezzonico 2020), emergency (De Coulon 2019), and underground shelters (Del Biaggio & Rey 2017) or, alternatively, in smaller-sized accommodations (Steigemann 2019). Its aim is to control, supervise, and support persons in the asylum procedure, or to ensure their effective deportation, while securing basic needs (housing, food, health, etc.).

It intersects with a fourth apparatus designed to discipline the behaviors of subjects and potential citizens. These individuals are obviously significantly constrained by the previous apparatus that ensures that they are located where they should be and are at the disposal of the authorities. The *apparatus of subject management*, however, targets the persons as subjects of the state's disciplining power and delineates desirable behaviors from deviant misconduct

through a system of retribution and punishment (Ravn et al. 2020; Swyngedouw 2019; Kohl 2020a).

While bearing in mind that these apparatuses are closely intertwined, this dissertation focuses specifically on the apparatus of bodies management. The more generic term "*apparatus of asylum reception"* will be used throughout this thesis. In this sense, I am interested in a specific population: asylum seekers, namely, individuals in search of refuge who are seeking and waiting for a right to protection in the global North. In this ambivalent context, in which asylum seekers are perceived and treated as individuals "in waiting", security- and humanitarian-related considerations become interrelated with narratives of efficiency and cost-effectiveness to ensure the efficient use of public resources while maintaining public order and guaranteeing (minimum) individual rights (Amelina 2017: 113). Accordingly, outsourcing and privatization thus appear as an integral part of the migration regime. In particular, the management of persons seeking protection is increasingly operated through private intermediaries (e.g., Darling 2016a; Humphris & Sigona 2019; Kritzman-Amir 2011), leading to a reclassification of the "asylum problem" from a political or social issue to an issue that is mainly (but not exclusively) managerial, technical, and bureaucratic (Darling 2016b; Hibou 2015: 105).

An ethnographic perspective on and beyond privatization

Based on ethnographic research carried out in three privately-run reception centers between 2016-2018, this thesis proposes a thorough analysis of the current process of contracting asylum reception. By investigating the mundane and formal, and, perhaps more importantly, informal practices of private organizations that are mandated by public authorities to provide reception services to asylum seekers in Switzerland, it sheds ethnographic light on outsourced reception policy on the ground.

In so doing, I approach privatization (broadly understood) as a subject of analysis that can be examined from the inside and from below, through its day-to-day discourses, enactments, incarnations, and effects. This empirical and constructivist approach allows me to grasp the complexity, but also the specificity of governing mechanisms in their daily work and manifestation (Fassin et al. 2015; Infantino 2016). Thus, it should be made clear from the outset that while the very term "privatization" is an explicit allusion to the dominant liberal rhetoric that shapes the organization of contemporary societies, in this thesis, I choose to speak of the *privatization of asylum reception* to indicate the sophisticated yet also invisible processes by which this function of the state is currently being invaded by a whole range of actors, as well as logics and instruments, from the private sphere.

The privatization of state tasks is common. Such managerial reforms generally pursue (widely desirable) objectives under the rubric of efficiency, accountability, or coordination. They now extend around the world and are nearly ubiquitous, and concern such varied policy areas as hospitals, schools or universities, social service organizations, prisons, or child-protection agencies. Yet, as Brodkin & Marston (2013) and Hibou (1999c), among others, show, these seemingly non-political strategies of governance do have deeply political consequences: They provide an avenue for changing the boundaries of the state while simultaneously limiting transparency and traceability, but also the visibility – and thus contestation – of these changes. Therefore, what this thesis aims to do, following Olivier de Sardan (2004), is to question *how* this managerial and neoliberalized dimension works, and how it is articulated with the social and political dimensions of the problems dealt with. It sheds light on its *effects* on the specific field of asylum reception in Switzerland.

To this end, I draw on a multiple-case study research design (Burawoy 1998; Yin 2003). I delve into the daily work of three private organizations: a for-profit enterprise, ORS Service AG (ORS); a non-profit organization, Asile Bienne & Région (ABR); and a charitable organization, the Swiss Red Cross (CRS). These are each responsible for the operational management of reception policy at the subnational (cantonal) level, in the cantons of Fribourg, Bern, and Ticino, respectively. Specifically, I observe and analyze their everyday work within Chamfors, Bürgistadt, and Tirossa[7], three asylum reception centers that they respectively manage daily. These observations are, in turn, articulated with the perspective of the cantonal authorities with whom these service providers collaborate daily, as well as the analysis of the legal bases, regulations, and documents that regulate this contractual relationship in the context of the policy of reception. Therefore, it is by immersing myself in the day-to-day reality of the implementation of asylum reception and spending time with the variety of actors who evolve in it that I uncover the complex and sometimes conflicting dynamics of contracting and outsourcing.

I reveal how these organizations appropriate, implement, and negotiate the policy of reception. I show how privatization – at first glance, a coherent and homogeneous process – is composed of several transversal dynamics, sometimes unintentional or mutually contradictory, in which the actors involved in the governing of asylum reception participate in a differentiated way. These include, for example, the contractualization and neoliberal bureaucratization of reception, its standardization and technicization, but also its managerialization or humanitarianization.

Overall, I suggest that we are not witnessing a simple transfer of state prerogatives from the public to the private sphere, nor the retreat of the state. Rather, we are seeing its transformation

[7] Fictitious names; see Chapter 3 for more details on ethics and confidentiality.

through the spreading of actors, instruments, and rationalities from the private sphere in the very process of government (Hibou 1999a). In this sense, an ethnographic approach to the privatization of asylum reception makes it possible to reach a deeper understanding of the broader process of governing. In so doing, I put forward other dimensions of outsourcing that remain obscure in the literature. As emphasized in the title of this thesis, I illuminate the processes at work in the neoliberal redeployment of the (welfare) state in governing asylum reception, through the diffusion and dispersal of actors, formalities and rationalities that emerge from the private sector (especially from the market), the shifting of the political task of operationalizing the (conflicting goals of the) reception policy to the implementation sphere, as well as the dilution of the resulting accountability.

The local production of asylum reception

At the core of this thesis also lies a particular thematic interest in the field of accommodation, reception, and care of asylum seekers. The choice of this field of study originates from a curiosity regarding the current dynamics of government that crosses it. Yet it also stems from a desire to shed light on the provision of public goods and services in the asylum field, rather than in the mechanisms of border control and the asylum procedure that have been predominant in the literature so far. In other words, to use Bourdieu's (1993) terminology, having inspired authors such as Wacquant (2010) and Fassin (2015), focusing on asylum reception implies questioning an unexplored function of asylum regulation that falls under the responsibility of the left (social) hand of the state.

More broadly, it also allows me to cover a gap in the Swiss literature on asylum where the legal, political, and organizational elements regulating the reception policy, but mostly its everyday and mundane practices, have never really been looked at in a systematic manner, nor through an ethnographic lens. While outside Switzerland, apart from a few studies in Austria (Rosenberger & König 2012), France (Kobelinsky 2010), the United Kingdom (Darling 2016a, 2016b; Humphris & Sigona 2019), and other European countries[8] (Glorius & Doomernik 2019; Meeus et al. 2019), asylum reception is often addressed either from the point of view of asylum seekers or through its most spectacular manifestations at the borders of Europe.

To be more precise, the peculiarity of the sovereign task of asylum reception lies in the fact that it does not directly target the exclusion, nor the inclusion of migrants in a given territory. Instead, it is part of the interstitial time between entry into a territory, the submission of an asylum application, and the (conditional) admission to that same territory. The very nature of this function is, therefore, that of ambiguity and indeterminacy, between short and long time

[8] "The State at the Street" project (ongoing) led by Karen Nielsen Breidhal and Evelyn Z. Brodkin also adopts an ethnographic and organizational perspective in the analysis of contemporary asylum politics in Sweden and Denmark. For more information, see the project webpage on https://voices.uchicago.edu/stateatthestreet/ (last accessed on 23.11.20).

periods, control and assistance, formality and informality, inclusion and exclusion. It is a time of waiting and (in)hospitality, the contours and content of which are particularly blurred and malleable (De Bono 2019).

In taking this perspective, I further aim to break with a trend in refugee studies, which have hitherto been dominated by the national perspective as the starting point. In line with Glorius & Doomernik (2019), I thus analyze the reception of asylum seekers by focusing on the local level – in my case, the subnational level. Indeed, as emphasized by Zapata-Barrero et al (2017: 242), the local perspective can "contribute to a more in-depth understanding of why and how cities and regions respond differently to similar challenges, and of why and how these different answers can affect state-based models of immigration management". In other words, this "local turn" implies a reconceptualization of the local as the level of policymaking in migration governance. In this study, my interest in the cantonal reception policy involves, on the one hand, questioning Switzerland's federalist system, but also, on the other hand, articulating the apparatus of asylum reception with local socio-historical dynamics and local conceptions of reception.

Theorizing state action

By addressing the above-mentioned topics, this dissertation participates in a body of social and political science studies theorizing "the (welfare) state". It mobilizes and contributes to several strands of literature that assist in ethnographically tracking the contours of state action[9].

First of all is research on *policy implementation,* which focuses on the actors and agencies working at the street-level of government (Brodkin 1990; Lipsky 2010). This theoretical stance is crucial in the understanding of the street-level policymaking of actors; in this case, private organizations carrying out the policy of reception on the government's behalf. A street-level implementation perspective, in this sense, has the potential to shift the focus from policy design to day-to-day practices. This thesis contributes to the literature on street-level organizations in the welfare state (Brodkin 2013, 2015, 2020) and to the analysis of their critical role in the mediation of policy and politics.

The second strand is the *socio-anthropology of bureaucracy* (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2019; Blundo & Le Meur 2008a; Dubois 1999; Eckert 2020a) for highlighting the everyday and mundane practices of bureaucratic administrations, be they public (government, public

[9] I refer to "state action" – an expression derived from its French version "*l'agir étatique*" used in several studies dealing with the transformation of the state in the Swiss context (see, e.g., Cattacin & Lucas 1999; Kissling-Näf & Cattacin 1997) – as it gives me more freedom in understanding the (often shifting) contours of government activities, without using predefined categories. In the context of this thesis, this term will be used interchangeably with the (perhaps less normative) one of "public action". Chapter 4 proposes an in-depth reflection around "the state" and the different ways of conceiving its action from an ontological and theoretical perspective.

administrations) or private (enterprises, charities, and other non-profit institutions), and their employees, and from the *anthropology of the state* (Das & Poole 2004; Hansen & Stepputat 2001; Sharma & Gupta 2006) for its critique of the state as a fixed, unitary, and homogeneous entity. Their theoretical contribution is valuable in that they approach the concept of "the state" cautiously by addressing "the disaggregated, diverse and specific (or local) sites" (Allen 1990: 22) in which it actually comes into being. They also provide tools to think of the state through its bureaucratic tendencies, thus allowing the discussion of state action to be framed around the highly bureaucratic processes of privatization and outsourcing.

A third and double strand is the *anthropology of public policy* (Wedel et al. 2005), but also the *socio-anthropology of public action* (Lavigne Delville 2017), which offer an off-centered view of the way in which a public problem is constructed and dealt with, in particular through the mobilization of a wide range of actors, often at several scales and from different spheres. By connecting disparate actors in complex power and resource relations, and counteracting the use of dichotomous and prefabricated frameworks, these theories significantly contribute to the comprehension of how a multiplicity of actors reproduce, resist, or otherwise affect processes of governing. In other words, they construct policy as a fluid site of political contestation.

This thesis also draws inspiration from "critical asylum geography" (Darling 2016b ; Gill 2016; Mountz 2010), on the one hand, which calls for focusing on the everyday, spatialized, and material reproduction of state effects. On the other hand, it also calls on theories from organizational sociology, public management, and public administration. These contribute to the understanding of how politicians and bureaucrats produce and draw on different kinds of knowledge to make sense of policy problems, but also the legitimization of certain tools and modes of governance (Boswell 2015, 2018; Emery & Giauque 2005, 2012), as well as more broadly the political significance of reforms affecting the state and the exercise of its power (Hibou 1998, 1999b, 1999c, 2015).

Finally, this thesis draws largely on "refugee" and "camp studies" (e.g., Agier 2008; Fresia 2009; Malkki 1995; Oesch 2017; Ramadan 2013; Sigona 2015; Turner 2016) to analyze the daily functioning of asylum facilities, paying particular attention to their material and spatio-temporal dimensions, as well as to their many ambiguities. It contributes to this literature by proposing an original and detailed analysis of the workplaces of reception agents (i.e., the offices) and how they structure the everyday dynamics of the governance of reception.

These different theoretical lenses allow me to think of the state as a daily and embodied, yet fluid, entity, and to uncover the operation of power at multiple scales and centers. In other words, the articulation of these different fields of literature allows me to conceive of the state in a plural way, that is to say, to show that it has multiple institutional faces, that it materializes

through a multitude of places, spaces, and infrastructures, but also that it does not follow a single, coherent logic and operates through the entanglement of manifold, often contradictory rationalities.

Intermediaries and the posture of the interface

The constellation of actors, norms, infrastructures, and rationalities that are intertwined in the apparatus of reception leads me to adopt a posture of "the interface" in the analysis and comprehension of the private provision of this public policy. This posture, indeed, enables the different perspectives that are necessary to understand complex human phenomena to be included (Fresia 2007). It is a means of linking different levels of analysis (or "spaces"), such as the structural, organizational, infrastructural, and individual dimensions.

In my case, this interface is concretely embodied in the figure of the reception center for asylum seekers – at the heart of my ethnographic fieldwork – in which the many spaces and perspectives interwoven into the governing of asylum reception crystallize and meet. It involves an international, national, and cantonal legal space, as well as a local historical space, each in turn governed by different norms, institutions, and actors. The challenge, then, is to understand and analyze how this entrenchment reveals social and political transformations taking place in the society under observation.

In so doing, I therefore go beyond a purely individualizing understanding or, conversely, one that focuses solely on structure, to articulate a plurality of spaces in the analysis of asylum reception. To be more precise, I propose to focus on the *intermediaries of state action*, i.e., the infrastructure of reception in the material and spatio-temporal sense of the term, the street-level organizations providing reception services, and the instruments and rationalities that traverse this field. Crossing the elements and scales of analysis allows me to have a global understanding of the mechanisms of government at work in the field of reception; in other words, to grasp the intermediate dynamics that shape the governing of asylum reception, both transversal and specific to this field. The bureaucratization and neoliberalization of reception are telling examples: While these two processes affect society as a whole and have contributed to (re)defining its contours in recent years, they also affect the field of reception in a particular and localized way through the normative inflation, yet also abstraction, to which it is subject through its contractualization and commodification. It is therefore by questioning the specific effects of these processes on asylum reception that I can, in turn, also reflect more generally on the neoliberal tendencies of the (welfare) state.

By adopting a meso-political perspective, this thesis makes two principal contributions: first, it bridges the micro- and macroscale perspectives that have hitherto been predominant in the study of "the state". Second, it contributes to the literature on asylum reception, and more

broadly on the regulation of migration, by offering a thorough analysis of the governmental rationalities and everyday-power effects of outsourcing.

Research questions and outline

Based on the presented theoretical background and the discussed literature, including the identified research gaps, this dissertation addresses three sets of research questions articulated around one main and transversal interrogative, namely *how is asylum reception governed in Switzerland today* and, more specifically, *how (and why) is the day-to-day implementation of asylum reception governed through outsourcing and contracting processes?*

A first set of questions focuses on the relationship between government mechanisms and the contextual and structural framework in which they take place: What is the legal, political, and economic framework that structures asylum reception today? How does the public-private relationship in this field evolve over time? In what historical context(s) do these dynamics take place?

Part I of this thesis answers these questions by proposing a legal and socio-historical contextualization of asylum reception in Switzerland (Chapter 2). This chapter is accompanied by a methodological reflection on accessing and encountering "the field" and its (un)certainties (Chapter 3), as well as by an ontological and theoretical reflection on "the state" and the different ways of conceiving its action (Chapter 4). It presents how and why the intermediaries of state action are to be considered in order to refine the understanding of the everyday governing of asylum reception.

A second set of questions is interested in the manufacturing of asylum reception from an (infra)structural perspective. It uses the concept of the apparatus, mentioned above, as an analytical guideline: What are the rationalities behind the material, temporal, and spatial incarnation of asylum reception? How and why is the apparatus of asylum reception co-constituted and enacted by different organizations? How are these government arrangements characterized, particularly in terms of transparency and responsibilities, but also in terms of contractual relations?

Part II deals specifically with these questionings. On the one hand, it disentangles the spatial, temporal, and material moorings of asylum reception and wonders about their joint production of a "suspended" time-space (Chapter 5). While presenting an initial analysis of the reception apparatus, this chapter draws on the data collected in the field to provide a more detailed contextualization of asylum reception. On the other hand, Part II focuses on the contractual arrangements that delineate asylum reception, paying particular attention to the neoliberal bureaucratization of reception spaces (Chapter 6). In so doing, it highlights the

politics of (un)certainty that structure, constrain, yet also enable the governing of asylum reception.

A third set of questions aims to extend the understanding of what outsourced reception looks like in day-to-day practices: Who are the contracted agents and agencies and how do they make sense and position themselves within the reception apparatus in which they operate? What logics, values, and interests do they draw upon to implement and negotiate asylum reception? How are various rationalities contested, reconfigured or (re)produced in the apparatus of asylum reception?

Accordingly, Part III starts by looking at the way contracted organizations conceive their role and legitimize their place within the apparatus of reception (Chapter 7). On this basis, it then analyzes the informal and discretionary practices and discourses that they develop daily in negotiating the *arrangements* that circumscribe the provision of services (Chapter 8) and the *content* of reception services (Chapter 9). Overall, these two chapters address the role of street-level practitioners in (co-)constructing the realities of asylum reception.

Finally, the conclusion provides a synthesis of these different empirical parts and considers the theoretical implications of my study (Chapter 10). It also proposes a more general reflection on the politics of enclosure, that is, the marketization and uniformization of asylum reception, but also the process of restricting alternatives for reception services.

By addressing these questions, this thesis investigates the effects of subcontracting a sovereign task to the private sphere, not only in terms of the conception of public policy, but also in terms of accountability and opportunities for contesting politics. Overall, this dissertation is thus the account of the deconstruction, construction, and reconstruction of supposedly fixed and homogeneous binary categories: the state, the non-state, the public, the private, but also managerial and humanitarian, proximity and distance, welfare and repression.

PART I • Encountering and unsettling asylum reception

2. Asylum reception under Swiss federalism

> Originally, Switzerland considered that the granting of asylum was a task of the state, but that assistance should primarily be entrusted to private bodies. Thus, during the Second World War, relief organizations took on the task of assisting refugees at their own expense. Afterward, the Confederation took over an increasing share of the expenses. The drafting of the Asylum Act and its revisions led to the gradual abandonment of the subsidiary nature of the competence to provide assistance and to the recognition of this service as a task of the state. (FF 1996 II 87[10]; personal translation[11])

In Switzerland, asylum law is a matter of the Confederation and is defined by the Asylum Act of 26 June 1998[12], its ordinances and directives. The AsylA defines who may be recognized as a refugee and who may be granted asylum. The term "refugee" corresponds to the term "refugee" as defined in the Geneva Convention as it relates to the Status of Refugees. As long as AsylA contains no specific provision, individuals seeking protection in Switzerland are subject to the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act[13] (FNIA), and the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) in Bern is the sole authority deemed competent to make asylum decisions.

The Swiss federal system implies a system of government in which power is shared between the central state (federal level) and several subnational regions (cantonal level), the latter being the principal authorities responsible for the implementation of national law. This federal structure has an influence on various aspects of migration policies — in particular, the granting of citizenship and integration policy (see, e.g., Manatschal 2014; Probst et al. 2019). In the field of asylum, either the Confederation or the respective canton is responsible for providing material and personal reception amenities to an asylum seeker. They may in turn mandate third parties to implement these tasks. This leads to very diverse practices, precisely regarding housing, reception, and welfare considerations. In ongoing political debates within Switzerland, opinions vary on whether this diversity in approaches is beneficial or detrimental. Some contend that variations in reception conditions constitute a real source of discrimination for asylum seekers and refugees (EKR 2009), while others argue that this

[10] Message du 4 décembre 1995 concernant la révision totale de la LA ainsi que la modification de la LSEE (FF 1996 II 86 ss).
[11] All excerpts from legal and official documents cited in this chapter have been translated from French or German into English.
[12] Loi sur l'asile du 26 juin 1998 (RS 142.31).
[13] Loi fédérale sur les étrangers et l'intégration du 16 décembre 2005 (RS 142.20).

system gives greater freedom to cantons and, therefore, facilitates the evolution of cantonal "best practices" (Kriesi & Trechsel 2010; Linder 2011).

More specifically, today, the accommodation and care of persons in the asylum field are governed at the federal level by Articles 80 and 81 AsylA. These are complementary; while Art. 80 deals with the division of competencies between the Federal government and the cantons in the granting of social and emergency assistance to persons undergoing asylum procedure ("who does what"), Art. 81 addresses the question of "who is entitled to what" (Nguyen 2015a: 527).

These two articles of law form the thread running through this chapter. Its purpose is indeed to provide the contextual bases necessary to understand the rest of this thesis while situating my research in a longer time frame to place it in the precise context in which it takes place. However, it is not yet a question of providing a critical analysis of it. In doing so, I begin by providing a brief historical overview of Switzerland's reception experience (2.1-2.2) and by outlining the current asylum procedure and its recent developments (2.3). I then introduce the current modalities and standards of asylum reception (2.4). More precisely, I present the legal bases that govern the administrative organization of reception and its financing, and the conditions of reception of asylum seekers in Switzerland. The three cantons and organizations that are the subject of this thesis — namely the canton of Fribourg with ORS, the canton of Bern with ABR, and the canton of Ticino with CRS — are also briefly portrayed. In conclusion, I propose to go back in time (again) to trace the genesis of Art. 80 (2.5). This time, I focus on the evolution of the distribution of competencies between the Confederation, the cantons, and private organizations in the field of asylum reception since the beginning of the 20th century. This analysis is essential for understanding the rest of this dissertation: It aims to show from the outset that the private and public sectors in Switzerland have maintained a longstanding relationship and that public-private partnerships in the field of reception are far from new.

2.1. Overview of national reception experiences

This section presents the main historical events that have marked Switzerland's reception experiences and influenced the current policy of asylum reception.[14] Chapter 2.2 proposes a more detailed examination of the shifting context of the years 2015-2020, the period in which this research took place.

[14] This historical section is mainly based on the following bibliographical references: Arlettaz & Arlettaz (2000); Parini & Gianni (2005); Piguet (2009, 2019); Kälin (1992); Riaño & Wastl-Walter (2006). Overall, regarding the history of Swiss asylum policy, see also Bolzman (1993); Bonjour (1970); Caloz-Tschopp (1982); Frossard & Hagmann (2000); Maillard & Tafelmacher (1999); Parini (1997a); Stünzi (2018). It is also worth mentioning that refugee policy during the Second World War is one of the most controversial chapters in contemporary Swiss history, both in public debate and in academic research (Stünzi 2018: 138), where it has given rise to a great deal of research and the publication of important reports commissioned by the authorities from groups of historians (e.g., the Ludwig report of 1957 and the report of the Bergier Commission in 1999).

Switzerland's reputation as a place of refuge goes back further than the post-Second World War period. As far back as the 16th century, Switzerland offered refuge to thousands. At that time, for example, refuge was provided to the Huguenots, a group of French Protestants who were persecuted for their religious beliefs. Through the admittance of increasing numbers of political refugees, particularly during the 19th century, Switzerland became known as a "country of asylum".[15] The founding of the Red Cross in Geneva in the 19th century is especially symbolic of the humanitarian and liberal spirit that prevailed until the early 20th century (Riaño & Wastl-Walter 2006). As Piguet (2019: 43) stresses, however, the image of Switzerland as a country of asylum rests as much on an effective reception as on the feeding of a myth.

The period of the First and Second World War can be perceived as a turning point. On the one hand, the numbers of protected persons increased, and on the other hand, there were powerful tendencies towards retrenchment and closure (Stünzi 2018). The emergence of a "culture of threat" (Riaño & Wastl-Walter 2006: 7) led to the conviction that Switzerland should shift its ideology from that of a country of refuge to one of transit. Employing "the boat is full" rhetoric (Bolzman 1993), the Federal government gradually closed the country's borders to refugees seeking entrance "solely on racial grounds". While many Jewish refugees were deeply impacted by this political measure (they were perceived by the Swiss government as a danger to the country), a significant number of other non-Jewish refugees did find asylum in Switzerland during that period (Parini 1997b; Riaño & Wastl-Walter 2006).

As in the rest of Western Europe, the time spanning from the Second World War to the 1970s may be considered, in Switzerland, a "Cold War refugee" period. It is in this context that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was founded and the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was signed in Geneva and ratified by Switzerland three years later.

This new international regime of asylum is challenged for the first time with the Hungarian crisis in 1956: Hungarian refugees fleeing persecution collectively are indeed not covered by the 1951 Refugee Convention, the new individual definition of a refugee of which is enshrined in Swiss law. Nevertheless, as scholars note (e.g., Parini & Gianni 2005; Piguet 2019), the reception of Hungarian refugees into Switzerland was characterized by the speed of the reaction, excellent methods of admission, housing, and integration conditions. More than the legal commitments of 1951, it is therefore the political context of the Cold War and the surge of popular solidarity that explain the generosity of the welcome in Switzerland (Piguet 2019: 61). It is worth noting, however, that according to the same authors, this remarkable level of

[15] It should also be stressed that until the 1880s, Switzerland characterized itself as an emigration country. Foreigners were, therefore, perceived as indispensable to the country's economic development (Arlettaz & Arlettaz 2004; Arlettaz 1991).

generosity could also be explained as a desire to compensate for past deficiencies in relation to the restrictive reception of Jewish refugees during the Second World War (see also Bergier 2002). The reception conditions that were established during the Hungarian crisis remained in place for subsequent Tibetan and Czechoslovakian refugees during the 1960s.

Overall, as Stünzi (2018: 55-58) points out, Switzerland's ratification of the Geneva Convention marks a fundamental stage in the discursive and legal construction of the category of refugee at the national level. More generally, it also obliges Switzerland to align itself with the other signatories of the Convention and/or international organizations dealing with the asylum issue, such as the UNHCR. Yet, along with the international context and the movement of refugees, the economic situation in Switzerland, as well as the "ideological-identity" confrontations[16] on the question of foreigners (on this topic, see Chapter 2.5 and Box 2.8) are in this respect also significant factors in determining Switzerland's policy towards political refugees.

In effect, contrary to the unanimity encountered regarding the asylum processes employed with the Hungarians and Czechoslovakians, the reception of Chilean refugees fleeing Pinochet's regime in 1973 gave rise to a significant controversy, calling the justification of Switzerland's asylum ideology into question. For the first time, the national consensus about the openness of the asylum policy was compromised in the form of notable divergences in opinion over what attitude should be adopted towards the new refugees. While the Swiss authorities were very reluctant to admit them and questioned the role of Switzerland regarding refugees from such remote regions, Swiss humanitarian groups lobbied for their acceptance. The Federal government offered to receive no more than 250 Chilean refugees. According to Arlettaz & Arlettaz (1998) and Bolzman (1993), the timidity of this reception can be explained by the fact that it no longer fit within a view to combatting communism.

The culmination of events related to the reception of Chilean refugees spurred the creation of the first Swiss Asylum Act, which was voted in by the Parliament on 5 October 1979 and came into force in 1981. Its purpose was to formalize a practice that had so far only been based on article 21 of the Federal Act on the Residence and Permanent Settlement of Foreign Nationals (LSEE)[17]. AsylA, nevertheless, left a large degree of autonomy to the authorities: It assigned the policymaking power to the Confederation while clearly giving cantons the responsibility of implementing policy (see below on the distribution of competencies in the field of asylum reception).

[16] Following Parini & Gianni (2005: 191-196), the term "ideological-identity confrontations" (*affrontements idélogico-identitaires*) refers to the set of questions concerning the repercussions of the asylum and immigration policy on Swiss identity and, more generally, everything that concerns the relationship with foreigners.
[17] Loi fédérale sur le séjour et l'établissement des étrangers du 26 mars 1931, in force until 31 December 2007.

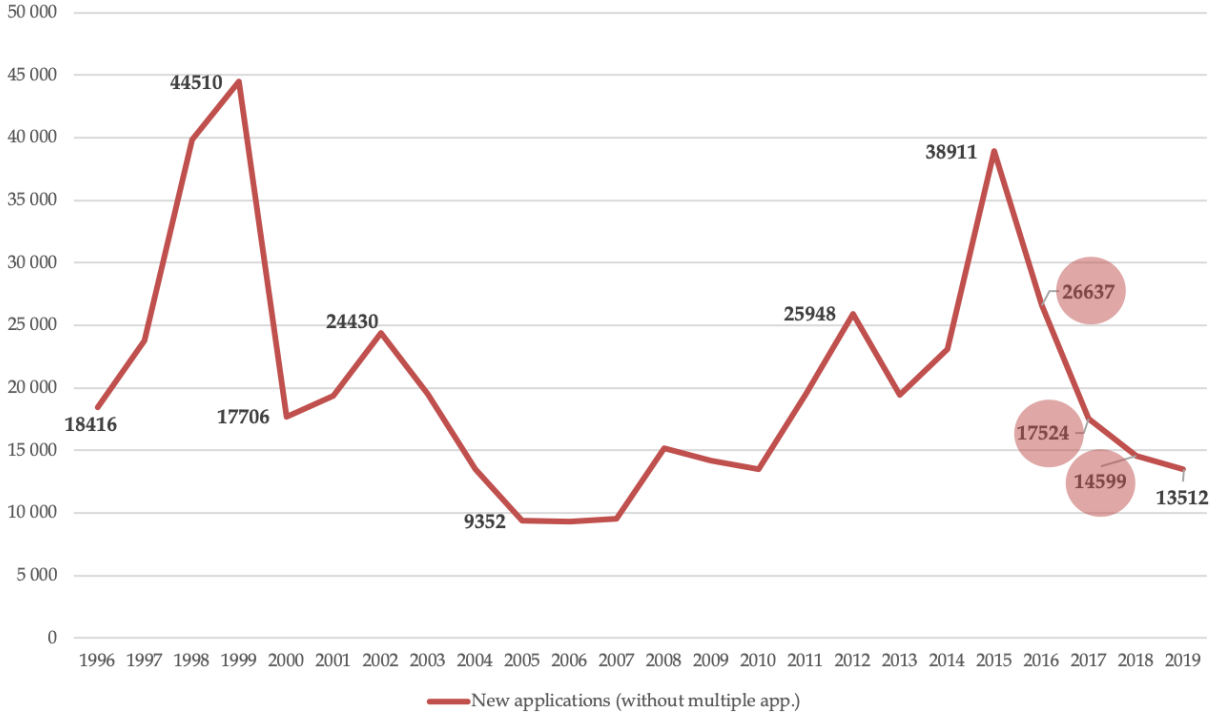
By 1980, Switzerland was faced with a significant increase in asylum applications, primarily from Eastern European countries and from Turkey. Additional applications from Chile and Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) were then added to the stack between 1981 and 1983. The increase continued from 1984 until 1990 with requests for refuge from Sri Lanka. The result of these mounting conditions of crisis was a historical record of 41,600 asylum applications in 1991. This is generally referred to as the "first asylum crisis" (Piguet 2019: 78) in Switzerland.

Furthermore, measures were implemented to avoid having to process too many individual applications and to accelerate procedures. One of the main changes was the 1986 introduction of a distribution key to ensure the "fair distribution" of the asylum seekers (and the associated costs) between the cantons. Prior to this amendment, as explained by Antonioni Luftensteiner (2015), asylum seekers were free to choose the canton in which they wanted to stay (place of living). This resulted in some cantons becoming "overcrowded", while others received only a few refugees.[18] For that reason, the Federal Council decided to define attribution criteria between the cantons and introduced a distribution key in the Ordinance of May 22, 1991 (see Box 2.1).

It is also worth noting that the federal authorities introduced two forms of provisional admission in the late 1980s (Stünzi 2018: 208-209), i.e., an individual provisional admission and a temporary protection for "groups of refugees" (primarily aimed at people fleeing Bosnia and Kosovo).[19] These measures represented crucial turning points in Swiss asylum policy, as Switzerland was one of the first countries to introduce them. As explained by Parini & Gianni (2005: 210-211), the introduction of a provisional status can be understood both as a restriction and as a widening of the asylum policy. In fact, Switzerland could admit refugees without cumbersome administrative formalities but send them back to their country of origin when return could reasonably be required. Provisional admission thus offers only one perspective: return over the medium or the long term.[20]

[18] At that time, 70% of asylum seekers were distributed in the cantons of Basel-City (19%), Bern (15%), Zurich (12%), Geneva (10%), Vaud (9%) and Fribourg (5%) (BBI 1986 681).
[19] Originally, churches, aid organizations, and human rights organizations were the groups touting the provisional refugee status. They considered it an alternative to "open detention" (*internement en milieu ouvert*), which was at that time considered to be the only alternative when removal was not permitted, reasonable, or possible.
[20] This logic of "provisional admission" can also be found in the Swiss migration policy, which, from the 1930s to the 2000s, has been using the status of "seasonal worker" (*Gastarbeiter*) to prevent foreign workers from settling permanently in Switzerland (see Piguet 2009; Mahnig 2005).

Figure 1: Asylum applications in Switzerland, 1996-2019



Source of data: SEM[21]; red circles indicate years of fieldwork

With a total of 44,510 new applications, Switzerland went through its "second asylum crisis" in 1999. The applications filed that year came mostly from people from Serbia, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, and Somalia. Following the end of the Kosovo conflict, the number of asylum applications in Switzerland saw a marked decline. However, the asylum issue remained on the political agenda as the figures still exceeded 10,000 applications per year (the exception being between the years 2005 to 2007). If 2012 was characterized by a significant increase in asylum applications, it must be noted that the non-consideration (NEM) rate[22] was never higher (65%). This is mainly due to the context of the early 2010s — namely, the Arab Spring, the high rate of "Dublin cases"[23], but also the significant number of applications from citizens

[21] All the statistics presented in this chapter are drawn from the figures published by the SEM: https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/publiservice/statistik/asylstatistik.html (last accessed on 6.6.2020). See also the synthetic reports published by the SEM.

[22] A non-consideration (NEM) decision means that the federal authorities do not examine in depth the asylum application, either because another state is held responsible for it or because the application is "manifestly unfounded". (Before 2014, there were more grounds for a NEM decision, in particular the lack of documentary proof of identity.) Non-consideration rate, therefore, is the total number of non-consideration (NEM) decisions out of the total number of cases handled in the year.

[23] The aim of the Dublin Regulation is to ensure that only one Dublin member state examines an asylum application. Specifically, responsibility for examining a refugee's asylum claim is assigned to the country that first received the refugee. In other words, a refugee who entered European territory through Italy, and who has continued on to Switzerland, cannot apply for asylum in Switzerland. Thus, this implies that if another state is found to be responsible, Switzerland will transfer the asylum seeker (i.e., the "Dublin case") to that state.

in "safe European countries" who were allowed to enter Switzerland without a visa, which were treated in an accelerated manner[24] by the SEM.

In this regard, it should indeed be noted that Switzerland has made extensive use of the Dublin mechanism since its entry into force in 2008. On the one hand, as emphasized by Stünzi (2018: 266), the Confederation sends back many more asylum seekers than it has to accept from other Member States, according to a ratio of about 8 removals for 1 treatment. On the other hand, Switzerland is one of the countries that makes the most use of the possibilities of returning applicants to countries of first asylum in comparison with Europe: While actual transfers amount to approximately 3 to 4% of all asylum applications filed in all Member States, Switzerland is the only state to substantially reduce (between 15 and 20%) the number of asylum applications to be examined (ibid.). This "blind application"[25] is regularly fought against by a broad coalition of aid organizations involved in the asylum field.

Conversely, 2014 is marked by a sharp increase in the protection rate[26]. In that year, the primary nationalities of asylum applicants were Eritrean, Syrian, and Sri Lankan.

2.2. 2015-2020: a shifting context

Between the time I formulated my first research questions in 2015 and the period in which I finished writing this thesis, the context in which the reception of asylum seekers takes place has changed profoundly, both in terms of the number of refugees arriving in Switzerland and the system that regulates the asylum procedure (on this subject, see below). While 2015 marked an unprecedented increase in asylum applications, 2020 was characterized by the lowest figures since the mid-2000s. These fluctuations have a direct impact on asylum reception, to which its decision-making and operational actors constantly had to adapt. It is precisely during these highly uncertain and changing years that my fieldwork took place (see Figure 1). These constant uncertainties, however, define the very nature of asylum (Horst & Grabska 2015; A. M. Williams & Baláž 2012).

Overall, the number of persons seeking asylum in Switzerland in 2015, during the "summer of migration" (Buckel 2016), reached 38,911[27], 68% more than in 2014. Eritreans, Afghans, and Syrians comprised the top three nationalities of asylum seekers. Males accounted for 72% of

[24] This special measure called the "48-hour procedure" was implemented precisely in 2012 to treat applications of citizens from "safe European countries" (such as Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo) in an accelerated manner.
[25] See Amnesty International, "Une large coalition lance l'appel contre l'application aveugle du règlement Dublin », on https://www.amnesty.ch/fr/pays/europe-asie-centrale/suisse/docs/2017/une-large-coalition-lance-lappel-contre-lapplication-aveugle-du-reglement-dublin (last accessed on 29.9.20).
[26] Protection rate is the total amount of granted asylum plus provisional admissions out of the total number of decisions (i.e., granted asylum, dismissed applications, and NEM). It should be noted that Switzerland distinguishes the *protection* rate from the *recognition* rate, which is the total number of positive decisions (granted asylum) out of the total number of decisions.
[27] This figure only includes *first-time applications*. In 2015, out of the 39,523 total asylum applicants (i.e., including repeat applicants), 38,911 were first-time applicants. In addition, it should also be noted that the number of applications per year is not the same as the number of cases handled. For example, in 2015, out of the total of first-time applications, only 28,118 were handled.

the total number of applicants. Further, the number and share of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMA) more than doubled. It should be considered, though, that compared to the total number of applications in Europe, the increase in applications in Switzerland was very moderate. However, with a share of 4.9 asylum applications for every 1,000 residents, Switzerland was above the EU average of 2.6‰.

The resulting consequence of this context was an expansion of cantonal accommodation facilities for asylum seekers throughout Switzerland. In a very short period, the cantonal authorities had to open new structures – mainly existing buildings reassigned as "accommodation centers" – to cope with the large number of refugees arriving. Numerous military structures and underground shelters were used for this purpose, which was met with much criticism (see e.g., Del Biaggio & Rey 2017). The opening of these facilities also necessitated the adaptation and, thus, hiring of sufficient staff. As I was often told in the field, during the year 2015, it was not uncommon for centers to be overcrowded. The turnover of people, both residents and staff, was also very frequent. Albeit moderately, this was still the case in 2016, at the time of my fieldwork in the canton of Fribourg, as the head of the observed center had to juggle between running the center and opening a new temporary underground structure to provide additional accommodation.

The migratory context that characterized 2017 and 2018, the years in which I carried out my fieldwork in the cantons of Bern and Ticino, then, progressively evolved (Figure 2). The number of asylum applications filed after 2015 indeed decreased significantly. This decrease is correspondingly observed in the cantons that were allocated a percentage of asylum seekers based on the "allocation key" (see Box 2.1) determined by article 21 of the Asylum Ordinance 1 (AO1)[28]. The main country of origin of asylum seekers was Eritrea, followed by Syria and Afghanistan. The population of asylum seekers applying in Switzerland was approximately two-thirds male and one-third female.

Box 2.1 Allocation key and distribution of asylum seekers among cantons

In Switzerland, the distribution of asylum seekers among the cantons relies on a distribution key defined by law, which is based on the ratio of the population of the canton concerned to the total population of Switzerland. Thus, each canton receives a quota of asylum seekers in proportion to its population. The allocation is done electronically and randomly. When an asylum seeker is assigned to a canton, his or her file is transmitted to the competent cantonal authority. The latter is then responsible for allocating the asylum seekers to the cantonal and municipal reception facilities. The SEM has no influence on the distribution of asylum seekers within the cantons.

[28] Ordonnance 1 sur l'asile relative à la procédure du 1er août 1999 (RS 142.311).

Various elements are supposed to be considered when allocating asylum seekers to the cantons, such as the need for support (e.g., asylum seekers with health problems and unaccompanied minors) or the requests for allocation to a specific canton made by the applicants (e.g., to preserve family unity). Nuclear families (spouses, minor children) cannot be separated. However, as stressed by Nufer et al. (2015a: 52), in practice, the interests of the asylum seekers hardly seem to be taken into account (apart from family unity in so much as it speaks to core family members). Further, the applicant's mobility – in terms of the place of living and, eventually, the workplace – is strictly limited to the one canton until such time as the applicant receives a final positive decision on his or her application. The mobility restriction is lifted as soon as the person is recognized as a refugee and receives a residence permit (B-Permit).

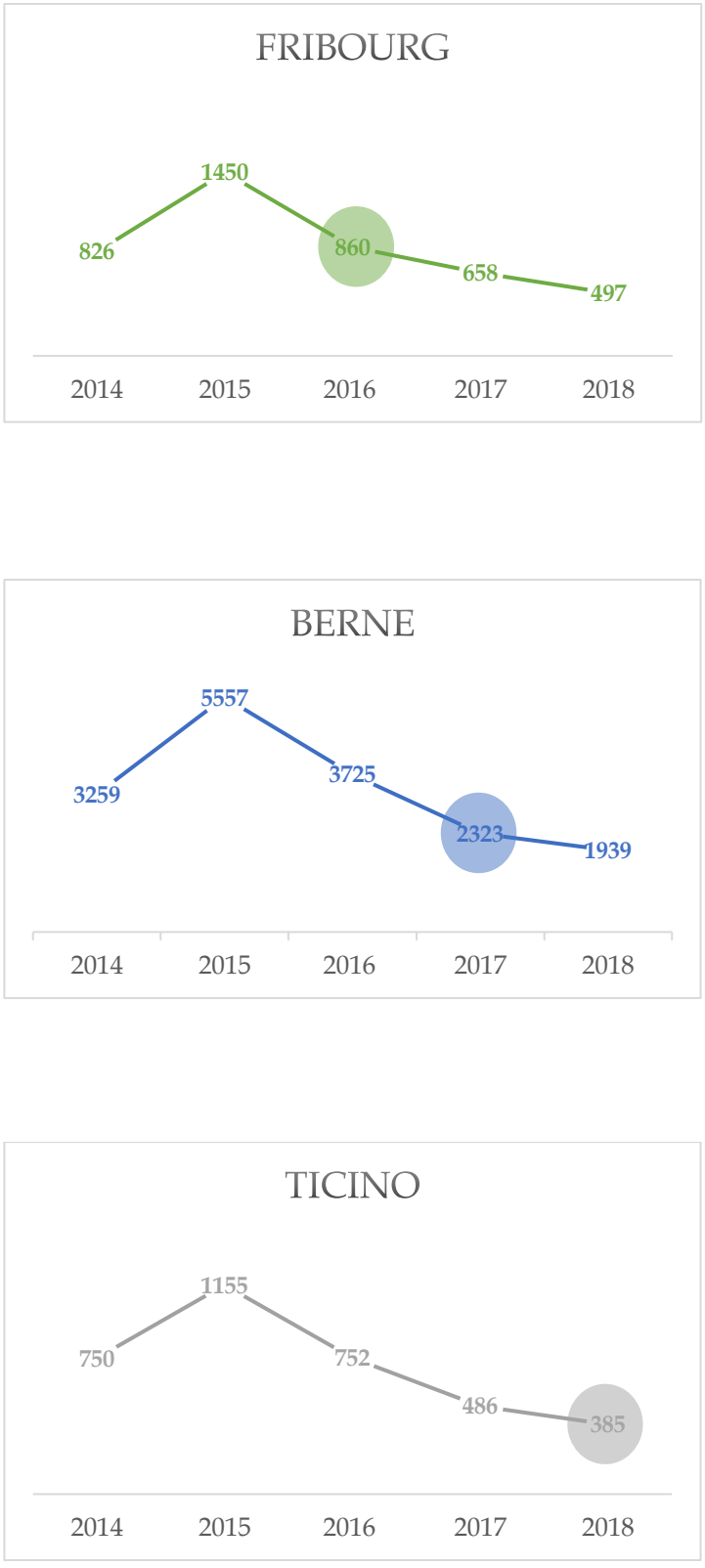
The question of the national language (German, French, Italian) already spoken by asylum seekers is also regularly debated, as the random allocation key generates inconsistencies. Indeed, a German-speaking asylum seeker has about a 70% chance of being placed in a German-speaking canton, while a French-speaking person has barely one chance in four of living in a French-speaking canton. As for an Italian-speaking asylum seeker, he or she will have less than a 5% chance of being placed in Ticino.[29] Yet, the allocation system is generally accepted by the cantonal authorities, or at least is not subject to recurring debates. It should be noted, however, that for logistical reasons, small (in terms of surface area) but densely populated cantons, such as Basel-Stadt and Geneva, may encounter more difficulties in accommodating asylum seekers than large, sparsely populated cantons.

This trend continued in 2019, reaching 13,512 — the lowest figure since 2007 (60% less than in 2015). The reason for the decline in new entries was mainly related to the policy of the European Union and its member countries. With a ratio of 1.7 asylum seekers per 1,000 inhabitants, however, Switzerland was still above the European average of 1.4 asylum seekers per 1,000 inhabitants.

After a period of frenzy, the decline in asylum applications since mid-2016 has had a particular impact on the field of asylum reception, especially at the cantonal level, where the cantons and the mandated organizations have had to adjust the number of under-occupied or even empty accommodation facilities. For example, the number of reception centers managed by ORS Fribourg in 2016 was ten, whereas in 2020, it was five. This has resulted in the dismissal of many employees. In the field, the decrease in the number of asylum seekers, as well as a certain calmness in the daily work of reception, have, nevertheless, been experienced by the implementing actors as a form of appeasement after an extremely chaotic period. Many of my interlocutors referred to a return to "normality", a daily work rhythm that had disappeared from 2015 onwards and which they were looking for again.

[29] Keystone-ATS (2017). La répartition de requérants d'asile par canton fait fi de la langue. *swissinfo.ch*, 10.4.2017, on https://www.swissinfo.ch/fre/toute-l-actu-en-bref/la-r%C3%A9partition-de-requ%C3%A9rants-d-asile-par-canton-fait-fi-de-la-langue/43099678 (last accessed on 29.9.20).

Figure 2: New persons in asylum procedure (including births), per canton



Source of data: SEM; colored circles indicate fieldwork

More broadly, at the political level, this "return to calm" corresponded with the gradual introduction of an integration program aimed at encouraging the integration of persons in the asylum sector into the labor market. This joint program of the Confederation and the cantons is called *Agenda Intégration*[30]. It aims to implement earlier and intensify the integration of temporarily admitted persons and refugees — a process that now begins in cantonal accommodation centers. The issue of integration in the field of asylum is thus a discourse that, in following the broader migratory context, has evolved throughout my research. In 2015, it was non-existent, but by 2020, it had become a key issue.

Hence, although they shared many common characteristics, the three fieldwork studies that I carried out in the cantons of Fribourg, Bern, and Ticino were inscribed in different structural conditions. While my interlocutors in the canton of Fribourg barely gave the impression of keeping their heads above water and those in the canton of Bern were still wondering whether they would face a new "crisis", those in the canton of Ticino had found a sort of cruising speed in a migratory context that seemed *a priori* to have calmed down. As I mentioned, this development in the migratory context and the everyday temporality of reception work, and in the asylum procedure more broadly, has also gone hand in hand with a corresponding evolution in asylum policy.

Yet, as I will show in Chapter 6, this has not alleviated the ambient uncertainty that characterizes the field of reception. Quite the contrary is true, in fact. This field remains deeply marked by uncertain structural and organizational conditions, which have been another common thread of my fieldwork, despite changing contexts.

2.3. Swiss asylum law and procedure

My research also took place at the crossroads of two asylum systems: the old one, developed under the Asylum Act of 1998[31], and the new one, in force since March 2019. This reform – known as the *restructuring of the asylum system* (see Box 2.2) – involved major changes, the main one being the centralization of the procedure in federal asylum centers. During my research fieldwork, the former procedure, involving a greater division between the federal and cantonal levels, was thus in force, but the introduction of the new one was already making its presence felt, particularly regarding strong competition over the numerous service mandates that were going to be put out to tender by the SEM. Based on Figure 3, I outline in the following the main stages through which an asylum seeker pass after his or her arrival in Switzerland. I use the asylum procedure as introduced in 2019 as a basis for this. Although it was not yet in force at the time of my fieldwork and even though a smaller number of asylum seekers are

[30] See *Agenda Intégration Suisse* on https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/themen/integration/integrationsagenda.html (last accessed on 8.6.2020).
[31] Loi sur l'asile du 26 juin 1998 (RS 142.31).

now allocated to the cantons, the main logic that runs through asylum reception remains the same.

Box 2.2 Recent developments in the Swiss asylum policy

Modeled on the Dutch system of asylum management (Wedemeijer 2013), the main goal of the restructuring is to accelerate the asylum procedure by centralizing and fundamentally reorganizing the various stages of the procedure – recording, hearings, decisions, and referrals.[32] It is based on the creation of large centers in which the entire procedure is (theoretically) conducted for 60% of asylum seekers, without them being assigned to a canton. Since March 2019, asylum procedures are thus conducted in six regions, each of which has a *federal asylum center* (CFA) that performs procedural tasks.

In federal centers, asylum seekers go through an *accelerated* asylum procedure, which should be completed in 140 days. According to authorities, the acceleration is only possible if the key stakeholders (applicants, decision-makers, legal representatives, return advisors, etc.) are in the same location, but also through a clocked process in which asylum seekers' appeal times are reduced (from 30 days to 7 days). Free legal representation is introduced under the accelerated procedure to "compensate" for this reduction in time limits for appeals.

Afterward, those subject to a Dublin removal or those who had been subject to an accelerated procedure that led to a refusal are housed in *departure centers*, including for the time awaiting and during appeals.

Only applicants who are subject to an *extended* procedure (estimated at 40% of cases) or those who are granted asylum in an accelerated procedure are assigned to the cantons, as is currently the case.

Thus, different dynamics of governing asylum come into play with this new asylum system (Stünzi 2018: 284-288): A temporal dynamic aimed at speeding up the process of decision-making on asylum claims works alongside a spatial dynamic that attempts to centralize procedures and accommodation in different centers with different objectives and characteristics. Furthermore, the procedure is anchored in a filtering mechanism, an initial selection between so-called "simple" cases and those considered "complex". Therefore, the restructuring of the asylum system implies a two-tiered system (accelerated vs. extended procedures) with multiple temporalities and new spatial practices between national and cantonal levels.

[32] The elements presented in this box, as well as more broadly in this chapter with regard to the restructuring of the asylum system in Switzerland combine several sources of information – in particular, the official document presenting the general planning of the restructuring (Groupe de travail Restructuration 2014), the SEM webpage on the asylum procedure, available on https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/asyl/asylverfahren.html (last accessed on 26.6.20), the Swiss Refugee Council webpage on the asylum procedure, available on https://www.osar.ch/themes/asile-en-suisse/la-procedure-dasile (last accessed on 26.6.20), as well as the AIDA webpage on the Swiss asylum procedure, available on https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/switzerland/asylum-procedure/general/short-overview-asylum-procedure (last accessed on 26.6.20).

Application • Asylum applications for Switzerland can only be filed on Swiss territory, either at a control point along the border or at a border control point at an international airport.[33] Applications are generally submitted directly to the federal centers run by the SEM. These are in Altstätten (eastern Switzerland), Basel (north-western Switzerland), Chiasso (Ticino and central Switzerland), Bern (Bern region), Boudry (French-speaking Switzerland) and Zurich (Zurich region). The "embassy procedure" has been abolished since 2012, meaning that applications can no longer be filed via Swiss authorities abroad.

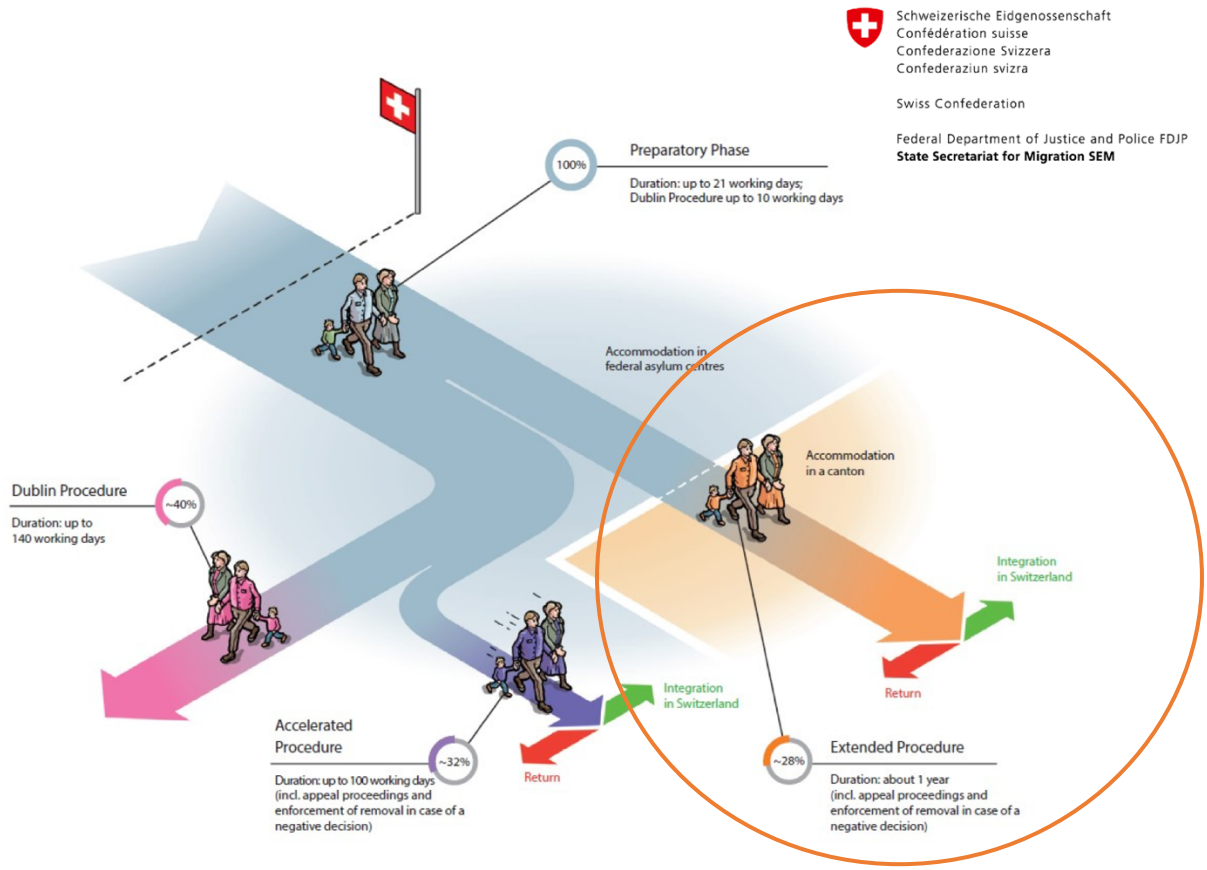
Preparatory phase and initial allocation • After registration and fingerprinting, the preparatory phase (up to 21 days) begins. Asylum seekers are assigned to a federal center. Asylum seekers from the same country should, in theory, be distributed fairly between regions. The same applies to unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, families, and persons with health problems. The capacity available in the CFAs is also taken into consideration. Asylum seekers undergo a short preliminary interview in which they are questioned about themselves, i.e., about their identity, place of origin, travel routes, previous living conditions, reasons for seeking asylum, their health, etc. An interpreter may be present if necessary. The SEM then assigns the applicant to one of the following procedures: Dublin procedure, accelerated procedure or extended procedure. The maximum length of stay in a CFA is 140 days, after which persons are allocated to the cantons.

Dublin procedure • After the Dublin interview, the SEM shall decide whether to examine the application on its merits. If another European state is responsible for this examination, a request to take charge shall be made. If the other country is willing to examine the asylum application or does not respond within a certain period, it then becomes responsible for the person. As a rule, Switzerland has six months to carry out the transfer. If a person disappears by hiding, the time limit is extended to 18 months.

Accelerated procedure • If Switzerland is deemed responsible for examining an asylum application, the SEM initiates an accelerated national asylum procedure. A hearing conducted by the SEM takes place in the presence of the person's legal representation. After the hearing, the authority shall verify whether the person seeking asylum qualifies as a refugee, whether he or she is granted asylum, or whether there are other reasons why the person cannot return to his or her country of origin or provenance. If the facts are clear, an asylum decision is issued at first instance within eight working days in a CFA.

[33] A person who flies into Switzerland from a non-Schengen state and files an application for asylum must remain in the transit zone of the airport for the entire asylum procedure. The airport police then process the asylum application.

Figure 3: Asylum procedure starting in 2019



Source: https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/asyl/asylverfahren.html (accessed 3.6.2020)

Extended procedure • Asylum seekers whose application for asylum cannot be decided immediately after the hearing are subject to an extended procedure. In addition to a possible additional interview, other investigative measures regarding the identity and origin of the person, the alleged medical problems, the documents submitted, or the credibility of the allegations may be taken. The SEM assigns such persons to a canton, which becomes responsible for their accommodation for the rest of the procedure. This extended procedure, which in theory lasts a maximum of one year, ends when an asylum decision is made at first instance.

The "waiting period" in the cantonal reception centers lies at the heart of this dissertation. As a rule, the reception of asylum seekers in the cantons is divided into two phases – first in collective accommodation structures, then in individual accommodation. It includes personal (supervision, counselling) and material (housing, food, clothing) assistance, access to healthcare, employment and vocational training, access to primary and secondary schooling, as well as employment programs (for further details, see below).

The new procedure implies that only those persons subject to an extended procedure, i.e., an estimated 40% of cases, are now allocated to the cantons (see Figure 3). This is a considerably lower percentage than when I carried out my research between 2016 and 2018. Yet, this also reflects a political will to place greater emphasis on integration in the asylum field.

Decision • The SEM renders one of four types of decisions regarding the asylum application (apart from the early decision that may be made to dismiss the application): granting of asylum (wherein the person receives a residence permit, B-Permit), temporary admission (F-Permit), temporary admission *as a refugee* (F-Permit as refugee), or rejection. In effect, the Swiss law differentiates between the *ordinary temporary admission* and *temporary admission as refugee* statuses. Ordinary temporary admission is granted to people who have not been given asylum, but whose enforcement of removal or expulsion is "not possible" (Art. 83 para. 2 FNIA), "not permitted (Art. 83 para. 3 FNIA) or "not reasonable"[34] (Art. 83 para. 4 FNIA). In contrast, temporary admission as a refugee includes persons who meet the requirements of refugee status under international law, but who are not granted asylum because of "unworthiness of refugee status" (e.g., serious misconduct or endangerment of Switzerland's external or internal security, Art. 53 AsylA) or "subjective post-flight grounds" (Art. 54 AsylA). All persons temporarily admitted (as a refugee or not) receive the F-Permit, which is valid for a period of one year and can be renewed by the canton of residence. Temporary admission is, however, not considered a real residence permit, but rather as a suspension of removal or expulsion enforcement (ODAE 2015). In addition, as emphasized by Nufer et al. (2015a), the status rights of a provisional admission in Switzerland are lower than the ones of persons with a subsidiary protection according to the EU Qualification Directive.

Generally, persons who obtain an F- or B-permit are transferred to individual dwellings, i.e., in the second reception phase. Persons receiving a negative decision are, depending on the canton, placed in emergency centers (De Coulon 2019). However, these transfers take time, particularly for logistical reasons. Therefore, these persons often continue to reside in the reception centers for several months, making the population living in the reception centers quite varied in terms of their legal status.

Appeal • If a person has not been granted asylum, he or she may submit an appeal against the decision of the SEM to the Federal Administrative Court (FAC), which is the first and last court of appeal in asylum matters in Switzerland. Thus, an applicant has only one opportunity to appeal against a negative decision. The deadline for appeal depends on the type of decision

[34] According to the SEM, "unreasonableness of enforcement" is the most common reason for temporary admission (see Rapport du Conseil fédéral en réponse au postulat du groupe libéral-radical du 24 septembre 2013, 30 juin 2014, on https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/aktuell/news/2014/2014-09-031/ber-f.pdf). "Unreasonableness" includes reasons of war or general violent situations (e.g., Syria), but also unavailability of indispensable medical treatment.

and the asylum procedure: five working days in the Dublin procedure, seven working days in the accelerated procedure, and 30 calendar days in the extended procedure.

Removal order and detention • A removal order obligates the dismissed asylum seeker to leave Switzerland (Art. 44-48 AsylA) by a certain deadline, after which any prolonged stay becomes illegal. If the person concerned does not leave the country, the canton issues orders for deportation (Art. 69 FNIA). Removal orders can be issued either by federal or by cantonal authorities. In either case, the canton is responsible for the enforcement of the deportation if there are no obstacles to the removal, regardless of whether it concerns a transfer to a Dublin Member State or a return to the person's country of origin.

Coercion measures, such as detention, may be used to ensure the enforcement of removal or transfer, and to avoid the "risk of absconding". Administrative detention is regulated by articles 73 to 82 FNA, which specify at least six different types of detention: temporary detention (Art. 73), detention in preparation for departure (Art. 75), detention pending deportation (Art. 76), detention under Dublin procedures (Art. 76a), detention pending deportation due to lack of cooperation in obtaining travel documents (Art. 77), and coercive detention (Art. 78). Detention may be ordered for a maximum of 18 months (6 months + 12 further months) if the person does not cooperate with the authorities. In practice, as observed by Nufer et al. (2015b: 80), persons are detained for an average of 22 days, but the use and duration of detention vary considerably across cantons. Even though detention alongside persons being detained for criminal activity must be avoided if possible, rejected asylum seekers are regularly held in prisons or pre-trial detention facilities. Finally, it must be noted that the detention of persons to be transferred to a Dublin Member State is particularly problematic in Switzerland because it entails the incarceration of an asylum seeker whose application has not yet been examined (Mouzourakis et al. 2015).

2.4. Reception modalities and standards

This section presents in more detail the modalities and standards of asylum reception that today prevail in Switzerland. It presents the administrative forms that currently exist in the reception field (2.4.2), as well as the legal bases for the delegation of reception and the allocation of subsidies to the cantons (2.4.3), and the federal and cantonal standards of reception (2.4.4). The three case studies that are the subject of this dissertation are also outlined. To begin with, a parenthesis on New Public Management (NPM) in Switzerland and the reforms that have affected public administration since the 1990s is, however, necessary.

2.4.1. Managerial reforms and (the search for) modernization

Increasing efficiency, aiming for profitability, making savings, optimizing management: These are the main objectives that have guided the wave of administration reforms throughout the world known under the generic term of New Public Management. The idea of "governing by contract" (in other words, management by service contracts), which lies at the core of this thesis's questioning, has, for example, become a central instrument in these processes of administrative modernization.

In Switzerland, the desire to reform the functioning of public administrations and public organizations, as well as para-public organizations[35] in charge of the implementation of public services, is part of a movement that has its origins in the 1920s, when a commission was set up within the federal administration to reform its functioning (Germann 1996). But these modernization efforts gained momentum in the 1990s with the advent of the NPM. The context of the time, i.e., difficult economic and budgetary conditions, the rise of a liberal ideology advocating "less state" (or a "different state"), growing dissatisfaction with "bureaucracy", was particularly favorable to this reform trend.

Also, the dominant model of private enterprise seems to be particularly widespread in Switzerland, as contended in the literature. According to Giauque & Emery (2008: 32), the dual ideological hegemony of private enterprise as the unassailable horizon of performance and "managerial" thinking (that permeates all spheres of society) is a Swiss reality that would be rarely challenged. In addition, the NPM reforms allow the state to address another specifically Swiss issue, namely the division of tasks between the Federal government, the cantons, and the municipalities; a challenge that is compounded by the difficulty of coping with financial pressures at each level of governance, especially municipalities.

Driven by NPM's specific ideas, the reforms undertaken within the Swiss federal administration have had the peculiarity of focusing mainly on improving the productive efficiency of the various services or administrative units (Emery & Giauque 2012: 90). The Federal Act on the Personnel of the Swiss Confederation (LPers)[36] entered into force in 2002 is an example of this trend; it provided the public sector and its way of working with an initial blueprint for "normalizing" existing working conditions. As Giauque & Emery (2008: 23) argue, this term is not insignificant: It is indeed a matter of orienting the rules of public administration on those of the private sector. As for the main reasons that drive the cantons to embark on administrative changes of varying degrees of magnitude, these include the desire to make savings, the objective of evaluating public services and better understanding their usefulness, particularly in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, the desire to optimize

[35] By this term, which he considers an "intermediate zone" between public and private, Germann (1987) means private or semi-private actors performing public tasks of a legislative, executive or judicial nature.
[36] Loi sur le personnel de la Confédération (LPers) du 24 mars 2000 (RS 172.220.1).

administrative processes and procedures in order to achieve greater quality of service, and finally, the goal of disentangling and clarifying the activities devolved to the cantons and communes (Emery & Giauque 2012: 102), as mentioned above.

According to the literature, NPM had its pioneers in Switzerland, notably the canton and the city of Bern, but also the cantons of Lucerne, Obwalden, and Zurich. It should be noted, however, that not all Swiss cantons have experienced a political "homogeneity" allowing a consensus in favor of managerial reforms. In general, these were better accepted in German-speaking Switzerland than in Latin cantons.[37] On an interesting note, a report reviewing the introduction of NPM-type reforms published by the Federal Council in 2009 (CF 2009) classified the Swiss cantons into three main groups. According to this typology, Bern was in the group "large-scale introduction" of NPM reforms (along with ten other German-speaking cantons), while the cantons of Fribourg and Ticino were in the group "partial introduction/pilot trials" (with a total of four cantons). The group "other forms of piloting" comprised eleven cantons. Although these generalizations should be considered with caution, these analyses indicate that the diffusion of NPM in Switzerland has taken very diverse forms and its principles and tools do not constitute a homogeneous corpus throughout the country.

Finally, as discussed by Emery (2010: 3), it would seem that the Swiss administration has been little attracted by "market-type mechanisms" and the commodification of public services. According to him, in contrast to Great Britain, for example, competition between public organizations and private providers were not at the forefront of NPM reforms, although they were underlying many political decisions that praised the merits of the market. Through this dissertation, and on the basis of the example of asylum reception, I would however like to qualify this assertion by showing that, although it is not a generalized trend throughout Switzerland, what we observe today in some cantons, but also at the national level, is indeed a dynamic of privatization and marketization of this field (see also Chapter 2.5). Without asserting that this is a homogeneous or negative dynamic arising solely from NPM, I show that it results from the interweaving of actors and practices, rationalities, and instruments that are multiple and diverse.

2.4.2. Administrative landscapes

In Switzerland today, the governance of asylum reception takes a variety of administrative forms. Parini (2000) identifies two main organizational models: *state governance*, i.e., delegation from the federal to the cantonal level and implementation centralized by the canton or delegated to the communes and *multi-level mixed governance*, i.e., the involvement of the different state levels (federal, cantonal, and communal), but also third-party organizations.

[37] Giauque & Emery (2008: 58) postulate that these differences relate to the nature of citizens' expectations of the state and, more generally, to their conception of the state.

According to Nguyen (2015a: 537), this may involve *centralized* administration, *decentralized* administration, or *collaboration* with third parties from the private sphere. Basically, while some cantons centralize the execution of these competencies within public administration, others delegate them to third parties from the public or private sphere.

Box 2.3 Delegation, privatization, decentralization?

As Sow (2014: 213) points out, the *delegation* of public law tasks differs from privatization in that, in the former case, the state retains primary responsibility for the performance of the task while transferring its execution to a third party. According to this definition, delegation therefore implies a distinction between decision-making and operational powers. Bellanger (2016: 51) refers more specifically to the *privatization of the performance of tasks* when it consists of the transfer of the performance of public tasks to private organizations, regardless of whether they are controlled by the state.

The privatization of the performance of tasks differs from *decentralization* – or "soft privatization" (Bellanger 2016: 65) – which does not lead to an actual privatization of the ways in which public tasks are carried out, as the decentralized entity is subject to public law. This is the case, for example, in the cantons of Vaud and Zurich, which respectively mandate the Établissement cantonal d'accueil aux migrants (EVAM) and Asylorganisation Zürich (AOZ), two autonomous institutions under public law.

Delegation implies, however, that when management is outsourced to a private entity, the entity in charge of carrying out a public task is not governed by public law but by private law. This therefore means that the questions relating to the organization of the private entity are essentially beyond the control of the legislator, even if the mandated entity implements a public task. The privatization of management and staff status is, in this sense, automatically carried out. Yet, as Bellanger (2016: 66) points out, this structural transformation is limited by the fact that delegation does not change the nature of the administrative relationship: The beneficiary's interlocutor changes, but the conditions for implementing the law remain the same as if it were a public administration.

Although charities were originally mentioned in Art. 80 AsylA as an example to illustrate the category of third-party actors (see below), other types of organizations are now involved in the management and allocation of assistance services. For example, at the federal level, supervision services are entrusted to ORS Service AG (ORS), a for-profit company, and Asyl-Organisation Zürich (AOZ), a public law institution, while security services are entrusted to three private companies: Protectas SA, Securitas SA, and Verkehrsüberwachung Schweiz SA. In addition, Ascom Management AG is mandated for the recording of identification data and the company OSEARA SA for the medical accompaniment of departures.

The same trend can be observed at the subnational level, where several cantons and municipalities call upon private organizations or specialized public bodies to implement asylum reception. Examples include the private company ORS, which is mandated by several cantons and municipalities, as well as private non-profit organizations (e.g., Asyl Berner Oberland), charitable organizations (Caritas, Red Cross, Swiss Workers' Relief Agency, Salvation Army), and institutions under public law (AOZ, EVAM). It is specifically those cantons in which third parties are involved through performance mandates that are the subject of this dissertation. Boxes 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6 present the three cantons and organizations that I investigate in depth in this dissertation. This is not an exhaustive presentation, but a first rough portrait of my three case studies.[38] Each of the elements presented below will be developed further in the analytical chapters, including details related to the reception infrastructures and their daily environment. [39]

Today, approximately one-third of the cantons in Switzerland cooperate with third parties in the implementation of the reception policy. Public administration tends to be more often in charge of asylum reception where the canton – and not the municipality – represents the level of political responsibility (Probst et al. 2019: 100). This echoes the analysis made by Steiner (2000: 171), who observes that financially critical areas at the municipal level are specifically housing for asylum seekers, along with civil defense, the sewage problem, and public transportation.

Civil society actors, such as associations or citizens' groups, are frequently involved in the accommodation and care of refugees at the cantonal level (see, e.g., Efionayi-Mäder et al. 2015). These actors provide important services by responding to different needs, such as support for basic necessities (clothing, food), socialization (through meeting and discussion spaces, socio-cultural activities), accompaniment (support, administrative assistance, mentoring), training (language courses, workshops, etc.), integration projects, and advocacy and claiming around the asylum policy. Civil society actors, who also participate in the reception apparatus by offering their services, are not, however, the subject of this study. For this reason, I therefore make a distinction between organizations *mandated* by the cantonal authorities to implement asylum reception and those working in parallel or in addition to the reception policy. Thus, in the words of Valluy (2009: 243), I differentiate between *associative actors* and the *institutional actors* of social and humanitarian aid. This second category of actors is, for example, represented by ABR and CRS.

[38] On the research design of this research, see Chapter 3.

[39] The information presented in these three boxes comes either from internet pages and official documents, in which case they are mentioned, or from data that I have collected in the field, during interviews. All statistics are retrieved from the Federal Statistical Office (OFS), in particular from the Population and Households Statistics (STATPOP). See also the OFS webpage on the "Portraits of the cantons" available on https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/regional-statistics/regional-portraits-key-figures/cantons.html (last accessed 26.6.2020).

Box 2.4 Fribourg – ORS – Chamfors

The Canton of Fribourg is a French-German bilingual (predominantly French-speaking) canton of Switzerland. Its capital city is Fribourg/Freiburg. With a total population of 320,000 inhabitants, of which 22.7% are non-nationals (OFS 2020), it is what might be called a medium-sized canton.[40] In proportion to its population and according to the distribution key, the canton receives 3.7% of the asylum seekers registered in federal centers or Swiss airports (SEM 2020[41]).

In the canton, it is the *Service de l'action sociale* (SASoc), a department of the *Direction de la santé et des affaires sociales* (DSAS), which is responsible for policy on the accommodation and reception of asylum seekers and recognized refugees. The State Councillor in charge of the department since 2006, Anne Claude Demierre, is affiliated with the Socialist Party.

On behalf of the canton, ORS Service AG is responsible for the reception, supervision, and accommodation of asylum seekers, provisionally admitted persons, and rejected asylum seekers, as well as for the Return Advice Bureau. It is responsible for collective and individual housing (first and second phases of reception). ORS has been active in the canton since 2008. It replaced the Red Cross, which had previously been responsible for reception policy for more than 25 years.

ORS was founded in 1992 in Basel, Switzerland. It is a private, for-profit company specializing in the accommodation and supervision of people in the field of asylum. It was originally a temporary employment agency (now Adecco) that specialized the staff of one of its companies – Overseas Recruitment Services – for the asylum sector. ORS then gradually detached itself from the group and the name was changed to *Organisation für Regie und Spezial Aufträge*, literally an organization for management and special assignments. In 2013, ORS was sold to the investment company Equistone. ORS has its main mandates in Switzerland, but it is also active in Germany, Austria, and Italy. In 2012, the service company OX Service AG was established to oversee the various companies, with its head office in Zurich. Its role is purely administrative and non-operational. In 2016, ORS was present in several federal centers, in more than 35 reception centers (including eight in the canton of Fribourg with a capacity of between 60 and 100 beds), in six cantons and more than 40 municipalities under mandate from the cantons. The company had about 650 employees in Switzerland, 170 of whom work in the canton of Fribourg.

The Chamfors[42] center where I carried out my fieldwork had a capacity of about 100 people. It was a residential building with several apartments on the outskirts of a small town.[43] The number of reception officers working there in 2016 was six, including the center manager.

[40] In 2020, the Swiss population is slightly over 8.5 million inhabitants. The most populated canton is Zurich with a population of 1,500,000; the least populated canton is Appenzell Rh.-Int. with a population of 16,000 (OFS 2020).

[41] See Annex 3 of the Ordinance 1 on Asylum (OA1), available on https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/19994776/index.html#a21 (last accessed 26.6.2020).

[42] The names used to designate the three centers studied are fictitious. This is a personal invention that ensures the anonymity of these places and the people working and living there on a daily basis, while facilitating the writing and reading of this thesis (see Chapter 3 for further discussion on ethics and confidentiality). Chamfors is a contraction between "champs" (*fields* in English) and "ORS"; the facility in question being located not far from fields. Bürgistadt reflects the location of the center in the middle of a town, as well as ABR's perception of asylum seekers as "citizens" (*Bürger(in)* in German). Tirossa is a contraction between "Ticino" and "Croce Rossa".

[43] In the Swiss context, a small town is considered small if its population is less than 20,000 inhabitants. A medium-sized town has a population between 20,000 and 70,000 inhabitants.

Box 2.5 Bern – ABR – Bürgistadt

The canton of Bern is a bilingual German-French canton (with a German-speaking majority), the capital and federal city of which, the capital of Switzerland, is Bern. With a population of just over 1,000,000 inhabitants, including 16.3% non-nationals (OFS 2020), it is the second most populated canton in Switzerland. It is also one of the largest cantons in terms of surface area. According to the population-proportional allocation key, the canton is allocated 12.1% of asylum seekers (SEM 2020).

Since July 2020, the *Direction de la santé, des affaires sociales et de l'intégration* (DSSI) has been responsible for policy on the reception of asylum seekers and recognized refugees. The Directorate is headed by Pierre Alain Schnegg, affiliated with the Swiss People's Party (UDC), a right-wing political party. Prior to 2020, the *Direction de la sécurité* (DES), headed by Philippe Müller (PLR, center-right-wing), was specifically responsible for the accommodation and reception of asylum seekers and provisionally admitted persons.

Reception is divided into two phases: collective accommodation centers and individual accommodation in the municipalities. Prior to 2020, the Canton of Bern worked with five partners – Asyl Berner Oberland (ABO), Asyl Biel und Region (ABR), the Salvation Army (HAF), ORS, and Zentrum Bäregg GmbH – for the first reception phase. For the second phase, it collaborated with ABR, HAF, Kompetenzzentrum Integration, and ABO. As part of a cantonal restructuring of the asylum field, these different competencies were merged and the contractual partners were reduced to five: the Swiss Red Cross (local section), HAF, ORS, ABO, and Zentrum Bäregg. This new organization came into force on 1 July 2020.[44] It followed a major overhaul in the cantonal partnership with local entities, which has already been underway for several years.

ABR is a non-profit association under private law that fulfills missions of public interest in the field of asylum. It mainly carries out its activities under mandates with the canton of Bern. In 2016, ABR consisted of a head office, seven reception centers with a capacity of between 50 and 80 beds, an emergency shelter, and four regional offices providing support for people living in individual accommodation. It had a total of 135 employees. Following the restructuring in the canton of Bern, ABR lost its mandate to the SRC. As a result, it lost its activities, and the association was liquidated.

The Bürgistadt center, a former hotel turned into a reception center for asylum seekers, had a capacity of 70 people. It was located in the middle of a medium-sized town. In 2017, three full-time positions were distributed among the four reception officers (including the center's managers), in addition to voluntary civil conscripts, a person responsible for professional integration, and an administrator.

[44] See "Réorganisation du domaine de l'asile" on https://www.asyl.sites.be.ch/asyl_sites/fr/index/navi/index/na-be.html (last accessed 26.6.2020).

Box 2.6 Ticino – CRS – Tirossa

The canton of Ticino is an Italian-speaking canton in the south of Switzerland, on the border with Italy. Its capital is Bellinzona. It is a medium-sized canton with a total population of 350,000 inhabitants, 27.8% of whom are non-nationals (OFS 2020). The canton receives 4.1% of all asylum seekers (SEM 2020).

In the canton of Ticino, the *Ufficio dei richiedenti l'asilo e dei rifugiati* (URAR) is responsible for the accommodation and reception policy for asylum seekers and refugees. It is part of the *Dipartimento della sanità et della socialità*, under the responsibility of Raffaele De Rosa who is affiliated with the Christian Democratic People's Party (PDC), which sits in the center of the political spectrum. An overall restructuring of the administrative management of asylum took place in 2019, resulting in the creation of an office that merged competencies in the field of asylum seekers and recognized refugees. This restructuring was presented as a "formalization" of asylum management, previously considered to be in deficit (Foletti 2019).

Asylum reception is organized in two phases that correspond to two types of accommodation (collective centers and individual accommodation). Two organizations mandated by the canton share the management of the reception policy: SRC Ticino (first phase) and Swiss Workers' Relief Agency (SOS) (second phase). Both are "historical" partners of the canton in the field of asylum and have been operating for many years in the canton.

The Swiss Red Cross was founded in 1866, three years after the International Committee of the Red Cross (SRC 2008). The SRC is one of the 191 National Societies that make up the International Red Cross Movement. Like Switzerland's federalist system, it is organized in a decentralized manner and is made up of 24 cantonal associations. As a humanitarian organization, the SRC works together with the Federal government and the 26 Swiss cantons in the social and health sector. Among the SRC's cantonal associations is the cantonal association of Ticino. For more than 30 years, the organization has been working with the canton in the field of migration and asylum. SRC Ticino now runs four collective accommodation facilities in the first reception phase, with a capacity of between 50 and 180 places (390 places in total). Some 40 employees (plus security staff) work in the asylum field, as well as 40 volunteers.

The Tirossa reception center is a newly built accommodation facility, specifically designed for the accommodation of asylum seekers. It has a capacity of up to 180 people. It is located in an industrial zone on the outskirts of a medium-sized town. In 2018, a dozen employees were working there, including six social workers, a center manager, and a security officer.

2.4.3. Financing, contracts, and tenders

As mentioned above, Art. 80 para. 1 AsylA provides that the cantons may delegate all or part of the task of asylum reception to third parties. The delegation is made on the basis of a service contract that the cantonal authorities draw up with their agent(s). As a rule, this agreement defines the framework conditions and the concrete procedures for the delegation. Chapter 6 will analyze in more depth the different aspects of the contractualization of asylum reception.

Financing • In particular, AsylA stipulates that the Confederation compensates the cantons for the costs incurred in the management of asylum seekers on a lump-sum basis. The flat-rate payments cover, in particular, "the costs of social assistance and of mandatory health insurance and also contain a contribution towards the supervision costs" (Art. 88, para. 1, AsylA). Directive III of the SEM, concerning the field of asylum, supplements this provision by providing a more precise framework and establishing the legal framework for the allocation of federal subsidies to the cantons:

> The Confederation pays the cantons a lump-sum compensation for all asylum seekers and provisionally admitted persons who have been in Switzerland for less than seven years. With these lump-sum allowances, the cantons finance the costs of accommodation, assistance and compulsory health insurance and receive a contribution towards the costs of care. This monthly lump sum is adjusted annually in line with the development of the Swiss consumer price index and the average premiums, deductibles and participations of the compulsory health insurance as well as periodically to the development of the real estate market. (SEM 2019b)

In 2020, the monthly global lump sums for social assistance in the field of asylum in the cantons of Bern, Fribourg, and Ticino were as follows (SEM 2019a):

Table 1: Global lump sums per attributed asylum seeker in the cantons of Fribourg, Bern, and Ticino, in Swiss francs

Canton	Distribution key	Health insurance	Rent	Social assistance	Supervision	Global lump sum (monthly)
BE	12.1%	407.07	194.52	622.85	276.34	1,522.97
FR	3.7%	384.35	195.83	622.85	276.34	1,501.56
TI	4.1%	433.36	189.30	622.85	276.34	1,544.04

The global lump sums are paid quarterly based on the data recorded in the central migration information system (SYMIC), which the contracted actors are responsible for updating daily. The data of all new arrivals at a reception center must therefore be entered into the system, as

must all departures, thus providing a list of all persons who are allocated to the cantons and for whom the Confederation pays global lump sums.

As a report on the investigation into the reception system in the canton of Ticino shows, depending on the reception arrangements put in place in the cantons, the amount paid by the Confederation for the reception of asylum seekers does not, however, always cover the costs incurred (Foletti 2019: 20). In the canton of Ticino, it appears that a decentralized and small-scale accommodation system (i.e., in pensions or reception centers for up to 50 persons) generates costs exceeding the amount allocated by the Federal government, forcing the canton to cover the difference, which is sometimes considerable. For this reason, the Council of State decided in 2016 to increase the size and capacity of the accommodation facilities in order to reduce the costs associated with the supervision of asylum seekers (Consiglio di Stato del Cantone Ticino 2016: 2). In this sense, the federal funding available to the cantons for the reception of persons in the field of asylum is not only limited in time, but it may also appear to be insufficient in the eyes of the cantonal authorities who perceive this economic context as a source of stress and uncertainty (see Chapter 6).

Legal bases for delegation • The cantons are free to manage asylum reception as they wish and to organize the distribution of asylum seekers throughout the territory. Accommodation solutions vary from one canton to another and, consequently, as illustrated in Chapter 9, so do the living conditions of asylum seekers. More specifically, article 80a AsylA states that the cantons may delegate the fulfillment of these tasks entirely or in part to third parties. Thus, some cantons choose to delegate these tasks to third parties, public or private, by means of service contracts. As seen before, this is the case in the cantons of Fribourg, Bern, and Ticino, which mandate three private organizations — respectively, a private for-profit company, a non-profit organization, and a charity.

At the cantonal level, the legal bases for the delegation of asylum reception tasks are to be found in the legislation on asylum and social assistance. For example, article 2 of the Asylum Ordinance in the canton of Fribourg[45] (entitled "Delegation of tasks to private entities") provides that "the performance of assistance tasks under federal asylum legislation may be delegated to private institutions". These provisions are supplemented by article 14, paragraph 1 of the Social Assistance Act (LASoc)[46], which provides that "the state may entrust, by agreement, private institutions with the mandate to grant social assistance to certain groups of persons, in particular to persons subject to asylum legislation". It is specified that "the convention also governs the legal remedies against decisions rendered by private institutions" (para. 2). The main aspects of the mandate are therefore determined in an agreement between

[45] Ordonnance sur l'asile du 26 novembre 2002 (RSF 114.23.11).
[46] Loi sur l'aide sociale du 14 novembre 1991 (LASoc) (RSF 831.0.1).

the mandated organization (here, ORS) and the Council of State, but not in the law (Sow 2014: 214-215). A "compendium" describes the scope of services in more detail and specifies the scope of action of ORS.

Similarly, article 2, paragraph 2 of the Regulation on assistance benefits for asylum seekers[47] in the canton of Ticino provides that "the [Social and Family Action] Division and the [Social Support and Inclusion] Office may delegate the performance of this task to autonomous public or private bodies by concluding a performance contract". The Regulation further stipulates that "in the event of the conclusion of a service contract […], the bodies responsible may adopt internal directives governing the arrangements for granting and administering assistance services, which may derogate from the rules of this Regulation for well-founded reasons, […]" (al. 3). The canton thus lays down the standards of material assistance in relation to the provisions of the asylum legislation while leaving the possibility for organizations to issue internal directives with its agreement.

Finally, in the canton of Bern, the Law introducing the Federal Law on Asylum and the Federal Law on Foreigners (LiLFAE)[48] stipulates in Art. 4, para. 1, that "the competent authority [...] may delegate the granting of social assistance to responsible public or private bodies by means of service contracts. [...] The latter may take decisions within the scope of the delegated competencies. The Directorate of [Security] [DES] shall decide on appeals". Paragraph 2 further specifies that "the Executive Council shall lay down by ordinance the minimum conditions for the conclusion of such a performance contract". Guidelines on the minimum and maximum standards of assistance are therefore issued by the canton to their contractual partners.

Tenders • The procedures that led to the selection of contractual partners for the implementation of the reception policy diverge from one canton to another, in particular with regard to their degree of formalization. In the canton of Ticino, the partnership with the Red Cross derives from a local "tradition" in which the two main actors — the Red Cross and SOS Ticino — have shared the field of asylum for many years. "This is certainly a way of taking into account the elements of political and social representativeness," observes a member of the management of SOS Ticino, the entity mandated by the canton for the second reception phase, adding "[they gave] a little to the Catholics, a little to the left" (Interview, autumn 2018). For this reason, as the person in charge of the asylum sector points out, the reception mandate was never put out to public tender: "I believe that behind it there are also some political choices of division of territory, of tasks. We've never had a public tender. We've never done this"

[47] Regolamento concernente le prestazioni assistenziali per i richiedenti l'asilo, le persone bisognose di protezione non titolari di un permesso di dimora, le persone provvisoriamente ammesse e le persone la cui domanda d'asilo è stata rigettata e che devono lasciare il territorio svizzero del 23 gennaio 2007 (143.310).
[48] Loi portant introduction de la loi fédérale sur l'asile et de la loi fédérale sur les étrangers du 20 janvier 2009 (RSB 122.20).

(Interview, summer 2018). Yet, in the canton of Ticino, the lack of transparency and formalization of contracts in the field of asylum has also been the subject of much criticism, particularly following the "*Caso Argo 1*" (Consiglio di Stato del Cantone Ticino 2019), which saw the award of the security mandate to the controversial private surveillance company Argo 1 SA. "The existence of contracts formalizing commitments to suppliers was a rarity. Almost everything related to the asylum sector was handled by telephone and e-mail agreements" (Foletti 2019: 93), concluded the parliamentary inquiry into the scandal.

Selection procedures and contractual relations in the cantons of Fribourg and Bern are much more formally structured. The arrival of ORS in 2008 in the canton of Fribourg followed a public invitation to tender launched in May 2007 by the canton to renew the "asylum mandate." Three bidders had responded to the call for tender: the Fribourg Red Cross, which had been carrying out the mandate for 24 years, Caritas Switzerland, and ORS. This procedure was based on a set of specifications (DSAS 2007b) previously defined by the public authorities that detailed the concept of reception, the populations to be taken in charge, the various tasks to be carried out, the suitability criteria and requirements, as well as the award criteria and their weighting ratio, which were as follows: 35% for the rational and efficient management of the organizational system, 30% for the quality of the services in relation to the requirements of the mandate, 35% for the relevance of the financial proposal. Based on the report of the College of Experts, the Council of State then decided to award ORS the entire mandate:

> According to an in-depth analysis conducted by the College of Experts, the offer submitted by ORS Service AG, Zurich, is the one that best meets the numerous requirements set out in the specifications, in particular: to have a professional organization, to make use of existing structures and infrastructures while maintaining an optimal cost/benefit ratio, to hire qualified and versatile staff with a social and economic profile, to commit to the concept of social and professional integration developed by the state which defines the options and objectives, to have the necessary skills and qualifications in business management, monitoring and controlling, to demonstrate versatility and flexibility by being able to adapt quickly to new requirements of the state. (DSAS 2007a: 1)

The mandate was initially granted for a period of three years, i.e., for the years 2008 to 2010, and would subsequently be renewed for periods of one year unless notice of termination was given. Chapters 7 to 9 will analyze in more detail how ORS builds its organizational identity and "markets" itself to its contractual partners.

In the Canton of Bern, following the entry into force of the LiLFAE, responsibility for granting social assistance to persons in the asylum field was transferred from the Bernese municipalities to the DES and, more specifically, to its Migration Service (SEMI). The SEMI made use of the possibility offered by law to delegate this task by means of service contracts to public or private institutions. Within the framework of the 2012 asylum strategy (see CHS 2014: 24), the canton

has chosen to work with four partners, all of whom have long been active in this field at the cantonal level, and to distribute their scope of action geographically: the *Asylkoordination* of the city of Thun in the Oberland, ABR in the Bernese Jura and Seeland, the competence center for integration in the city of Bern, and the Salvation Army's refugee aid in the Mittelland. In addition to these organizations, there was the Zihler Social Development company, which was responsible for the center for unaccompanied minor applicants, as well as several other organizations responsible for recognized refugees (Swiss Red Cross, Caritas, etc.). This collaboration evolved in 2012 with the arrival of a new partner, namely ORS, without a public call for tenders (Moser 2012). In the same way as in the canton of Ticino, the absence of public tender seemed to be justified by the emergency prevailing at the time. As also explained below, this was part of a political context expressly aimed at strengthening competition in the reception of asylum seekers. In the spring of 2019, following a call for tenders launched in the context of the restructuring of the asylum sector in the canton of Bern (NA-BE project, see POM & SAP 2017), the canton selected four regional partners, as opposed to 13 previously. The award criteria were as follows: 35% price, 30% quality of the concept of professional integration, 15% regional networking, 15% promotion of language learning, 5% experience. While some (large) organizations, such as the Swiss Red Cross and ORS, maintained or even increased their scope of action, other (some of them small) organizations were excluded from the mandate of reception and integration, such as ABR, Caritas, and the Salvation Army.

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, the contractual relations between the cantons of Bern, Fribourg, and Ticino and their partners provide for control mechanisms, applied before (*ex-ante*) or after (*ex-post*) the actions of the agent (or delegatee). Again, depending on the canton, these are (more or less) formalized and binding. On the one hand, it is about the specifications of the delegation contract, as mentioned above. In all three cantons, this is done by defining performance indicators. However, as Baume (2016: 16) points out, this strategy faces the problem of the incompleteness of the delegation contract: the more imprecise the contract is, the more *ex-post* monitoring instruments cannot be developed. On the other hand, the supervision exercised over the delegatee may be based on several methods, such as direct control by the canton, the agent's activity reports, or supervision by a third party. Chapter 6 shows that the canton of Bern is emblematic of the management of reception by indicators, which takes the form of a series of particularly rigid and cumbersome quality control measures, financial monitoring, and effectiveness evaluation.

2.4.4. Reception standards

It should be stressed at the outset that there is no law or directive in Swiss law that is specifically devoted to reception conditions in federal and cantonal asylum centers (Amarelle & Nguyen 2009). There are therefore no minimum standards for the accommodation and

reception of asylum seekers in Switzerland. Switzerland is also not obliged to comply with the minimum conditions for the reception of asylum seekers laid down in the European Union's common "Reception Conditions Directive".[49] Nor does it rely on the recommendations on reception conditions of UNHCR or the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

The Swiss Refugee Council (OSAR[50]) has recently taken a stand in this respect by calling for the definition of reception standards, particularly in view of the many third-party actors involved in the implementation of the reception policy (see OSAR 2019). As I will show thoroughly in this dissertation, this lack of regulation indicates something important: Public authorities regard calls for tender as the main instruments for ensuring the quality of the asylum system, through the criteria and requirements laid down for the selection of service providers. Yet, these relate only to the *form* of accommodation and reception services (budget, certification, and other technical provisions) and not to their *content* (regulations and daily structure in the centers, sanctions, access to education, access to health and personal care, support for persons with specific rights, training of reception and medical staff, and so forth).

In view of Switzerland's federalist structure, cantonal law therefore has an important place in reception legislation (Gordzielik 2016). In what follows, I shall present in greater detail the rights and benefits to which asylum seekers are entitled at the cantonal level. These various points cover the reception services as set out in general terms in the performance mandates.

Accommodation • Following the allocation of an asylum applicant to a canton, the cantonal authorities become responsible for the provision of material and personal reception conditions for that applicant. As explained previously, each canton has its own reception system that usually includes several types of housing (collective centers, family apartments, homes for unaccompanied minors, etc.). Asylum seekers are generally placed in facilities according to the type of procedure they are going through while taking into account, for example, the expected length of their stay in Switzerland. They cannot freely choose the type of housing to which they will be assigned. Accommodation for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, families and/or vulnerable persons may vary considerably. It must also be noted that regular protests occurred in 2015 condemning the housing of asylum seekers in underground facilities (see e.g., Del Biaggio & Rey 2017).

Social and material assistance • Social assistance includes all costs related to basic living, housing, and healthcare, along with other costs resulting from a special situation. It is provided in the form of non-cash benefits wherever possible, depending also on the categories of persons affected (Nguyen 2015b). Asylum seekers therefore receive only a very small part of this amount in cash. For example, in the canton of Fribourg, an asylum seeker (from the age

[49] Only so-called "vulnerable" persons are subject to specific supervision measures. In particular, the Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Affairs (CDAS) has drawn up recommendations to assist the cantons in caring for unaccompanied minors.
[50] In French, l'*Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés*.

of 16) living in a reception center receives 10.40 Swiss francs (CHF) per day, which is about CHF 320 a month, for personal maintenance and clothing.

Material assistance includes essential household items, such as kitchen equipment, plates and cutlery, bed linen and towels, personal hygiene products, and cleaning and laundry products. In the context of school-age applicants, these items may also include school supplies. This equipment does not usually belong to the asylum seekers and must be returned when they leave the reception center.

Emergency aid consists of minimal benefits and is geared towards asylum seekers whose application has been rejected or dismissed, and who must leave Switzerland.[51] Emergency aid is granted by cantonal law and thus also results in notable differences in treatment. Under such aid, people are housed in specific shelters with reduced living conditions and may receive around CHF 8 per day (Nufer et al. 2015a: 58). It may be noted that the Federal Court considers that, due to the temporary nature of their presence, emergency aid has no interest in integrating rejected asylum seekers (Nguyen 2015b).

Under article 3 of the Health Insurance Act[52], every resident in Switzerland must be insured for sickness. Even undocumented persons (including asylum seekers under the expulsion procedure or dismissed asylum seekers) residing in Switzerland are obliged to be insured. However, AsylA provides specific dispositions that allow cantons to limit the choice of insurers, service providers, and physicians and hospitals for asylum seekers and temporarily admitted persons (Art. 82a para. 2 to 5 AsylA). Similar obstacles in the cantonal centers may occur as a result of the triage conducted by the staff of the reception centers. Apart from this restriction, the basic insurance and the covered treatments do not depend on the person's status but on their needs. Therefore, basic healthcare does not systematically include care for mental health issues and often remains deficient in this respect. The same is true for specialized treatment for victims of torture, traumatized beneficiaries or people with mental health problems (Romer et al. 2019: 124).

Personal assistance • Personal assistance to asylum seekers is poorly regulated — if regulated at all — within the framework of reception policy. As these services are not regulated by national or cantonal legal provisions, they are referred to in cantonal specifications or directives in general terms, while remaining vaguely defined. Personal assistance refers to a broader understanding of "everyday hospitality" and concerns issues related to listening, information, administrative support, mediation, counseling, and the day-to-day care of

[51] As noted by Nguyen (2015b: 557), when it comes to unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be respected (especially regarding their accommodation).
[52] Loi fédérale sur l'assurance-maladie (LAMal) du 18 mars 1994 (RS 832.10).

asylum seekers. It also refers to psychosocial care, although this can be included in the category of access to healthcare.

As I show in Chapter 9, this normative vagueness makes it the dimension in which contracted organizations have the greatest room for maneuver, both in terms of its interpretation and implementation. The access to mental health care, as well as the nature of the everyday staff-resident encounters, varies greatly from one organization to another.

Employment • According to Art. 43 AsylA, asylum seekers cannot engage in any gainful employment during the first three months after the filing of an application for asylum. This period may be extended for a further three months if the SEM denies the application within this period (Art. 43 para. 1 AsylA). After this period, asylum seekers are permitted to work only if the following conditions are met: The general economic and employment situation allows it, a request from an employer has been received, the required remuneration and conditions of work are met, and it has been established that no other Swiss, EU/EFTA resident, or foreign person with a residence permit with the required qualifications profile can be found for the job (Art. 52 OASA[53]). Moreover, the cantons can limit employment access to certain sectors. The authorization to engage in gainful employment expires if the asylum application is rejected in a legally binding decision or on expiry of the deadline specified for departure. Rejected or dismissed asylum seekers are not allowed to work in Switzerland.

The above practice demonstrates that it is difficult for asylum seekers to access gainful employment due to practical impediments (the nature of their legal status, language barriers, recognition of competencies, etc.), as well as discrimination. There are substantial differences between cantons. In 2016, in the canton of Fribourg, 0.3% of asylum seekers were employed (SEM 2016[54]). This figure was 5.8% in the canton of Bern in 2017 (SEM 2017), while in the canton of Ticino, 7.8% of asylum seekers were employed in 2018 (SEM 2018). Of note, as well, is the fact that asylum seekers are only allowed to work within their assigned canton. Nufer et al. (2015a: 73) point out that the majority of asylum seekers continue to depend at least partially on social assistance even after they have found work because of an insufficient level of income.

In contrast with asylum seekers, persons admitted on a temporary basis are permitted to engage in any gainful employment, regardless of the general economic and employment situation or the principle of national priority (Art. 85, para. 6 FNIA[55]). The employment rate of these people is, on average, 30%, again with disparities between the cantons (SEM 2020). The

[53] Ordonnance relative à l'admission, au séjour et à l'exercice d'une activité lucrative (OASA) du 24 octobre 2007 (RS 142.201).
[54] The annual figures with regard to the number of persons in the asylum process in Switzerland with gainful employment are available on the SEM asylum statistics webpage on https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/publiservice/statistik/asylstatistik.html (last accessed 29.6.2020).
[55] Loi fédérale sur les étrangers et l'intégration (LEI) du 16 décembre 2005 (RS 142.20).

freedom of movement and the resulting possibility for societal participation of persons from the asylum sector, perforce, varies considerably depending on asylum status.

Access to education • With regard to access to education, although article 19 Cst.[56] guarantees the right to basic education for all children, this right is not always applied in a consistent way and practices differ depending on cantonal structures. As there are no schooling programs (or only very limited ones) in the federal centers, education mostly begins when children are transferred to a canton (Nufer et al. 2015a: 72). The practices in the cantonal and even municipal arenas of education are manifold and vary between classes designed specifically for asylum seekers, special language classes, and the ordinary education system. General culture courses are also sometimes provided.

The most important problem, however, is with access to vocational training (apprenticeships) or further studies. Although the legislation allows asylum seekers over the age of 16 to enter educational programs, many practical and administrative impediments deter potential employers from hiring asylum seekers whose procedures have not yet been concluded or temporarily admitted people. Moreover, the financing of post-compulsory education for asylum seekers is highly dependent on the goodwill of cantonal and municipal authorities. However, access to (pre-)apprenticeships for temporarily admitted persons has been fostered and facilitated with the new integration program that came into force in 2019.

Occupational activities • While there is again no precise legal basis for this, reception services usually involve occupational activities within reception centers. These sports or cultural activities are supposed to occupy and entertain the residents of the centers, especially children. The participation of parents alone, without their children, in these activities is indeed problematic and requires the provision of appropriate childcare facilities. Activities may also include programs of public utility (carpentry, sewing, cooking, bicycle repair workshop, building painting, etc.). Very rarely, on the other hand, are they sociocultural animations carried out by social workers. Access to occupation offers from local voluntary groups is common, but very uneven across cantonal and organizational contexts. Again, as in the case of personal assistance, these services are not clearly defined in the service mandates and are left to the discretion of the implementing organizations.

As I will show later in this dissertation, reception norms are, in turn, informally supplemented (or not) by the organizations in charge of the implementation of the reception policy. Indeed, the multi-level and multi-actor procedure that characterizes the field of asylum reception involves a significant fragmentation of the actual services to which asylum seekers are entitled.

[56] Constitution fédérale de la Confédération suisse du 18 avril 1999 (RS 101).

2.5. The "political cycle" of reception: a historical review of public-private arrangements

In conclusion, the aim of this section is to (re)place reception policy in a long-term perspective and to show that the entanglement of the public and private spheres in asylum reception in Switzerland is a long-standing phenomenon. It is indeed a configuration of government that is both banal in its principles and specific in its arrangements (Hibou 1999a: 41). I show that it is precisely these arrangements, i.e., the distribution of responsibilities between public and private, but also between the Federal government and the cantons, that evolve over time and contribute to the metamorphosis of state action in the field of reception. To be more precise, I argue that it is the analysis of the constant renegotiation of the *dosage* between public and private, i.e., the distribution and proportion of these sectors in public policy, that makes it possible to apprehend the current process of privatization of asylum reception.

The epigraph of this chapter provides an important starting point for the analysis of what I call the "political cycle" of asylum reception[57] in Switzerland, as schematized in Figure 4. It is composed of different layers: that of the division of responsibility between public and private, as well as federal and cantonal spheres (blue circle), that of the political dynamics of reception (black circle), and that of the rationalities towards which the governance of reception is oriented (red circle). These are closely interrelated and are mutually constitutive. On this basis, this section shows, in particular, how refugee assistance, which was originally a private-sector task, became a public task through its gradual "state-ization"[58] (Nguyen 2015a: 527), before being (re-)entrenched in a process of privatization from the 2000s onwards. It also highlights that this occurs in concert with the evolution of the rationalities that define the contours of the policy of reception, between assistance, security, financial, and managerial logics. This evolution does not, however, mean a passage from one logic to another, but rather their accumulation and imbrications in asylum reception.

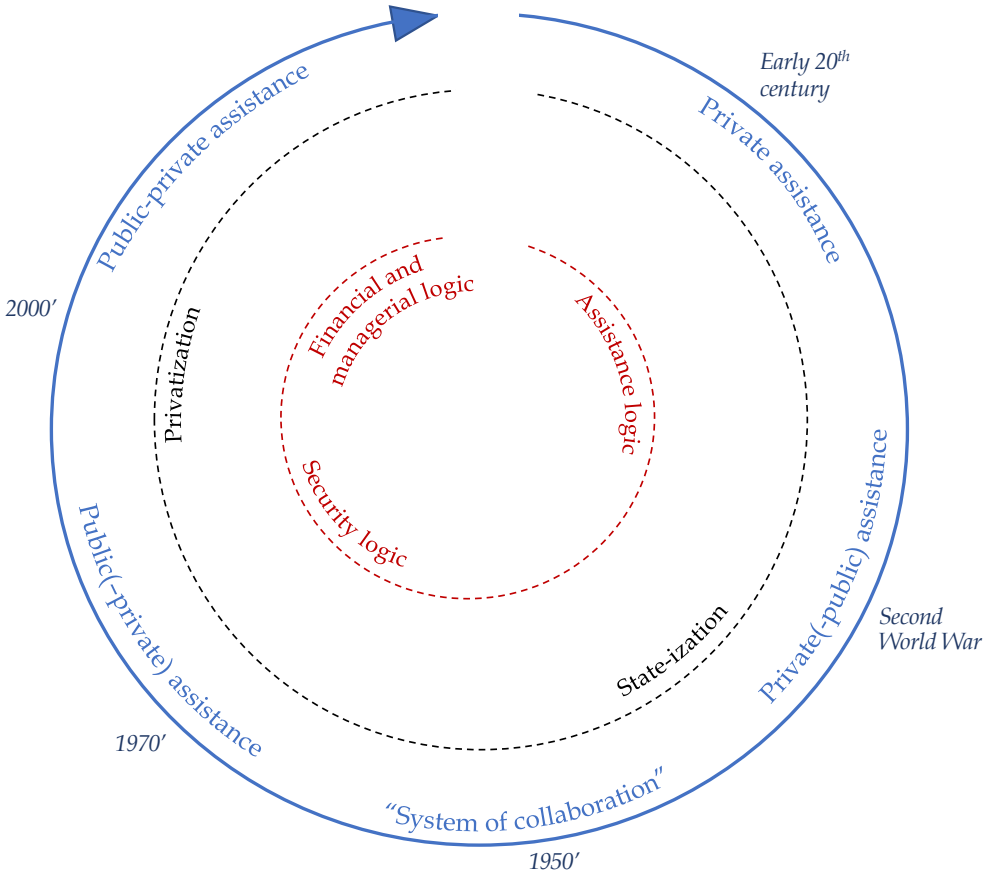
To this end, I draw on the report by Professor Carl Ludwig entitled "Swiss refugee policy from 1933 to the present day [i.e., 1955]" (also known as the Ludwig Report), which was first published in 1957 under a mandate from the Federal Council. This report, supplemented by a commentary by Federal Councillor Eduard von Steiger and the principles that should inspire the practice of asylum formulated in 1957 by the Federal Council, was republished in 1966 as

[57] The political cycle I discuss in this chapter differs in two principal ways from the political cycles studied in political economy (Nordhaus 1975; see also Bacache-Beauvallet 2008). On the one hand, the political cycle of asylum reception is not just about the economic and political environment in which it takes place; it is much more complex than conjunctural issues. On the other hand, the reception cycle is in reality an "imperfect" cycle that entails more uncertainties as to the form that reception policies will take in the future than what a macroeconomic model wants to show.

[58] The French term "étatisation" originally used by Nguyen (2015) translates into "nationalization" in English. However, to avoid any confusion and inaccuracy in understanding the dynamics that marked the reception field at the end of the Second World War, I prefer to use the expression "state-ization" through which I emphasize the process by which asylum reception gradually becomes a task of public responsibility, not the process by which this task is diffused across the country.

a work intended for the general public. For the period from the 1950s to the 2010s, I also rely on the analysis proposed by Nguyen (2015a), who provides the genesis of Art. 80 AsylA dealing with the distribution of competencies in the field of reception, as well as on Parini & Gianni (2005) with regard to the role of civil society and aid organizations.

Figure 4: The political cycle of asylum reception in Switzerland



2.5.1. The reception of refugees in the early 20th century

As the Ludwig Report (1957: 144-145) relates, before the Second World War, refugees who had neither money nor personal relations to house and support themselves were taken care of by private assistance. These people were placed with families, sometimes also in pensions, hostels, or private homes. At that time, the Federal government considered that it was the duty of the cantons to decide whether a foreigner could stay in Switzerland, and thus to provide material and financial support in case of need.

The granting of aid and assistance to refugees was thus primarily a cantonal matter, but private associations bore a large part of the costs of assistance. These were mainly aid

organizations from Protestant, Catholic, and workers' circles (Ludwig 1957: 146). To unite the efforts of the various organizations, the Swiss Central Office for Refugee Aid was founded on 17 June 1936 with the aim of supporting the interests of the various charities. This body is known today as the Swiss Refugee Council, which is the umbrella organization for refugee organizations in Switzerland. Despite several requests for subsidies addressed to the federal authorities "in order to make defense measures more humane" (ibid.: 147), no financial support from the Confederation was granted for the accommodation of refugees.[59]

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the accommodation of refugees became a growing problem. Initially, most refugees were taken care of by private aid organizations, which housed them in camps or hostels or provided them with a room or rented accommodation. Yet, as the Ludwig Report (1957: 163) points out, the fact that refugees were forbidden to work and thus "condemned to idleness" was "a cause of moral depression" and a difficult daily situation to bear.

2.5.2. The creation of camps and the beginning of the "state-ization" of reception

As early as 1940, the federal authorities began to create "refugee work camps" to house and occupy refugees by creating work opportunities (Stünzi 2018: 144-145). The idea was then to provide the army with additional manpower to carry out certain work previously done by the troops. "This approach had the advantage of keeping the refugees away from the cities and giving them the habit of manual labor, a habit that would be useful when it came to settle in another country" (Ludwig Report, 1957: 164). Switzerland was indeed perceived as a transit country for these people.

Detailed regulations on the internment of refugees admitted to Switzerland are laid down by the Federal Council in the decree of 12 March 1943[60] on the accommodation of refugees. It is stipulated that *employable refugees* must be accommodated in camps or homes to carry out, if possible, work useful to the country. *Unemployable refugees* (or civilian refugees) – i.e., children, women with small children, the elderly, disabled and diseased persons – were to be placed with the help of private assistance, if possible, in private houses or in a home.

By the end of 1943, there were two main types of refugee accommodation (Ludwig 1957: 260): *military camps*, divided into three types of accommodation: triage camps, quarantine camps, and reception camps; *camps for refugees under civilian control*, divided into two categories of accommodation: work camps for able-bodied men and camps for women carrying out work required by the men's camps (mending, laundry, etc.). Special camps with particular emphasis

[59] The first federal credit for refugee aid – amounting to 20,000 Swiss francs – was granted in 1937. Its primary purpose, however, was to encourage departures. Subsidies for simple transits and for the administration costs of relief work could not be charged against this credit.
[60] Arrêté du Conseil fédéral concernant l'hébergement des réfugiés du 12 mars 1943 (RO 1943 207).

on vocational training were also set up for young people between 17 and 19 years of age. As for refugees unfit for work, i.e., men in poor health or over 60 years of age and mothers with children under the age of six, they were accommodated in hotels, pensions or private homes depending on their financial means. Through the Swiss Red Cross, efforts were also made to place children between the ages of seven and sixteen in families.

Yet, although the Federal government – through the Department of Justice and Police – became the competent authority for the accommodation of (employable) refugees with the 1943 decree, the day-to-day care of refugees (in parallel with accommodation) remained in the hands of private organizations, even when they were housed in camps or homes run by the Confederation.

2.5.3. A system of collaboration

After the end of the Second World War, the question arose as to who bears the costs that might arise from the long-term admission of destitute refugees. A "system of collaboration" (Ludwig 1957: 399) was thus established between different actors: the Federal government, the cantons (which had hitherto hardly been involved in the reception of refugees) and private institutions, the latter being in need of "financial assistance" in view of the large number of refugees to be assisted (ibid.: 398-399).

A decree on the Confederation's participation in the costs of assistance to refugees was adopted on 26 April 1951[61]. It aimed to organize and re-arrange the various forms of assistance to refugees that had hitherto existed in Switzerland. The decree provided that the Confederation shall contribute to the assistance of needy refugees by contributing to the costs of their maintenance (Art. 1); that it shall reimburse private institutions for 60% of the assistance they provide to the refugees in its care (Art. 2); that it may allocate subsidies to the cantons and communes that assist refugees who are not being cared for by any relief organization (Art. 3). As later reported in the message of 31 August 1977[62] in support of a first asylum law in Switzerland:

> The Confederation's assumption of responsibility for the costs resulting from the presence of refugees in Switzerland was the condition which enabled it, on the one hand, to oblige the cantons to host them and, on the other hand, to gradually free the refugees, after the Second World War, from the obligation to emigrate and, finally, to institute what was known as "durable asylum". (FF 1977 III 138)

After considering that assistance should, in the first instance, be entrusted to private bodies and aid agencies, this episode shows that this task was gradually supported financially by the

[61] Arrêté fédéral du 26 avril 1951 concernant la participation de la Confédération aux frais d'assistance de réfugiés (FF 1951 II 21).
[62] Message à l'appui d'une loi sur l'asile et d'un arrêté fédéral concernant une réserve à la convention relative au statut des réfugiés du 31 août 1977 (FF 1977 III 113).

Federal government, which assumed an increasing share of the expenses with the 1951 decree. On the basis of the collaboration system introduced, the Swiss aid institutions, grouped within the SRC, nevertheless remained responsible for "the social and moral assistance of refugees" (Ludwig 1957: 399).

2.5.4. Assistance to asylum seekers and refugees as a public task

The assistance of (the legal category now called) "asylum seekers" then gradually became a public task involving the intervention of the Federal government and the cantons. To be more precise, it became a publicly funded task. This evolution corresponds to the drafting of the first Asylum Act[63] in the 1970s, which aim was to bring together the many provisions scattered throughout various legislative acts and other texts (laws, ordinances, instructions and directives) in a systematic manner (Stünzi 2018).

Box 2.7 The first Asylum Act and refugee reception in the 1980s

AsylA and its subsequent revisions introduced important provisions, two of which concern the housing and reception of refugees. These reflect a shift in the logics that shape asylum reception.

The first is the distinction between "asylum seekers" and "recognized refugees", i.e., legal categories that imply different rights and types of support. Stünzi's (2018) analysis of the asylum discourse indicates that this period coincides with a more suspicious gaze and new terminology on the part of the authorities. A distinction between "true" and "false" refugees is often evoked, and the "fight against abuse" (Leyvraz et al. 2020) becomes increasingly important. These categories will increasingly be used in public debates to differentiate between "deserving" and "undeserving" refugees (Riaño & Wastl-Walter 2006).

The second is the introduction of the system of registration centers (*dispositif des centres d'enregistrement*). As Stünzi (2018: 189-190) argues, the creation of these "gateways" at the Swiss border reflects the growth of a security policy in the field of asylum through the reaffirmation of the border. More specifically, it indicates the introduction of a policy of isolation, filtering, and dispersal: registration centers serve to restrict the possibilities of access to Switzerland to file a request for protection while introducing a new regime of control and territorial assignment of asylum seekers. This goes hand in hand with a regime of dispersal of asylum seekers since the centers are spread throughout Switzerland.

More importantly, the implementation of this system marks a profound change in the way of conceiving the collective accommodation of asylum seekers in comparison with the previous period: From a logic of (temporary) assistance characterizing the period of the Second World War and the Cold War, the AsylA marks the transition to a security rationality through a process of

[63] Loi sur l'asile du 5 octobre 1979 (FF 1979 II 977).

reterritorialization of the border and measures to control asylum seekers involving infringements of their individual freedom of movement (Stünzi 2018: 190).

This is also reflected in the discursive register used to designate accommodation facilities (ibid.: 192). To the notion of home (*heim* in German), etymologically associated with its protective and benevolent nature, the Federal Council prefers a more managerial terminology, using the term "reception center" (*Aufnahmezentrum*), which is now enshrined in the law.

Lastly, as noted by Parini & Gianni (2005: 233-234), the years following the introduction of the first AsylA are particularly marked by the action of pro-asylum circles, which constantly mobilized for the implementation of a more humane asylum policy, as well as against the policy of deporting rejected asylum seekers decided by the Federal Council (see also Box 2.8). These resistance actions were carried out in a particularly spectacular manner and were widely publicized in the media.

AsylA thus makes a new distinction between "the maintenance and accommodation of asylum seekers" and "assistance to refugees granted asylum by Switzerland". As stated in the message of 31 August 1977, the logic upon which the financing of assistance is based is as follows: "the Confederation, since it assumes responsibility for asylum, is also competent to settle financial questions relating to the granting of asylum, in particular assistance" (FF 1977 138). Social and financial assistance to asylum seekers and refugees is therefore, in principle, the responsibility of the Confederation. However, according to the 1977 message:

> In resolving these issues, it must be borne in mind that private aid agencies dealing with refugees have played a considerable role in carrying out these tasks from the outset. It is they who, for the most part, have provided and continue to provide assistance to refugees in practice. The close cooperation between private and public aid has proved to be effective and, according to the project, should be continued. The advantage of this cooperation is that refugees who are affected by fate and are sometimes particularly sensitive do not need to turn directly to official services in this area. (FF 1977 II 138)

For this reason, article 30 of the draft law on asylum provides that the responsibility for assistance to refugees lies with the Confederation, which, in accordance with current practice, may entrust these tasks to the mutual aid organizations it has recognized. It may also delegate them to the cantons, in whole or in part, when circumstances so require. As stated in the 1977 message, there are seven recognized aid agencies, which are grouped together in the SRC:

> These are aid organizations which pursue purely humanitarian aims, which demonstrate that they keep proper accounts and whose activities are in the general interest. It is not intended that other relief organizations should join the Central Office. (FF 1977 II 139)

According to the SRC's (1977: 20) annual report, these organizations were Caritas Switzerland, the Swiss Workers' Relief Organization, the Christian Peace Movement, Protestant Aid, Swiss Ecumenical Refugee Aid, the Swiss Red Cross, and the Swiss Union of Jewish Aid Committees.

With regard to compensation for assistance benefits, the rate of compensation is deliberately not specified in the law so that it can be adapted to the circumstances. It is provided that it shall be fixed in the enforcement order. Since the adoption of the Federal Decree of 1951 stipulating a federal contribution rate of 60%, this rate rose to 75% in 1960 and then to 90% from 1 January 1977 (FF 1977 II 139).

In conclusion, AsylA introduced a division of responsibilities that still prevails today in the field of reception: The maintenance and accommodation of asylum seekers in a federal center is the responsibility of the Federal government, while the cantons provide assistance to asylum seekers undergoing the procedure (outside federal centers) and to persons admitted on a temporary basis, with compensation from the Confederation. As a general rule, assistance services are financed by the Federal government, while the cantons, and charities to a lesser extent, are responsible for their implementation. According to Art. 34, charitable organizations and cantons that take on tasks as a result of a delegation of power from the Confederation perform them under the "supervision" (*surveillance*) of the latter.

Box 2.8 Ideological-identity confrontations around the refugee issue

In Switzerland, since the beginning of the 20th century, (far-)right political circles have made and continue to make the issue commonly referred to as "over-foreignization" (*Überfremdung*) one of the central themes of their political programs. In light of the recurrence of this issue, as well as the potential for mobilization of the (extreme) right in this area, Parini & Gianni (2005: 191) consider that the political authorities' management of asylum is influenced by internal political considerations. Since the 1960s, and on a very regular basis, initiatives launched by right-wing parties or movements have proposed reducing the number of foreigners in Switzerland and, from the end of the 1980s, have been pointing the finger at the "abuses" committed by "false refugees" (on this topic, see Leyvraz et al. 2020). Although these initiatives were rarely accepted by the Swiss people, analysis of legislative changes in this area shows that the authorities and political parties often incorporated provisions proposed by right-wing groups (see Stünzi 2018).

Obviously, right-wing movements do not have a monopoly on the discourse on refugees. Left parties and aid organizations have long been mobilizing – sometimes in spectacular fashion, sometimes more pragmatically – for a more humane asylum policy. As Parini & Gianni (2005) point out, the impulse of pro-asylum milieus in contesting, modifying and/or actively resisting asylum policy is indeed also central. Numerous aid and support movements for refugees mark out Swiss reception experiences, particularly in the areas of accommodation, accompaniment and support, legal issues (appeals, collecting signatures for referendums, etc.), integration of refugees or return assistance. These solidarity groups generally come from and/or are supported by Protestant and Catholic circles, by political, union, and humanitarian organizations, as well as by numerous intellectuals and artists (ibid.: 202).

For example, as Bolzman (1993: 34) details, faced with the parsimony with which the Federal Council proposed to receive Chilean refugees in the 1970s, the "places gratuites" (*free places*) committee (APG) publicly expressed its position at a press conference, namely that the movement was ready to assume itself the reception of a larger number of Chilean refugees. The campaign launched by the APG has resulted in approximately 3,000 places being offered to Chilean refugees by families, communes, and parishes. Following this declaration, the Federal Council, meeting in an "extraordinary session" (Parini & Gianni 2005: 208), decided to halt this initiative by introducing a visa requirement for Chilean nationals. The years 1980-1990 were also marked by fierce resistance against the removal of asylum seekers and restrictions on the admission procedure and saw the creation of numerous ecclesiastical refuges organized by parishes. As in the previous example, the federal authorities were concerned about the creation of these support networks and the risk of losing control over the entry and exit of asylum seekers if the reception of refugees fell into the private domain (ibid.: 213-214). While these are only a few examples among many, they illustrate the role of private and religious initiatives as an important (counter-)power in the field of asylum in Switzerland. It is to be noted, however, that these movements of contestation appear mostly at the local level (cantons, cities) and not at the national level.

2.5.5. The multiple layers of Art. 80 AsylA

In the previous sections, I have shown the context in which the current Art. 80 and 80a AsylA originated and how the responsibilities between the Federal government, the cantons, and charities have been divided. I have also shown how the reception and accommodation of refugees has evolved from a private to a public task. The main guidelines for this process were threefold: increasing procedural efficiency, sharing responsibilities, and incentivizing effectiveness (of removals). They are summarized here on the basis of the "layers" (Nguyen 2015a) constituting Art. 80 AsylA, which, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, have literally piled up to regulate and formalize asylum reception.

The first layer identified by Nguyen follows on from the elements presented above: "for organizational and administrative reasons", the new AsylA adopted in 1999 involves a "transfer of powers from the charities to the cantons" (FF 1996 II 87[64]) which, according to Art. 80 AsylA and 48 aCst. (currently 115 Cst.), are responsible for paying assistance benefits to persons seeking asylum who are staying on their territory, regardless of their legal status. According to the 1995 message, this ensures the proper functioning of the procedures by avoiding "double work" (FF 1996 II 87). The Confederation thus remains competent only in federal asylum centers. This new bill raises the disapproval of many organizations involved in the field of reception as it assigns to the cantons the responsibility of providing assistance

[64] Message concernant la révision totale de la loi sur l'asile ainsi que la modification de la loi fédérale sur le séjour et l'établissement des étrangers, du 4 décembre 1995 (FF 1996 II 1-187).

to asylum seekers, a procedure that bypasses the role of aid organizations (Parini & Gianni 2005: 234). Yet, in practice, the relative leeway that the cantons have in organizing the tasks of reception and assistance of asylum seekers means that many of them still rely on charities.

The second layer of Art. 80 AsylA is intended to fill a gap — particularly in relation to Art. 178 Cst., according to which the law may entrust state tasks to third parties. In other words, it is intended to introduce a formal legal basis to allow the granting of all or part of the social assistance under the responsibility of the Confederation to be entrusted to third parties (FF 2002 6406[65]). The new version of Art. 80 of the Asylum Act of 16 December 2005 (in force since 1 January 2008) provides that the cantons and the Confederation (depending on the place of residence of the person covered by AsylA) may delegate all or some of the tasks relating to social assistance or emergency assistance to third parties, "in particular [i.e., no longer exclusively] to the charities authorized in accordance with article 30, paragraph 2".

The third layer is in line with the desire to subject asylum seekers to emergency assistance, i.e., to lower social assistance benefits they were granted until then (which were already lower than those of residents) (see Sanchez-Mazas & Efionayi-Mäder 2011). This measure stems from the Führer/Gerber report of 9 March 2000[66], which made assistance an instrument for the enforcement of the return of persons who have received a decision of non-entry on their asylum application and are obliged to leave Switzerland (Nguyen 2015a). According to the report:

> The measures envisaged serve, on the one hand, to strengthen the sense of responsibility of persons who are called upon to stay longer in Switzerland, [...] and, on the other hand, to introduce a system of incentives for the cantons to increase the effectiveness of the enforcement system for removals. (FF 2003 5166[67])

It is worth mentioning that this measure was also part of a program to reduce the Confederation's budget, allowing an optimization of the system for financing social assistance and, according to the Federal Council, making savings of between 15 and 20 million Swiss francs. This resonates with the managerial reforms undertaken in Switzerland since the 1990s to increase the efficiency of public administration.

According to Nguyen (2015a: 529-534), the analysis of the different "layers" of Art. 80 AsylA shows that the gradual state-ization of assistance to persons falling under asylum has contributed to its greater exposure to the influence of politics. Hence, in the political context of the early 2000s, this process led to a convergence between the issue of assistance and that of enforcing removal; the former becoming an instrument in the service of the latter (on this topic,

[65] Message du 4 septembre 2002 concernant la modification de la LAsi, de la LAMal et de la LAVS (FF 2002 6406).
[66] Rapport final du Groupe de travail sur le financement du domaine de l'asile à l'attention du DFJP, « Incitations individuelles et institutionnelles dans le domaine de l'asile » du 9 mars 2000.
[67] Message concernant le programme d'allégement 2003 du budget de la Confédération (PAB 03) du 2 juillet 2003 (FF 2003 5091).

see, e.g., Pfirter 2019). This is consistent with Stünzi's (2018) analysis mentioned earlier on the securitization of the asylum issue following the entry into force of the Asylum Act.

Yet, as I demonstrate in the following, the gradual state-ization of asylum reception is part of a "political cycle" which is now characterized by a move towards the privatization of asylum reception, that is, the marketization of policymaking processes and the recourse to technocratic forms of governance, but also the process by which political possibilities are limited or denied. This is, again, in line with Stünzi (2018: 284), but also Leyvraz et al. (2020: 242-244) who point to the prevalence of a managerial (and thus de-securitized) vision of asylum in the context of its restructuring, conveyed by the authorities through the concepts of efficiency, rapidity, and fairness, and the pursuit of the objectives of speeding up and rationalizing the asylum procedure. This renewed process nonetheless reveals governing arrangements that result in, but at the same time differ from, those that prevailed earlier. To be more precise, it reflects the extension and strengthening of the "system of collaboration" put in place from the 1950s onwards, but in which the institutions, norms and values are no longer the same. The following part thus presents a fourth layer of Art. 80 AsylA — namely, the *contractualization* and *outsourcing* by some cantons of the operational tasks of asylum reception to third-party actors for financial and managerial reasons. It provides the contextual foundation on which the rest of this thesis will be developed.

2.5.6. Towards the privatization of asylum reception

While the transformation of refugee assistance into a public task in the 1950s was mainly explained by the desire to make the procedure more efficient, as I showed earlier, the outsourcing of this task to private organizations is today in line with a financial and managerial rationality. This is articulated around three interrelated and mutually constitutive axes, which I am outlining here.

First, the *institutionalization of the delegation of reception policy* to the private sector. The outsourcing of these governmental activities is now carried out within the framework of service contracts between the federal or cantonal authorities and private organizations. Particularly noteworthy are the numerous calls for tender issued by the SEM since the 2000s for the provision of support, security, and legal protection services in federal accommodation for asylum seekers, as well as medical services during removals. Also noteworthy are the tenders launched by the canton of Fribourg in 2007 and by the canton of Bern in 2018 as part of the cantonal restructuring of the asylum sector. This process of contractualization has gradually created a mutual dependence between public authorities and the contracted organizations — the latter are (most of the time) directly dependent on the public authorities to carry out their functions, whereas public authorities redeploy their competencies.

Second, the *diversification of private entities*, in particular the expansion of for-profit organizations that do not pursue "purely humanitarian goals" and the "general interest", as stated in the 1977 message on the Asylum Act. As mentioned earlier, this trend originated in the early 1990s in the canton of Basel, where an interim company specialized some of its staff for the asylum field in response to a request from the cantonal authorities and became the company now known as ORS Service AG. Since then, the Swiss authorities have indeed delegated the management of many federal and cantonal accommodation centers to ORS, which has become a central player in the field of asylum in Switzerland. The 2007 award of the reception mandate to ORS in the canton of Fribourg marked a turning point as this canton became the first to delegate all its operational competencies to a private for-profit company.

Third, the primacy of private enterprise as a model of organizational "normality", which translates into the *increased use of managerial instruments* in the governance of reception policy. In an effort to modernize and be more cost-effective and efficient, public administrations borrow many concepts and tools from the private sector. This is the advent of NPM, which goes hand in hand with the neoliberal bureaucratization (Hibou 2015) of asylum reception, i.e., its invasion by neoliberal formalities.

These intertwined processes are the complex knot at the center of this research and are, in my opinion, partaking in the *privatization of asylum reception*, i.e., the process of diffusion of private intermediaries in the governing of this field, but also the translation of reception into a regime of market and technical values, as well as the limitation of political alternatives in this field.

2.6. Conclusion

The analysis of the genesis of art. 80 AsylA, which henceforth regulates "who does what" in the field of reception of asylum seekers, teaches us that to apprehend and understand the dynamics of privatization of reception in Switzerland, and more broadly the transformations underway in the governance of asylum, it is necessary to restitute its historicity, while shedding light on its current and particular configurations.

More particularly, it shows us that talking about the privatization of reception does not indicate the withdrawal of the state in the face of the rise of private actors, but rather its neoliberal redeployment through the restructuring of the ways of understanding and acting in the field of asylum. Indeed, as I show in the following chapters, the specificity of the current dynamic lies in the invasion of reception policy by so-called "private" norms. Today, the governance of reception is characterized by the diversification and diffusion of actors, rationalities, and instruments from the private sphere (especially from the market), but also by a separation between decision-making and operational tasks. In this way, processes of delegation and contractualization contribute to the multiplication (and therefore

fragmentation) of institutional and moral spaces and, more broadly, of responsibilities in the field of asylum reception.

Yet, the reflection I propose in this thesis does not seek to portray privatization as an omnipotent dynamic that should be understood as the cannibalization of the policy of reception by a neoliberal rationality. Nor is it a question of "following the money" and lifting the veil on the economic intricacies of asylum reception. Rather, it is a question of highlighting the multiple tensions that cross the governance of asylum reception today and questioning their effects on the ground.

Moreover, while the focus of this research is on the contracted organizations (including field agents) to whom the public authorities entrust the implementation of reception policy, it is to be noted that these actors operate within a broader framework in which the privatization of reception (in the broad sense) is regularly criticized, as outlined in this chapter. Whether in the (local) associative world or more broadly in the press, the invasion of asylum reception by private intermediaries raises many questions, particularly with regard to the growing role of private for-profit (and to a lesser extent non-profit) organizations that benefit from a "reception industry" (Eiholzer 2019 ; Eggli 2015), the logic of competition and the precarious working conditions that affect this sector (Fuchs 2019 ; Koponen 2019 ; MacKenzie & Ott 2019 ; Strassmann & Naegeli 2020), but also the neoliberal logics that cut across the asylum field and impact asylum seekers and their living conditions (von Wyl 2019). Demonstrations and/or public statements condemning the housing conditions of asylum seekers are also frequent, just like those that took place in the canton of Ticino in 2019 to call for the closure of an underground shelter used to house asylum seekers.[68]

To get to the heart of the matter, I propose in the following to enter the intricate realities of asylum reception in Switzerland through my experience as a field researcher. Chapter 3 lays the methodological and epistemological foundations on which this research is built, before considering the theoretical tools and reflections that guide this thesis (Chapter 4).

[68] See "Presidio alla Croce Rossa 'Contro i lager'" on https://www.laregione.ch/cantone/luganese/1323932/presidio-alla-croce-rossa-contro-i-lager (last accessed on 1.10.20) or "Camorino, si manifesta" on https://www.rsi.ch/news/ticino-e-grigioni-e-insubria/Camorino-si-manifesta-11914112.html (last accessed on 1.10.20).

3. Ethnographic encounters and (un)certainties

> My role as a field researcher... week one:
>
> Day 1: Adaptation time for myself, feeling good in the field. In the beginning, I remained in the kitchen where I could still hear what was going on at the counter/office (first half-day). Then I decided to go into the office, to the "abandoned" chair, with my notebook. I spent the afternoon sitting in the chair, observing, and writing in my notebook. But I am not completely satisfied with that; I don't want to close myself off as an observer.
>
> Day 2: I move back into the office (on the chair) but without a notebook to distance myself from the notebook and the role of researcher. However, I have my phone with me (to reassure me?!). I sometimes write a few notes on it so as not to forget, and I rewrite them afterward. Maybe I hang on to my phone a little too much... I still take "breaks" in the kitchen. I do this for myself, but also for others. I also discover that interesting discussions take place in the kitchen — discussions that are "face to face" and more personal.
>
> Day 3: I feel good in my role. I feel comfortable, and so do others (I think). New: I conduct an interview with a reception agent from the center. I feel a little uncomfortable about "removing" someone from the team for an hour or more. My role as an "observer in my chair" is still not quite comfortable. I find myself looking for something to read all the time to legitimize my presence. I have even started to leaf through the office supplies catalogue! (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

These were my very first impressions of "the field" after my first week in Chamfors, in the canton of Fribourg, in autumn 2016. At that time, I was far from experienced in doing ethnographic work in reception centers. I had several preconceptions about the field that was going to occupy me for many months but also many anxieties. Although my feelings have subsequently evolved and matured, these reflections express the multiple methodological, ethical, epistemological, and emotional (un)certainties I have been confronted with throughout my fieldwork. As Thrift (2003: 106) argues, fieldwork is indeed "a constant stew of emotions, ranging from doubt and acute homesickness to laughter and a kind of comradeship". It is thus with the account of an ethnographic "adventure", in the words of

Bensa (2008: 323), and the many challenges and lessons that result from it, that this methodological chapter is concerned.

At the outset, it should be made clear that this is not the tale of a total and long immersion in a faraway place with no way out, as the approach to ethnography set by Malinowski (1963 (1922)) would suggest. Rather, it is the intensive and systematic practice of repeated visits, particularly to asylum reception centers. Yet, encountering "the field" does not mean parceling distinct chunks of time, outside of which fieldwork completely stops. As Darling (2014c: 210) advocates, it demands a constant attentiveness to the always shifting context and positionality, which requires the skills of listening, (self-)observation, questioning, and perseverance. Not so much a specific discipline or technique, I therefore approach ethnography as a process (Fassin & Bensa 2008: 10) driven by the interest of *being there* and observing events and processes while they occur, while also being *sensitive* to the everyday practices and encounters by which interlocutors produce meaning.

In particular, I found meaning in a qualitative and constructivist understanding of data collection through the use of research procedures and techniques derived from grounded theory. In the context of this dissertation, I identify myself with the constructivist current proposed by Charmaz (1990, 2000, 2006), as opposed to the objectivist perspective of Glaser (1978, 2001, 2002). I agree with this first current in two respects: Meanings and significations are constructed by individuals; the data and analyses resulting from them are inserted in a particular context, as well as through a particular interaction between researcher and interviewee. In this sense, the researcher is not seen as a (negative) bias, but as part of the process of knowledge production. Promoting a reflexive science, the reinterpretation proposed by Burawoy (1998, 2003) – known as the extended case method – seems to be particularly relevant and useful in this respect. Following an inductive approach and a continuous "back and forth" movement, it is thus by constantly linking the empirical data, the analysis, and theoretical elements that I continually refined my research questions. In other words, theories have been "constructed" (Charmaz 2006) in the research process and are grounded in the empirical data.

This chapter describes how I constructed my field (3.1), how I accessed the field (3.2), and what methods I used to collect various types of data (3.3). It discusses the doubts and difficulties I encountered in the process of learning the entanglements of fieldwork. It also reflects on positionality in the field (3.4) and presents the different steps I followed to interpret and analyze the data (3.5).

3.1. The iterative process of choosing the "case studies"

The desire to articulate different cantons and organizations in my analysis led me to be inspired by a multiple-case study research design (Burawoy 1998; Yin 2003). This was well suited for the research interest that guided my research: investigating the contemporary process of governing asylum reception in all its complexity and specificity. While not prescribing a method of data collection and analysis, this research design allowed me to take into account and analyze in detail different case-specific, yet cross-case constellations and patterns (Eisenhardt 1989).

During the elaboration of my thesis project, I was immediately confronted with the question of what my "case studies" (see Box 3.1) were going to be, in terms of actors and location, and how they were going to be articulated. Indeed, the first mapping of reception policy in Switzerland and in other countries in the global North revealed that the actors involved in this field were extremely numerous and heterogeneous, and that the modalities of governance (assemblages of actors) varied considerably from one country to another. This extremely dense web of actors, involving a great deal of complexity, quickly prompted me to make choices and to define my field of research. This delimitation work required several (re)adaptations. It is worth noting, however, that I very quickly decided to focus on Switzerland and not to include other national contexts, as the Swiss "playing field" already seemed to me to be very complex and revealing of the dynamics and rationalities that run through the field of asylum reception.

Box 3.1 A case of what?

Following Zittoun's (2017: 171) definition, "a case study is an in-depth study of, as the case may be, a person, a phenomenon or a complex situation to such an extent that the insights gained allow an understanding of the core dynamics at heart". Within the framework of this dissertation, I define a "case" as a contemporary cantonal context in which a private organization is mandated for implementing the reception policy, and in which a multitude of people (officers and asylum seekers) and interpersonal relations are in turn inserted. It is a unit of elements combining macro, meso, and micro characteristics (Swanborn 2010).

In particular, to address the question "what is this a case of?" (Schwandt & Gates 2018: 342), the phenomenon of interest from the studied unit is the outsourcing of asylum reception and, more particularly, the way in which these different levels are articulated and the effects they have on this field. The in-depth and multifaceted exploration of the private provision of reception is, in turn, carried out within the boundaries of a few "systems" (the cases) in which the phenomenon to be studied exists.

Thus, I choose to study cases because they are instructive examples of a more general dynamic and permit more general conclusions to be drawn from analyzing them (Zittoun 2017). Case study

research indeed builds on the principle of *analytic generalization* (Yin 2003), i.e., the comparison of the connections and constellations observed in the empirical analysis of the case studies with theoretical considerations. It is therefore a rise in abstraction and a linking of the different case studies that enables me to reflect in a more comprehensive way on dynamics of privatization, whether in Switzerland or elsewhere. The aim was to draw theoretical conclusions from the cases; I was "interested not only in learning *about* a specific social situation, […] but also in learning *from* that social situation" (Burawoy 1991: 5).

I initially expressed my interest in two domains of reception: the reception of asylum seekers and the reception of recognized refugees. My first overview of asylum reception in Switzerland had, in fact, highlighted an interesting (slight) difference in terms of the actors involved: Unlike the first, the second domain seemed to be mainly the responsibility of public authorities and not delegated to private actors. The willingness to take into account different types of actors in different cantonal contexts nevertheless obliged me to reduce my research framework. I therefore chose to focus solely on the reception of persons undergoing the asylum procedure, mainly housed in collective reception centers.

Then came the question of the organizations and cantons to be studied. Once again, the desire to deal with the complexity inherent in the field of asylum reception led me to consider as many case studies as possible in order to be able to articulate numerous points of view and vary my observations. In the thesis project I submitted to the University of Neuchâtel in 2016, I thus decided to select four cantons, two of which would have been the subject of what I called "in-depth fieldwork" (participant observation and interviews) and two of a "case study" (more interview-based). With these four cantons, I aimed to include a private for-profit organization, a private non-profit organization, a charity, and a public organization. This, I believed, would bring an additional dimension to the research, and make it possible to contrast the practices studied. All this was obviously likely to change according to the progress of the research and the accessibility of the field, and this is what happened.

Before continuing the account of the process that led me to choose my case studies, I open here a small, and necessary, parenthesis about the many preconceptions with which I began my thesis. Indeed, I then considered the state and the non-state, but also the public and the private, in a binary and normative way, as if one was good and the other bad. I can even say that I tended to demonize the "private" by taking a shortcut between its alleged characteristics and those of a private for-profit company like ORS, which I had immediately categorized as a "mysterious and impenetrable fortress making money on the backs of the most vulnerable". Basically, the private sector seemed to me to be a malevolent and immoral sector because of its fundamentally economic interests, while I believed the public sector was responding morally to the needs of people in precarious situations. From this amalgamation also stemmed

an obstinacy to distinguish between the state and the non-state and to consider them in an antagonistic manner; not by assuming that the former was "doing a better job" than the latter, but rather by attaching to them fundamentally contrasting modes of acting and thinking, on which I could not put clear and meaningful words.

The adjustment that then took place denotes an epistemological advance in my approach to "the state" and "the non-state", closely linked to my progress in empirical and theoretical data collection. As Soysüren (2019) puts it, it is precisely this "epistemological vigilance" that enables the necessary corrections to be made for the more or less chaotic progress of research. In my case, the following happened: Through the first interviews I conducted in the field and my many readings, I basically realized that the "non-state" category was not relevant. As discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 4, I realized that reversing the perspective, i.e., not starting from questioning the "non-state" category but rather from that of "the state", would bring more subtlety to the analysis of asylum governance and its intricacies. Similarly, by adopting a reading of public and private organizations in terms of "bureaucratic administrations", I was able to go beyond the *a priori* division between the public and private sectors I had created myself. In other words, following Gill (2016: 36), this enabled me to read the state and the non-state, the public and the private as part of a single "system" or "apparatus" by approaching them through the tendencies inherent in bureaucratic administration that were common to both.

Combined with questions of feasibility, this epistemological reflection led me to finally decide to focus on three cantons and organizations, leaving aside the case study involving a public organization. Indeed, I felt that these three case studies would allow me to grasp the dynamics and logic that make up the governing of asylum reception, while at the same time paying particular attention on so-called "private" actors. In this sense, I based my research on the analysis of the diversity and variations, but also similarities of the functioning of various private organizations and, in particular, how they appropriate and implement public policy. I am nevertheless aware that the inclusion of an institution of public status would have allowed me to both nuance and strengthen my general argument on the privatization of asylum reception, for example by avoiding some shortcuts in the analysis of neoliberal practices (e.g., audits) too quickly attached to the private sector (and connoted negatively). In other words, this would have allowed me to support my arguments empirically, by putting into perspective the public and private sectors, rather than through (often) too strong assertions.

In the end, I opted for three in-depth case studies that were similar in terms of fieldwork, but different yet complementary in terms of the organizations involved. These are the three field sites that are now the subject of this thesis, namely Fribourg and ORS, Bern and ABR, Ticino and CRS. The choice was made on the basis of several criteria, which had been established previously. Firstly, the size and population of the canton, which directly determines the

number of asylum seekers taken into care according to the distribution key determined by Art. 21 OA1. Secondly, the administrative methods of the cantons in the reception of asylum seekers, which vary, in particular, according to the type of delegation and the actors involved (Parini 2000: 7-8). Thirdly, the type and diversity of organizations involved in asylum reception at a cantonal level. Finally, I also wanted to cover different language regions. Although this latter criterion is certainly not the most relevant, it provided me, on the one hand, with an opportunity to include a canton often neglected in studies concerning Switzerland (Ticino), but on the other to also reflect on potential differences in (the perception of) administrative cultures (Emery 2010; Germann 1987) stemming from a geographical proximity to France, Germany, and Italy.

3.1.1. A comparative study?

Choosing a multiple-case study design easily implies that I use a comparative approach; an approach through which I seek to compare different dimensions related to the reception of asylum seekers that I systematically find in each of my cases. This is indeed the case, as evidenced by the structure of this thesis, which compares the three organizations according to different themes, rather than presenting them separately in different chapters as "in-depth" case studies. In what follows, however, I explain why I believe my research is not a *systematic* comparative research, as could be a multi-site ethnography (Marcus 1995) or a comparative ethnography (Simmons & Smith 2019). Most importantly, I highlight the implications of such an approach in the field, particularly in terms of having to constantly justify myself in this regard. To this end, I draw in particular on Soysüren (2019), who highlights various epistemological questions that should be asked in the context of comparative studies; in his case, when comparing deportation practices between France, Switzerland, and Turkey.

First of all, the fundamental objective of my research was not to multiply the number of case studies with regard to particular excerpts nor to cover a representative sample, but to observe different cases as a whole and in their complexity(ies) (see Eule et al. 2019a: 17). Selecting three different case studies thus enabled me to highlight the complexity and heterogeneity of a phenomenon: that of the governing of asylum reception through outsourcing and contracting processes. The choice to approach this field through the concept of apparatus (see Chapter 4) does not therefore indicate a desire to systematically compare some of the heterogeneous elements that make it up, but rather to reflect on their entanglements and what they tell us about the effects of this apparatus on the field of asylum reception and, more generally, the character of the state.

Second, a systematic comparative research would have required, first, a systematic approach to data collection by creating fully comparable cases – for example, in terms of the size of the canton and the number of asylum seekers to be accommodated or the types of accommodation

and reception capacity – and by collecting the same type and amount of data for each case. It would also have been necessary to define and select in advance the "right" dimensions (or indicators) to be compared within the implementation of the reception policy — for example, the staff-to-residents ratio, the type of activities offered to the residents of the reception centers, or the financial and material means made available to each organization. A systematic comparative approach, and thus a rather deductive one, would therefore have required considerable preliminary work to create the precise framework within which the comparison could be made. In spite of a strong dimension of control (Sartori 1991: 244) while doing fieldwork and therefore of methodological "comfort", I felt that the risk was the decomplexification of the phenomenon studied, or at least the difficulty of taking its complexity into account, especially with regard to the structural context in which it is inserted. I was indeed afraid of restricting my field of research and neglecting certain aspects by concentrating on dimensions of comparison that were too strict. By adopting an inductive approach instead, I kept some flexibility and left room for the unexpected in the collection of data, and thus also in the development of my research questions.

Third, as Soysüren (2019) rightly points out, the issues relating to language and terminologies are not negligible. The three selected case studies presented some basic difficulties to be compared in a systematic way due to their three different linguistic anchors. Although my understanding of French, German, and Italian was sufficient for me to collect the data myself in the field, thus not requiring a translator, the different terminologies I was confronted with in relation to the issue of reception made my work complicated at times. I was often afraid of over- or misinterpreting some of the terms frequently used by my interlocutors; starting with the one at the heart of this research, *reception*, which translates as "encadrement" (literally framing) in French, "Betreuung" (assistance, care) in German and "assistenza" (assistance) in Italian. To overcome this problem, I did not think in terms of comparison, but rather in such a way that I could "deconstruct and then reconstruct" (Lallement 2003: 306) the meaning of these terms by analyzing them empirically in their respective contexts.

Finally, and I think this is the most important point in my view, a comparative approach implies a normative dimension that I wanted to avoid as much as possible in my research. In fact, the alleged comparative dimension of my research came up again and again in my discussions with my interlocutors, both at the level of the cantonal authorities, the management of the organizations and the reception officers. I constantly had to explain that I did not aim to compare and thus indirectly evaluate cantonal reception practices. As also observed by Soysüren (2019: 7), the idea of a comparison indeed seems to awaken in some people the fear of being judged as "worse" than others. During my fieldwork, I was often asked what the "indicators" of my research were, such as in the following discussion with the

director of ABR and Gabriel, the head of Bürgistadt. This telling episode will be resumed in this chapter.

> The director of ABR seems to be reading the project description I sent him quite carefully. He then asks me some specific questions about my research project: Who am I interviewing (staff members and/or residents)? Do I only do observation? What methods do I use? What is my observation grid? What are my "evaluation criteria" for comparing three cantons? As this does not seem clear to him, I specify that my aim is not at all to assess ABR, and that I therefore do not have precise indicators. Nor is my aim to make a comparison of various practices by saying what is "good" or "bad". I emphasize the fact that I want to understand the everyday practices of asylum reception to bring out the complexity of this field. (Edited fieldnotes[69], summer 2017)

Similarly, a discussion I had later with Julie, a reception officer working for ABR, in addition to the many remarks I already overheard from her colleagues, led me to seriously consider the question of indicators – below expressed spontaneously in square brackets – and more generally my way of presenting my research so as not to create confusion:

> While we eat lunch together and discuss her background and her daily work, Julie asks me some questions about my research and what are my indicators of observation [everyone talks about indicators! What is it related to?]. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

Conversely, the comparison of practices can potentially also give rise to a desire to be judged as a "good pupil" or "best practice" and thus to present oneself in a way that corresponds to this alleged image. This was the case, for example, when I first met the management of CRS, as the following excerpt shows:

> "Without wishing to brag," the director tells me, "CRS pay particular attention to the management of 'post-trauma'". According to her, Ticino is considered the "best practice" in this field; Italian organizations and other Swiss cantons have "even" come to Ticino specifically for this purpose. (Fieldnotes, spring 2018)

It is precisely this kind of discourse that I have sought to avoid putting at the center of my questioning, as I did not consider myself entirely competent and legitimate to make such an assessment, but above all, I had no interest in doing so. The very design of my research has nevertheless made comparison a dimension that constantly came back to "bother" me throughout my fieldwork, often destabilizing me in my certainties about what I thought I was or was not doing as a type of research.

[69] The mention "edited fieldnotes" refers to fieldnotes that I have slightly modified (in particular by cutting out words or passages) in order to make them easier to read. Conversely, they are my original fieldnotes when the mention "fieldnotes" is indicated.

3.2. When access negotiations are revealing the field

Experiences of getting access, whether they result in a positive or negative response, or of doing fieldwork are very revealing about the field we are interested in. When one is interested in bureaucratic administrations, be they public or private, working within the framework of migration regulation (here, asylum), accessing negotiations indeed tell us a lot about "the state" (Kalir et al. 2019) — or in my case, what I considered *a priori* to be the non-state. As Fresia (2018) further emphasizes, it is also worth questioning the openings and the reasons why certain actors agree to enter into the research relationship, as it was in my case.

3.2.1. Presenting the research

Requesting access to the field requires prior consideration of how the research is to be presented. Does telling "the whole truth" represent risks in terms of (non-)access? Is it better to nuance the questions at the heart of the research by presenting only part of it? I myself was confronted with these questions at the very beginning of my research, when I was considering contacting the first organization. As S. Beaud & Weber (2010) stress, such questioning does not, however, involve a lack of ethical considerations. As with any activity in social life, research allows for a certain amount of shadow. This is because academic considerations are not the responsibility of the respondents, because one never knows in advance how the research will evolve and because it leaves room for maneuver to redirect the research later if the initial investigations so require (ibid.: 99).

Considering it as an impenetrable "fortress", I decided to start with ORS. This personal preconception was fueled by several factors: the fact that it was a for-profit business working with human beings; by its negative reputation in the Swiss media; by the fact that there were no scientific studies about it; but also by my disciplinary affiliation, which led me to deconstruct the power processes at work in society – a process of power that seemed obvious to me in the case of ORS because of its omnipresence in the asylum field (particularly at the federal level). Therefore, beyond the fact that access negotiations were potentially going to take time, I also believed that it would then be easier to convince other gatekeepers once cleared by this authoritative peer.

I contacted ORS by sending a letter by post, including a request to carry out a "scientific study" at one of their reception centers, as well as a description of my thesis project and its research questions, the methodology used, and the ethical issues that arose. These concerned, among others, anonymity and confidentiality matters (see Chapter 3.3). My contact information, as well as that of the director of my thesis, was also included, as well as our two signatures, thus certainly bringing more legitimacy and authority to the project. The same document templates were used to contact ABR and CRS.

Whether this concern was well-founded or not, I had then seriously questioned whether I should tell ORS that I was specifically interested in the role of private organizations in providing reception services. I was afraid that the organization would be suspicious of my research and would not give me access to the field. Hence, I decided to leave a bit of a blur in the presentation of my research. To be more precise, I decided to present myself as a (young) doctoral student conducting research on the policy of reception of asylum seekers in Switzerland and, more particularly, on the *everyday work* of reception, as well as the subjective and lived experiences of people working in this field. While taking advantage of the status of the young and therefore non-threatening researcher (S. Beaud & Weber 2010: 82), I deliberately chose not to emphasize the issue of privatization, which I feared could potentially hinder my access to the field. I thus specified in the project description that the involvement of "non-state actors" appeared to be an "interesting peculiarity" of the field of reception in Switzerland, while at the same time emphasizing my interest in the daily practices and experiences of asylum reception. The terms in quotation marks indicate the specific terms I used in the letter, although my use of some of these categories has subsequently evolved.

After that, I usually waited about ten days before contacting the organization in question, this time by telephone, to arrange a meeting with a member of the management team who could give me access to the desired field, if possible. Surprisingly, in the case of ORS, it was the executive assistant of ORS Fribourg who phoned me before I did so to tell me that they were getting into the matter and were ready to meet with me. In the case of ABR and CRS, my calls accelerated the process and made it possible to set up a personal meeting to discuss the research terms. The combination of postal mail and telephone contact in case of no reply (S. Beaud & Weber 2010: 103), as indicated in writing in the first letter, has, on the whole, worked very well.

3.2.2. Accessing the field

Accessing the field involves several steps of entry. After deciding on how to present the research, the next step is to contact the people one considers potentially able to give access to the field. The choice of the "entry door" is crucial and can strongly influence, for good or ill, the rest of the research.

As Achermann (2009: 61) points out in relation to the process of accessing prisons, although the final decision to participate in a study often lies with the head of the responsible administration, the first step is to gain the trust and interest of the prison management. It is the same in the field of asylum reception where, in order to carry out a field study within reception centers, the first door I knocked on was that of the (operational) management of the organizations — although they, in turn, most of the time asked the cantonal administration in

charge of reception for final approval. I therefore chose not to aim at the top of the hierarchy, but rather at the intermediate levels.

For example, instead of contacting the central management of ORS in Zurich, I preferred to contact the operational management of ORS Fribourg, which was potentially closer to the field I was interested in. It also reassured me to contact an intermediary person and not someone at the top of the hierarchy. It happened the same way with CRS in Ticino, where I contacted the management of the local section of the Red Cross and not its management at the Swiss level. As far as ABR is concerned, I first contacted a center manager (Gabriel) to conduct an expert interview with him. I took this opportunity to "feel the ground" and see if he thought it was possible to carry out fieldwork within ABR and one of their reception centers. On the basis of his positive opinion, I then contacted the management of ABR. As Kalir (2019) illustrates, establishing contact with the right person who could potentially pass on a positive recommendation, i.e., a "good word", to his or her superiors certainly facilitated the access to the field. In all three cases, establishing that first contact at an intermediate level proved to be a successful strategy.

In this respect, two anecdotes are worth mentioning, however. They illustrate two situations that could have potentially hindered my access to the field, but ultimately did not. Firstly, contacting the management of ORS Fribourg appeared to be a fortunate choice. Indeed, it later turned out that some members of ORS management in Zurich had expressed some initial hesitation about my research (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). The role of ORS Fribourg management, with whom I was mainly in contact, was therefore essential in my access to this field. They helped to support my request and took on the responsibility of convincing those higher up the chain at ORS.

Secondly, a small "mistake" in the canton of Ticino is also worth mentioning. In this canton, a center manager working for CRS was an acquaintance of one of my colleagues, so I thought that contacting him directly would make it easier and quicker to access the field. However, this strategy did not prove successful for two reasons. First, because I clearly contacted him at the wrong time, i.e., a period of restructuring within CRS, also corresponding to his retirement, which I did not know about. Second, because within CRS' organizational culture – which I was not yet familiar with – any decision was inevitably made by its director, whose decision-making role was central. Therefore, I assume that the first request I sent to the center manager was lost in the bureaucratic "meanderings" of CRS and took a long time to reach the director. In retrospect, I even wonder whether my request had stopped before the director, i.e., at the secretariat, who sent me a brief email reply explaining that "in view of the opening of [a] new center, an internal reorganization is underway and, for this reason, we do not have time to devote to this type of request" (email, spring 2017). It was therefore only after waiting several months after receiving the initial negative response in the spring of 2017 and after having tried

a second time to contact CRS in the winter of 2018, this time reaching out directly to the director, that the organization (quickly) agreed to the request. A fair amount of time thus elapsed between the two contacts, as well as a certain waste of time, but it finally resulted in a positive response.

These few examples demonstrate that the question of luck is not negligible. As Kalir (2019) contends, luck must indeed be considered as a structural feature in accessing the field. Not only can one not know precisely who will be in charge of dealing with his or her request (especially when addressing the management), but such dealing is always intersubjective. The characteristics of the researcher in terms of status, gender, age, or institutional affiliation, as well as those of the agent in charge of the request, thus greatly influence the final decision. Moreover, in the case of the canton of Ticino, I have always wondered if the fact that I myself come from this canton (with a surname and first name reflecting this cantonal "affiliation") made it easier for me to eventually gain access to this field (see below for more details about the researcher's identities).

Further, I believe that the timing of the request is also completely a matter of luck. For example, I consider it to be very fortunate that I started my applications "by chance" in 2016, after the "summer of migration" (Buckel 2016) and when the number of refugees arriving gradually decreased. Indeed, my interlocutors constantly told me that 2015 had been a real challenge on the ground and complete chaos in terms of accommodation. In terms of access to the field, I was therefore also lucky not to arrive at a time of "crisis".

3.2.3. What does access say about asylum reception?

My first steps into the field are indicative of the special position that the actors of asylum reception occupy within the "state-system" and the governance of asylum. In other words, they are indicative of the way these actors perceive themselves vis-à-vis the state and its sovereign functions. This analysis, presented here in summary form, will be pursued in Chapter 7.

In contrast to many of my colleagues who have recently conducted research within what Feldman (2012) refers to as the European migration apparatus (see in particular Rosset & Achermann (2019) and Lindberg & Borrelli (2019b)), I have encountered few, if any, difficulties and obstacles in accessing my field. Unlike them, I never had the impression of "entering the belly of the beast" (Lindberg & Borrelli 2017). Accessing the field is revealing of several aspects concerning the reception apparatus, in particular its position and function within the governance of asylum, as well as the dynamics that have defined its contours for several years and which will be analyzed in greater detail in the next chapters.

Firstly, as mentioned above, reception is a particular function of asylum governance. It is the provision of accommodation, support, and care services to a particular population falling under the state's authority: persons undergoing asylum procedures. These services go hand in hand with a surveillance dimension, as the reception centers for asylum seekers also perform this function by controlling the presence of residents (see Chapter 5). Although it is intended to manage a sovereign function, the reception apparatus seems, however, to be evolving in the shadow of flow and case management apparatuses which embody the more "spectacular" (De Genova 2013) functions of state action — for example, border control but also the decision as to whether or not to grant asylum. This first characteristic makes (local) asylum reception an area that is symbolically "far from the spotlight" and has a less remarkable character than the functions of border control, deportation, or immigration detention.

Secondly, this first point is accentuated by the context of Switzerland and its federalist system. As mentioned above, responsibility for the reception of asylum seekers is shared between the national level (federal centers) and the cantonal level (cantonal reception centers). Through the principle of subsidiarity, the cantons are responsible for the accommodation and care of the asylum seekers assigned to them, while they may in turn delegate this task to a lower level, the municipalities. Focusing on the cantonal level of reception thus implies taking an interest in a secondary area that is often little known, particularly in relation to the federal centers, which are more often the subject of media and political debate (see Stünzi 2018).

Thirdly, the apparatus of reception is even more fragmented by the contractualization of reception services. As I mentioned earlier, many national and cantonal authorities are indeed divesting themselves of the provision of public services by outsourcing these tasks to third parties. This is reminiscent of something Kalir et al. (2019), among others, pointed out — namely, that when considering the implementation of state tasks in the field of migration, one has to deal with the dispersed and fragmented character of the state. The actors at the heart of this thesis are therefore part of the "state-system" (Abrams 1988) by virtue of their contractual relationship with the cantonal authorities but are nonetheless peripheral actors to the "state-idea" (ibid.) due to their private status. Chapter 7 will show how the construction of an organizational identity in opposition to the state and its (perceived) repressive tasks is a real issue within ORS, ABR and CRS.

These three characteristics of the reception field show that the actors I am interested in in this thesis are acting far away from the frontline of migration control and management. These actors moreover implement tasks that are considered secondary, or at least less central and decisive in the asylum procedure. Their role is nonetheless crucial in the governance of asylum through the actual definition of the services asylum seekers are entitled to daily, as I will show in Chapter 9. The distance from the "heart of the state" is all the more reinforced by the fact

that it falls under the responsibility of the lower levels of implementation (in my case, the cantons and communes), but above all by the fact that it is decentralized and delegated to third parties.[70]

But this portrait of the characteristics of the reception apparatus would not be complete without evoking a fourth and last characteristic that was already strongly felt during my experiences of getting access: managerialization. This could potentially have been an obstacle to my research, especially in the canton of Bern, not because of the very process of managerialization, but because of the sense of suspicion and mistrust it had aroused on the ground.

To understand this, it is necessary to take a small detour through the previously mentioned discussion I had with the director of ABR and the head of Bürgistadt in the summer of 2017 on the modalities of the field. At that time, I was quite surprised to see that the focus of the discussion was on the fear on the part of my interlocutors that their employees would feel evaluated by my research. I quickly understood that the highly bureaucratic and managerial context in which they were evolving daily put them under pressure and had generated a strong mistrust towards external people who came to interfere in the center. My two interlocutors, while trusting me, told me that I had to make it clear to the reception staff that I was not going to evaluate them and, above all, that I was not mandated by the canton to conduct my research (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). According to Gabriel, the center manager, doubts about my role as a researcher could strongly influence the relationship of trust between the staff and me.

On an interesting note, on my first day in the field, a small note written by Gabriel in the team's logbook (see Chapter 5) for the attention of his colleagues suddenly reminded me of this conversation. These few words were, once again, intended to reassure the reception staff about my research intentions:

> 21 September 2017: From next Monday, Camilla Alberti, a doctoral student at the University of Neuchâtel, will begin an observation and immersion internship in Bürgistadt as part of her research. Thank you for welcoming her warmly!! She may wish to interview any of you. It is up to you to accept or refuse. The aim of Ms. Alberti's thesis is not to evaluate our work, but to make comparisons of the working methods and resources available to those working in the field in different cantons. [Signature:] Gabriel

This situation posed the challenge of demonstrating my willingness to produce legitimate knowledge (Rosset & Achermann 2019) in the eyes of the reception agents; in other words, of how to make a clear distinction between "evaluation" and "scientific research". Interestingly,

[70] It should be noted, however, that outsourcing processes to for-profit organizations could just as well have been an obstacle to my access to the field, as my initial fear of accessing the "mysterious and impenetrable ORS fortress" testifies.

while Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan (2019) observe that the obsession of quantification and the hegemony of benchmarking may result in contempt for qualitative research in bureaucratic settings, in my case, I observed the opposite: a dislike for quantification (in the broadest sense) stemming from a highly bureaucratic context and the need to position myself against it to gain access to the field. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.5, this refers more broadly to the need for the researcher to negotiate legitimacy with the different audiences he or she encounters within organizations in the field.

3.3. Ethics and confidentiality

As briefly mentioned, the negotiation of research conditions was done during meetings with the management of the three organizations studied. During the first one with ORS, the supervisor of this thesis was present with me, while for the other two, I was alone. After having presented my "ideal fieldwork", I discussed its contours and modalities. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were addressed through the following four points presenting my position as a researcher and my research ethics:

- *Respect and flexibility*: The work of the agents is respected, and the functioning of the center is disturbed as little as possible.
- *Consent and information*: All persons concerned are informed about the aims and methods of the research and can decide freely whether they wish to participate in the study. An information session can be organized at the beginning of the research and repeated afterward if necessary. Interviews are recorded only with the consent of the interviewee.
- *Anonymity and data protection*: All personal data is treated anonymously and confidentially. Interviewees are mentioned unrecognizably in publications. The organization and/or the canton can also be anonymized in the publications if desired. A data protection contract can be signed if deemed necessary by the management.
- *Transparency*: The research results are presented to the management and employees of the organization if there is an interest. A copy of the thesis is returned at the end of the project.

There has been very little discussion of these aspects, other than to ensure confidentiality and anonymity to the residents of the center. The organizations did not require to be anonymized, nor did they ask me to sign a confidentiality agreement, except for ABR. The head of Bürgistadt made me sign a "confidentiality declaration" – in reality, the contract for trainees – in which I committed myself to treat the sensitive information and data that I would have access to during my research at ABR with strict confidentiality.

In line with a processual comprehension of ethics (Perrin et al. 2018), I chose to anonymize the identity of my interlocutors and the reception centers but to reveal the names of the cantons

and organizations studied. This choice is based on two main considerations. On the one hand, I considered that beyond a theoretical contribution to the transformations of state action in the field of asylum, one of the objectives of my research was also to contribute to a better understanding of the reception policy in Switzerland. Anonymizing cantons and organizations would therefore have obscured, or at least made abstract, very concrete mechanisms. On the other hand, my reflection on anonymization was centered on the potential damage to the people I encountered in the field so that they would not incur any risk because of the publication of my work. Accordingly, I therefore felt it was necessary to valorize the specific mechanics of certain cantons and organizations, while anonymizing the places and people in and through which these mechanisms transpired.

To this end, I nicknamed the three reception centers by inventing fictitious names, while omitting or even decontextualizing some of their characteristics (Bonnard 2020: 305). While writing this thesis, I also changed the gender of my interlocutors to prevent them, among others, from being recognized too easily by their peers. Sometimes, to detach the relevant content from an overly singular situation or discussion, I have also chosen to narrate excerpts from my fieldnotes, rather than quoting them (ibid.: 307-308).

For reasons related to specific functions, or place-based characteristics, however, the cantonal officials and some members of the management of the organizations, as well as some locations might be identified indirectly. Indeed, according to Zonabend (2009: 9), "it is not easy to conceal, for example, the name of the company on which the research is focused or to conceal the status, institutional position, hierarchical rank or function of some informants". Thus, still in a processual approach, I chose to mobilize and therefore anonymize their discourse in a differentiated way, depending on whether it concerned access to the field or specific issues related to the daily practices of the reception. In this latter case, the identity of the members of the management was blurred by "playing" with professional categories and statutes. In other words, these people were all grouped under a generic category: the management of the organization, understood in the broadest sense. If, on the contrary, it was a question, for example, of discussing issues of access, I felt it was necessary to use finer categories.

3.4. Multi-perspective approach

To offer a deep understanding of the diverse processes taking place in the governing of asylum reception, I quickly opted for a multi-perspective research design. Following Achermann (2009), this involves capturing a social phenomenon in a broad sense by taking into account both the structural conditions in which it takes place and the arrangement of individuals in their varying appearances; in other words, to include the "intertwining agency of a variety of actors" (ibid.: 52). More specifically, since the issue of what I then called "non-state actors"

and privatization was at the heart of my questioning, I believed such a methodology allowed me to include several perspectives and types of data and, in so doing, to offer a contrasting but balanced view of this often simplified to one (macro or micro) perspective topic in the literature. Such an approach thus enables not only the complexity of a given phenomenon to be grasped by considering the perspective of the different (groups of) actors involved in a given setting, but also the understanding to be enhanced by combining different types of data.

3.4.1. Threefold perspectives

To better understand the modalities of action of the reception apparatus, the tensions, power relations, and the diversity of the rationalities that cross it, but also the profiles and universes of meaning of the actors who shape it, I decided to approach asylum reception from three perspectives: those of the fieldworkers (street-level bureaucrats), those of the organizations and their respective management (street-level organizations), and those of the cantonal authorities. These three groups of actors are, in turn, made up of a wide variety of elements: in terms of status, i.e., cantonal officials, institute directors, co-directors, center managers, operational managers, reception agents, social educators, psychologists, security agents, etc.; in terms of training and professional background, i.e., university training, apprenticeships, hotel management school, economics, school of applied sciences, etc.; but also in terms of age, gender, or origins.

On the basis of a street-level organization perspective, as proposed by Brodkin (1990, 2011b), organizations were considered as actors with their own identities, objectives and subjectivities, which in turn influence the way other actors act, i.e., reception officers. This is also in line with the ethics of "office" analyzed by Eckert (2020b), which structures the daily actions of the street-level bureaucrats who work on its behalf through a whole series of normative considerations.

When designing the research, for mere reasons of feasibility, I deliberately chose not to include the perspective of center residents, although this would certainly have led to a more nuanced analysis of the dynamics of reception, particularly with respect to the reading of asylum facilities as places of transgression (see also Chapter 5 on the contributions of such a perspective). Indeed, I quickly realized that being alone in conducting this research, my resources would be severely limited, especially since I had decided to include three different cantons and organizations, in which I was interested in the perspective of several groups of actors. This choice, however, certainly avoided some of the ethical questions that would have resulted from encounters with people in precarious situations (Achermann 2009; Darling 2014c), in particular with regard to the considerable difference in status between the researcher and the researched as far as legal status/citizenship, socio-economic position, and often also education are concerned, but also the difference in knowledge about the asylum system and

their rights. The same applies to the processing of potentially sensitive data related to the background and experiences of vulnerable persons, although I still had indirect and non-systematic access to this data and to the persons.

3.4.2. Types and extent of data

Capturing such a variety of perspectives and dimensions requires the collection of various types of data. These are summarized in Table 2 and explained in more detail in the following.

(Participant) observation • My first contact with the field, and certainly the one that constitutes the most important corpus for me, is the (participant) observation that I carried out. As I explain below, although my entry into the centers corresponded with a status as a non-participant observer, I was systematically caught up in the daily grind of reception work and "got my hands dirty", even though I have never been involved as a volunteer or employee at any time. In this sense, although it is a shifting posture, I feel that I have, at times, engaged in participant observation (see Chapter 3.5.4).

To grasp the everyday "realities" of reception centers, i.e., what fieldworkers actually *do*, I did observation in three reception centers – Chamfors, Bürgistadt and Tirossa – for four months (part-time). I also made more occasional visits to other reception centers where I met other people, had other discussions, and observed other local realities. During the days I spent in these centers, I accompanied the reception agents in their daily tasks, whether in the office or elsewhere in the center; I witnessed the many discussions between colleagues and their (dis)satisfaction with the work they carry out on a daily basis; I attended the discussions between reception agents and residents, sometimes taking a formal and sometimes informal turn; I took part in many cigarette breaks, though I was often the only one not smoking; I participated in the weekly or monthly team meetings; I attended the arrival interviews with the newcomers at the center and followed the reception agents into the basements or attics of the centers to prepare the necessary materials for them; I also spent a lot of time in the office watching them work in front of their computers and getting upset that they could not "get out"; I ate lunch with them and, in their company, little by little, came to appreciate coffee. I also accompanied them to some of their continuing education courses and learned new things with them. But I also wandered, alone or accompanied, through the corridors and floors of the center and talked with some of the residents, drank tea or coffee with them, exchanged a few words or smiles, and occasionally ate the dishes they prepared and let us taste. I had moments of boredom, but I also witnessed some emotional moments, or shared the stress and nervousness of the reception staff. These moments and encounters all contributed to creating a relationship of trust with my interlocutors due to my regular and repeated presence in the centers, as well as my attitude of reciprocity (Darling 2014c: 204). I myself had to answer many questions about my own life, my personal and professional background, my vision of society,

and my political opinion, or the progress of my research. Discussing these details was essential to a reciprocal exchange of views and experiences.

Observation was an opportunity to understand from the inside what was happening in the reception centers, what it meant to "do reception work" on a daily basis, and in what material and infrastructural framework it took place. In order to orientate myself in my *in-situ* observations, I had previously developed an observation grid with a series of non-exhaustive *elements* (people, objects, documents, scenery elements, layouts of the premises), *situations* (Who is there? Who has the right to be there or not? What is going on? Who is doing what? What are people saying?) and *interactions* (resident-staff, staff-staff, staff-hierarchy) to be observed and inventoried. Yet, despite this phase of preparation full of enthusiasm and goodwill, I subsequently never made use of this grid in the field. Nevertheless, the mere fact of having reflected on it beforehand certainly guided me indirectly in my observations.

More broadly, this immersive involvement also enabled me to *feel* the effects of the asylum system (Darling 2014c: 205), and more specifically of the reception apparatus. It was also an opportunity to have informal discussions with reception officers and spend time with them. Although this was not the focus of this thesis, informal discussions were also held with the residents of the centers. The observation also allowed me to gain an appreciation of the difficulties of reception work, particularly in view of the structural constraints affecting the field. I also carried out observation as part of in-service training for reception staff in the cantons of Fribourg and Ticino. The two-day "Welcome to ORS" course was particularly valuable and instructive in this respect. By mixing the perspective of the organization that was being introduced with that of the new (and not so new) reception agents, this experience allowed me to directly confront the tension between institutional and informal discourses, and the way in which participants navigated between the two. All these observations and experiences were documented as much as possible in my fieldnotes — notebooks in which I recorded everything I had seen, experienced and discussed over the course of the days — thus forming a complete field diary. These handwritten notes were systematically transcribed into a digital format.

Interviews • In order to better understand the perspective of the actors in the field and to complement my observations, I also conducted 42 semi-directive interviews (Kaufmann 2007) with both the management of the organizations and with the reception staff working in the centers. While these were mostly expert interviews (Flick 2009: 165) with the former, i.e., interviews focusing less on the person (as a whole) than on their capacity as an expert in a certain field of activity, interviews with reception staff can instead be qualified as ethnographic interviews (S. Beaud 1996), used in combination with field research and observation. Apart from three interviews for which I took notes, interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. The interviews that took place in the external administrative premises of the organizations

lasted about two hours, while those inside the centers with the agents only lasted about one hour. This duration bears witness to how little time my interlocutors had for this and my fear of wasting their time. Most of the interviews with the reception agents took place within the centers themselves, in the places that we could make as quiet as possible for this purpose (but which were usually not calm at all): the kitchen, the meeting room, the garden or the activity room for residents. In order to select the people with whom I conducted (one or more) formal interviews, I used "random sampling" (Becker 2002: 120), depending on the opportunities in the field and the encounters, which allowed me to have a qualitative representation of people who expressed themselves. Beforehand, however, I had drawn up a list of groups of people and, therefore, of perspectives I wanted to cover, including reception staff, center managers, executive board members, and cantonal officials.

As a rule, when I arrived in the reception centers and met the staff, I systematically introduced myself and the objectives of my research. I explained to them that I was carrying out research on the theme of asylum reception as part of a doctoral thesis and that my aim was to understand *from the inside* the work and daily life of reception. I explained that I wanted to combine my observations with their own points of view and experiences gathered in more formal interviews. This was always preceded by an announcement from the center managers to their colleagues, sometimes requiring some further clarification from me about my presence and status in the center (see also below). The reasons for my presence were continuously discussed, in a very informal way, during my daily exchanges with my interlocutors who were curious to "know more".

Negotiating with the reception officers in the field to conduct an interview with them proved to be quite complicated. This was not because they did not want to or did not trust me – on the contrary, they were generally very enthusiastic and even extremely eager to share their opinions – but rather for structural reasons. Due to a lack of staff and a daily frenzy, my interlocutors were constantly under pressure and never had time to devote to an interview. As mentioned above, the layout of the reception centers made all this even more difficult. Conducting interviews with the reception staff therefore required a lot of adaptation work, both on their side and mine. For them, agreeing to do an interview meant complicating the task for their colleagues who were left with one less person in the office. On several occasions, my interlocutors had to take the phone with them to answer calls. On a few occasions, I also conducted these interviews outside working hours, after long working days. I had to accept that I needed to be very flexible and comfortable with a certain amount of unpredictability. I simply had to wait for them to tell me at the last minute that "now is good" to do the interview. This usually happened during the last days of my fieldwork.

During the interviews with the management, the main objective was to understand how the organization, as an entity, perceived and talked about its role in relation to reception policy,

what its relationship with the cantonal authorities was, what its conception of "reception" and, more broadly, its work philosophy was, how it managed accommodation and reception in a given canton, what its tasks and responsibilities were, what the internal functioning of the organization was, what the profiles sought for reception staff were, and so forth. As far as the reception agents were concerned, I aimed to understand how they made sense of their function and the tasks they had to carry out daily, how they explained the way reception work was implemented in the centers and what words they used for this, as well as how they located themselves within a given organizational culture.

I always started the interviews by reminding the interviewee that the data processing would be anonymous and confidential. They also had the right to stop the recording at any time during the interview before which I always asked for their consent for the recording. I ended this introduction by specifying three elements: that the content of the interview would not be accessible to third parties (except possibly my thesis supervisor), that all the data collected would be used for my thesis, and that they had the possibility to remove sentences from the interview if they so wished. All they had to do was tell me during or after the interview.

In addition to this group, my analysis also included many other agents (reception agents, nurses, security guards, interns, teachers, volunteers, psychologists, doctors) with whom I had informal discussions or simply encountered often without carrying out a formal interview, but who are part of my body of analysis. Expert interviews were also held with cantonal asylum officials, particularly those responsible for the accommodation and reception of asylum seekers. These enabled me to take a more macro view of the issue of reception while at the same time benefiting from information essential to understanding reception management at the cantonal level. During these interviews, I was mainly interested in understanding how reception works in the canton in the broadest sense, why the canton had decided to delegate the operational mandate, how the collaboration with the contractual partner was going, how the reception mandate had been constructed and conceptualized, and which control measures were in place.

Documents and secondary sources • The secondary sources that helped me nuance my analysis are of three types. Firstly, consultation of the legal bases in which the issue of reception is framed. To this end, I have collected numerous legal texts and regulations – at the European, national, and cantonal levels – which structure reception policy. Secondly, I collected internal documents from the organizations (internal directives and procedures, regulations, activity reports, etc.), through which I was able to understand the way in which the actions of the reception staff were structured and oriented daily. Finally, I also referred to all sorts of press articles and scientific publications to grasp the wider socio-political context in which asylum governance, and in particular reception, is embedded. All these documents

provided information about the structuring conditions that are thought of being enabling and constraining at the same time (Giddens 1987 (1984)).

Table 2: Type and scope of data

	(Participant) observation	**Semi-directive interviews**	**Documents**
Fribourg **ORS**	Continuing education, "Welcome to ORS", 2 days in September 2016 Continuing education, "Animation and occupation in supervisory work", 1 day in October 2016 Reception center, Chamfors, 3 days/week during October 2016 Visits to 3 other reception centers, 3 days in October 2016 Recreational outings with center residents, 1 day in October 2016	8 interviews with ORS Fribourg management and sector managers 3 interviews with head of reception centers 8 interviews with reception agents and other employees (nurse) 1 interview with cantonal officer 1 interview with legal office (legal support for asylum seekers) *Total: 21 interviews*	Legal basis Mandate Cantonal directives Specifications Internal procedures and regulations
Bern **ABR**	Open day in Bürgistadt, 1 day in August 2017 Reception center, Bürgistadt, 3 days/week during October 2017 Visits to 2 other reception centers, 2 days in October 2017	1 (double-)interview with ABR management (director and co-director) 4 interviews with head of reception centers 5 interviews with reception agents *Total: 10 interviews*	Legal basis Mandate Cantonal directives Annual Reports Internal procedures and regulations
Ticino **CRS** **(SOS Ticino)**	Reception center, Tirossa, 3-4 days/week during August 2018 Visits to 3 other reception centers, 3 days in August 2018 Continuing training, "Integration training for refugees", 1 day in August 2018 Recreational outings with center residents, 1 day in August 2018	2 interviews with CRS management 1 (double-)interview with SOS Ticino management (director and sector manager) 1 interview with head of reception center 6 interviews with reception agents and other employees (volunteering and security sectors) 1 interview with cantonal officer *Total: 11 interviews*	Legal basis Annual Reports Internal procedures and regulations

3.4.3. (Dis)associating perspectives

In the end, the result of a multi-perspective approach is not a clear picture that reflects the "true reality" or "the objective truth" of the reception of asylum seekers and the multiple dynamics surrounding it. Instead, as Achermann (2009: 53) puts it, "researchers will rather face a multidimensional picture whose colors, shadings and clear, blur and black parts change according to the perspective from which it is presented or looked at". It is precisely this multidimensionality that I sought to enhance in this thesis by including different perspectives,

which moreover came from three different cantonal and organizational contexts. This represents both an advantage and a disadvantage, or at least a recurring personal uncertainty as to how to interweave these numerous perspectives and case studies, and how to make sense of them in a coherent, relevant, and clear way, while making their respective characteristics visible and understandable in a faithful manner.

The intertwining of levels of analytics, perspectives, points of view, contexts, practices, contradictions, and local particularities has indeed given rise to more than one question. As Achermann (2009: 59) also wonders: "how is it possible to really treat the different perspectives in a balanced and just way? [...] And how to analyse the details of the complex processes, elaborate what is happening and what the perspectives of the different actors are?" The will to take "everything" into account – and therefore the constant worry of getting lost in this mountain of data – clearly represented a challenge during the construction of this thesis, but especially during the processing and analysis of the data and their elaboration in writing (see below).

Nevertheless, I am convinced that a multi-perspective approach has greatly helped me to deconstruct and better understand the processes at work in the governing of asylum reception — for example, to understand how the neoliberal bureaucratization of this field is not only the intentional result of the cantonal authorities, or conversely of the involvement of private actors, but results from the interweaving of the state's decision-making and operational spaces. In particular, by giving me access to diverse and multiple data, the multi-perspective approach I adopted enabled me to "triangulate" (Olivier de Sardan 1995) several methods in order to grasp the multiple dynamics, practices, and rationalities at work in the implementation of the reception policy.

3.5. On the (fluid) researcher's positionality in the field

A **new trainee** starts an **observation mission** for a few weeks in "Center Bürgistadt" on Monday, September 25th, 2017.

Her name is **Camilla**.

Please give her a warm welcome!

This notice, hung on the front door of the office in Bürgistadt, announced in three languages (French, German, English) my upcoming arrival at the center to the reception agents and to the residents. Reproduced here with the original terms and emphasis, it immediately indicates

the type of (un)certain positionalities I have been led to navigate through in the field. My relationship with and my own place within the research has indeed continually evolved and, above all, has been the subject of many personal reflections. By zooming in on specific and non-exhaustive aspects of the field, it is the very process of the constitution, negotiation, and transformation of my position in the field, along with the way other people have perceived me, that is at the core of this section.

3.5.1. Holding the keys

Along with the first greetings and exchanges aimed at familiarizing myself with a place that was still unknown to me, my arrivals in Chamfors, Bürgistadt, and Tirossa were always accompanied with the handover of "the keys". This very symbolic moment marked not only the passage from the outside to the inside of the center, but also my connection with the group of reception staff, who were the only people in the center who could move freely around thanks to the keys. The fact that I myself had the keys to enter and leave the reception center, but also to circulate within it, is indicative of the organizational openness, yet also the infrastructural closeness of my research field. In other words, access openness has translated, in my case, into openness in the field, which in turn revealed to me the semi-closure, or at least internal mobility constraints, that the residents of the centers face daily.

The decision to provide me with the keys to the center has always come from the center directors, who did so very quickly during our first meeting, although at no time was it expressly requested by their superiors or by myself. However, this decision is no doubt also related to the nature of the request I had made to the management, i.e., to carry out a month's intensive research in a reception center, which had previously been accepted by the directors of the organizations. For the center managers, the gesture of giving me the keys was thus certainly their way of expressing their agreement to my presence in "their" center. More generally, the attribution of keys reflects the recognition of my immersive involvement in the reception center. No rules or recommendations have been given to me regarding the use of the keys, other than the (implicit) rules of manners implying to respect everyone's privacy.

Possessing the keys to the center enabled me to be autonomous and flexible inside it. I could arrive at the center whenever I wanted, or even before the other employees as it happened once, and open all the doors of the building; I could move freely during the day, going in and out of the office without someone having to give me this access; I could decide to take a break and go out for some fresh air at any time; I could also go to any room or apartment in the center, although I never made use of this access. This quickly made me realize that going around the centers without keys was almost impossible and that one was constantly confronted with closed doors. The few days when I forgot my keys were particularly revealing: I was suddenly blocked in my mobility within the center and became dependent on

other people, just like the residents of the centers outside the access to their own room, studio or apartment.

But possessing the keys also in a way "opened the door" to more personal exchanges with the residents of the center, who themselves asked me to open this or that door for them. For example, to a young mother in Bürgistadt who had forgotten the keys to her room and whom I came to help; to several residents who needed access to the laundry room (always locked) when all the agents were busy; or to a man in Tirossa who needed to use the lift, accessible thanks to the badge I had, with whom I regularly exchanged a few words while giving him this access. These seemingly insignificant moments were an opportunity to chat a few words with the residents of the center and to establish some bonds. On several occasions, they took the opportunity to (re)ask me my first name, invite me for a coffee or tea, or offer to let me taste the dishes they had cooked.

More broadly, I interpreted the handing over of the keys as a mark of trust, but above all, as a message meaning "we have nothing to hide". This resonates with the points already mentioned above regarding the role and particular position of contracted organizations within asylum governance: their sense of (non-)responsibility for the reception tasks that they implement under mandate from the public authorities and therefore their detachment from the criticizable elements that could potentially take place within the reception centers.

3.5.2. (In)visible identities and expectations

The very identity of the researcher can certainly also be seen as a "key" opening or closing doors. In my case, one can indeed start from the idea that my status as a white (young) woman, who is also a Swiss citizen, has played an important role in the field. More specifically, it is important to reflect on how my multiple identities and social positions have not only determined my access to the field, and more broadly to a whole range of people and information but have certainly also been the subject of associations on the part of my interlocutors. In other words, my own "ethnographic toolkit" (Reyes 2020) – both visible (skin color, age, presenting gender) and invisible (citizenship, social capital, backgrounds, education, facility with several languages), depending on the people I interacted with and their knowledge to interpret these clues – influenced the dynamics on the ground. In the following, I reflect on how my Swiss identity, as well as my gender and status as an academic researcher at a university shaped my fieldwork.

As observed by Desmond (2016: 325-326), "[e]verything about you – your race and gender, where and how you were raised, your temperament and disposition – can influence whom you meet, what is confided to you, what you are shown, and how you interpret what you see". In my case, my multiple positionalities and characteristics have evolved or, rather, have been

mobilized differently depending on the situations and people I was dealing with. Indeed, rather than being interested in a specific group of people (implying that only one or the other of my characteristics would have been mobilized), the interest in the daily functioning of the reception centers meant being in contact with the multiple types of people who navigated these places. As such, as a researcher, I found myself in an "unsettled time" and "transient place" (Reyes 2020) in which I constantly had to adapt to different groups of people, and therefore of expectations. It should be noted, however, that at no time did I position myself as a volunteer (with its share of responsibilities). I therefore analyze my shifting positionalities through the researcher's posture.

How did my (in)visible identities shape my research? First, my researcher status was obviously a key in opening doors to the field. This status has indeed allowed me to access the semi-closed places that are the reception centers (see Chapter 5), which are otherwise difficult for an ordinary citizen to enter. However, as mentioned earlier, my status as a doctoral student was also coupled with my (visible) characteristic as a young woman. In this sense, without wanting to extrapolate (since I never knew what my interlocutors really thought of me), I can assume that the a priori non-threatening and inexperienced double-characteristic of the young female researcher contributed to an easier access to the field.

More generally, this (double-)identity has itself positioned me at the center of asymmetrical relations, particularly between field agents and their superiors. It indeed gave me access to a whole series of interlocutors in a position of power (notably the cantonal authorities and the management of organizations), even though they were inaccessible to my main interlocutors, the reception agents. This also led to some conflicts of loyalty, as explained below. In this sense, through my status as a researcher, I may have been assigned a figure of authority by my means of access people at the top of the hierarchical ladder. It should be noted that this privileged access also went in parallel with access to knowledge (however minimal it may be) to which field agents sometimes had difficulty gaining access. For example, I was informed of the future introduction of a specific measure (e.g., the opening of a specific facility for unaccompanied minors) before the employees were informed of it. I was also put "in confidence" by the director of an organization regarding the tensions that within a reception center's team, even though I was evolving in this tense context daily and was sometimes even taken to task by the two opposing camps.

Moreover, entering the field as a supposedly neutral external observer probably contributed, in the first instance, to establishing my status as an "expert". On several occasions, during informal discussions, my interlocutors have indeed sought to know what my professional intentions were after the end of my thesis. Often even before hearing my answer, several of them told me (jokingly) that I could take the place of one of their superiors in the management; basically, that because of my status as an expert in asylum reception, I could manage an

institution specialized in this field. These remarks have made me uncomfortable, for two main reasons. On the one hand, because it immediately placed me in an asymmetrical relationship with my interlocutors (the reception agents), who started from the idea that they themselves could never access such positions because they had not done "as much" studying as I had. In effect, the educational and professional profiles of the reception agents I met in the field were extremely diverse and heterogeneous. Most of them had no university education, some were young people who had just completed their bachelor's or master's studies. On the other hand, because the enhancement of my intellectual capital coincided with a certain expectation on their part regarding the improvement of their working conditions, and more broadly of the reception policy, as if my research would necessarily allow me to make all the dysfunctions in the field change. I have therefore constantly sought at "levelling down" with my interlocutors to avoid that I was systematically put on a pedestal; a role that I did not assume.

In the field, I have indeed been constantly pursued by a feeling of impostor: Despite my academic background in migration studies, and thus my undeniable (theoretical) knowledge of this topic, I have always felt an embarrassment as to the real validity and usefulness of this knowledge. This feeling was all the stronger as it arose while observing the concrete and situational know-how of the reception agents. Nevertheless, I sometimes also made conscious use of my intellectual capital, as for instance during my numerous exchanges with the head of Bürgistadt, Gabriel, who himself had a university degree and post-graduate training as an institution director. Thus, unlike most of my other interlocutors who did not possess such capital, in this case I felt the need to constantly draw tools and knowledge from my academic background to legitimize my position.

Second, and related to part of what I said above, my female status, coupled with that of my age, my situation in my personal life (including not having children) and a certain vision of society, has opened many doors for me, especially in Tirossa. I believe this identity allowed me to easily integrate the (very homogeneous) group of social workers who worked in the center: I really got the impression that, after a first phase of mutual observation, they felt comfortable sharing to me their daily professional and personal worries. Or, conversely, the status of being the only woman within the staff – as in Chamfors – contributed to my endorsing of the stereotypical and gendered position of the curious, kind, and receptive (young) woman dealing with experienced (and older) men. This, I believe, allowed me to easily gain the confidence of my interlocutors and to have access to many informal exchanges. It should be noted, however, that this was my first field experience in the context of this thesis, which moreover was within an organization that I feared (or at least that seemed to me extremely opaque and difficult to access), which certainly also contributed to this posture.

Overall, during my informal exchanges with the reception agents, I had difficulty finding the right balance in expressing my political and social opinions. While at times this clearly allowed

me to create strong connections with my interlocutors, as in Tirossa and Bürgistadt, at other times I felt the need to "neutralize" my opinions (without however censoring them) for fear that this would close the door to certain discussions. This was, for example, the case in Chamfors when an officer openly told me that he did not tolerate homosexuality and that, according to him, it was "scientifically impossible" for two people of the same sex to have children (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). This discussion was related to the fact that a new resident had just arrived at the center after fleeing his country because of his sexual orientation, but also to a discussion about reality TV shows we had just had. This same agent also talked to me about a family that has lived at Chamfors for a long time and emphasized the fact that they "do not want to integrate" and that "they are not real refugees" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). Being confronted with these opinions has challenged me as to the stance that I, as a researcher but also as a citizen, had to adopt in the field. It also led me to always be reflexive about my own background and citizenship, which contrasted with that of several of my interlocutors, including asylum seekers.

Finally, I indeed cannot conclude this reflection without mentioning my privileged status as a Swiss citizen and the way in which it shaped the fieldwork. As experienced by Darling (2014c) in his fieldwork in the UK working with dispersed asylum seekers and refugees, the dual status as a volunteer and as a citizen may, in effect, generate a whole series of expectations about the possibility of effecting change through social and political capital (see also Pittaway et al. 2010: 232). If in my case, my role as a volunteer (or participant) was only secondary, it is nevertheless worth mentioning an episode in which my position as a Swiss citizen was strategically used to improve the treatment of an asylum seeker going to the emergency room, as recounted in the following excerpt:

> After the lunch break, an Eritrean man (Fethawi) comes knocking at the office door – he really doesn't feel well, he has pains in his abdomen. Since the doctor who treats the residents is on vacation, Selim tells him to go to the medical center (kind of emergencies). The man doesn't know where it is and doesn't look well. Selim asks me if I can go with him, arguing that my presence will certainly speed up the treatment and facilitate the exchange with the doctors. I agree and then walk together to the medical center. I fill out the form with the contact details and insurance for him and wait with him in the attendance room. After seeing a doctor and being checked, it turns out that Fethawi must go to the hospital quickly in order to have an operation. (Edited fieldnotes, Bürgistadt, autumn 2017)

Thus, although in my case this kind of episode was only occasional, it illustrates the role and the significant influence of my Swiss citizenship, or at least of the privileges that derive from it. This also resonates strongly with the previous chapter: my position as a researcher with Swiss citizenship not only allowed me to enter the semi-confined space of the reception centers, but also to have very easy access to the keys allowing me to circulate freely within the

facilities. Beyond my appearance and skin color, which visibly contrasted most of the time with those of the residents, the differential treatment regarding freedom of movement within and outside the center was also indicative of my privileged status. Not without a feeling of uneasiness on my part, the end of the day in Tirossa also crystallized and made visible the asymmetrical relationship between the residents and me: While I left the center by bike to return to the hotel where I was staying for the duration of the fieldwork thanks to the financial means made available by my university, the residents of the center would take the same route in the opposite direction (by bike or even on foot, for the many who could not afford to buy a second-hand bike) to return to the room they shared with other residents.

3.5.3. The researcher's chair

While I was always given a key to circulate within the reception centers, I was not officially assigned a specific place to work in the office. In fact, I have never made such a request and the infrastructural conditions would not have allowed it, as the reception officers sometimes did not have a personal desk due to lack of space. Yet, what I have been assigned, or have assigned to myself as a workplace, is a chair, as can be seen in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. This chair has become a material presence that was both comforting and uncomfortable because categorizing and spatializing. My "intimate" relationship with this chair truly became the common thread of my field experience and self-observation.

Although in different configurations, this chair appeared to me as a way to settle into the reception officers' office and find my place there. Because it could be easily moved, I could set it up in a place (within the office) that allowed me to observe the office space, as well as the objects and the interactions that happened in it. This chair was sometimes located in the corner of the room, behind an empty desk and/or discussion table, next to the board of the center, next to an officer's workstation, or in the middle of "nowhere", where my presence did not bother anyone. Although the appropriation of this chair was sometimes easy, as in the case of ORS where it was the only chair left in a corner of the office, I was also unsettled by the layout of the office and the difficulty of finding "my" chair, as this excerpt from my fieldnotes written just before my arrival in Bürgistadt testifies:

> First day in the Bürgistadt center. Gabriel (the director) wrote me an email a few days ago telling me that he would be absent and that I would be welcomed by his deputy, Selim. Surprisingly, I am not too stressed at the idea of starting in a new place. I don't know if it is because it is my second field or because I have already become a bit familiar with the center [at an open day], but I am pretty relaxed. The only thing that makes me a little nervous is my place within the office. At ORS, the advantage was that the office was a very large room where everyone was working. I could easily sit in a quiet corner on a chair and observe all the interactions. Since the offices in Bürgistadt are more separate (there are three), I am not sure what it will be like. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

My "installation" in this center therefore required a slightly longer adaptation time. In the end, I navigated between the different offices, and therefore different chairs, depending on which workstations were unoccupied. I also tried to place myself in relation to the agents present in the office, so that I could accompany them for a whole day. As I will come back to again, this was facilitated by the fact that they spent most of their time in the office, behind their computers, doing administrative work.

Conversely, a chair was sometimes also directly assigned to me. For example, when I arrived at Tirossa, an empty chair specially intended for me was already waiting. The characteristics of this chair immediately made me feel a little uncomfortable:

> As we leave the office of Renato, the center manager, we come across part of the team smoking outside. Renato asks Lorenza – one of the social workers – if she can be with me this morning and show me her work. I thank Renato for giving me all the information about the center and settle into the office. Lorenza has already put a chair next to her so that I can sit. I notice that all the employees have office armchairs (with wheels, adaptable to their size, etc.) and that the one I was offered certainly comes from the kitchen (break room), where there are classic chairs. I also notice that the agents are already cramped in the room and that the presence of my chair takes up the little space still available. I feel a little uncomfortable. I feel like I am suddenly catapulted into this chair and put in the position of the observer who does not say much. (Edited fieldnotes, summer 2018)

The figure of the chair thus refers to my positionality within the office, and more broadly within the reception centers. It refers to the way in which I entered my role as a researcher, the way in which I subsequently practiced it, but also to the way in which it was potentially perceived by my interlocutors.

During my first few weeks in the field, knowing that there was a chair waiting for me somewhere in the offices greatly reassured me of my concern about finding the "right" place within the reception team. Its presence somehow legitimized mine. It became my little personal space that gave me comfort at times when I still had to find my role in the field. In the beginning, as the vignette above relates, this chair clearly made me adopt the detached posture of the observer, participating little in the exchanges but taking notes in her notebook. With hindsight, I think that I hid a lot at that moment behind the status of the researcher who, while inhabited by an innocent curiosity to know more, did not want to or felt unable to actively participate in the observed setting.

This posture has, however, evolved rapidly over time. The chair allowed me to blend in, to begin to feel part of things and to acquire a "feeling" for how to behave in this new community. I gradually managed to detach myself emotionally and physically from it and to return only when a proper opportunity arose. I alternated sitting moments with other times where I circulated around the center, with or without reception staff. I was afraid that if I confined

myself too much to my chair, I would cut myself off from the reception staff and the informal exchanges I might have had with them. This reflects the tension felt by the researcher between taking sides, "engagement", and "distancing" from the situations he or she observes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011: 203-204, see also below).

More broadly, the question of *in-situ* note-taking — in particular, the decision to note an event deemed important and the appropriate moment for this — was the subject of a long learning process (S. Beaud & Weber 2010: 136). Not wanting to lock myself into the posture of the observer sitting in her chair and abstracting myself from the situation, I have gradually put in place strategies to perceive, memorize, and then document my observations. In general, it was a matter of writing down a few snippets of discussions or key words on an A4 sheet of paper or in a small notepad that I took out of my bag from time to time. Depending on the activities of my interlocutors, I took the liberty of writing more extensive notes *in situ*. On other occasions, a short excursion into the kitchen or outside the center would allow me to quickly mark two or three items so that I would not forget them. Sometimes I even recorded short audio memos on my phone. The flip side of this was that I spent hours, even days, writing my fieldnotes afterward based on the annotations taken during the day. That is why I never went to the reception centers five days a week – I would not have had enough time to write my fieldnotes properly. My fieldnotes, written in my chair or elsewhere, were a mix of descriptive observations that provided a general overview of the field, more focused observations that concentrated on aspects particularly relevant to answering my research questions, and more selective observations that were meant to capture central aspects of my field of study (Spradley 1980: 34). I supplemented them with methodological notes and memos, as explained below.

3.5.4. "Are you here to observe, or…?"

Somewhat like Golde (1970: 8), who explains that after a certain period of time in the society under study, the members of that society will make the ethnologist understand that if he or she wants to live with them, he or she must live "like them", my main interlocutors – the reception agents – also tried to bring me into line within their community by finding me a legitimate position. Like Chiara, for example, a reception officer in Tirossa, who, during our first encounter, immediately sought to know if I was only there "to observe or ...?" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018); these three suspension points expressing a query about my (active) role in the center. In my fieldwork setting, I was thus faced with a tension between, on the one hand, the will to integrate into this community by participating in it and, on the other hand, to not get too involved and keep a certain autonomy.

While the first few days in the field were more like non-participant observation, I was soon led to become involved in the everyday running of the center. These *ad hoc* and personal initiatives gradually turned into an alleged availability that the agents called upon to fill gaps

in the functioning of the center. This was the case in Chamfors, Bürgistadt, and Tirossa, where a lack of staff systematically hindered their daily work. My presence therefore progressively became necessary for the internal functioning of the center, although my departure from the centers was never really complained about in terms of workload.

It often started with occasional help, such as delivering mail to residents when they came to the office to pick it up or giving a new garbage bag to those who needed it. Or when Selim, who had to leave for a while in the afternoon, asked me to answer the phone for him:

> When I get back to the center at around 2 p.m., Selim tells me that he will have to leave for a while because of a work-related appointment this afternoon. He tells me it shouldn't be too long but asks me to answer the phone just in case and to take notes if there is something important or to remember. At first, I think he says this jokingly. But I quickly realize that he is serious! He also adds, laughing, "and you can also give out the garbage bags – that you already know how to do anyway!" For about an hour, I am therefore alone in the office. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

Then my attendance days at the center began to interest the agents who relied on it to carry out this or that task, such as the fortnightly distribution of social assistance in Bürgistadt:

> The team present at the weekly colloquium discusses, at some point, the planning and organization of the week and realizes that Thursday is going to be complicated in terms of staffing. Selim is in training; Julie is at a conference and Gabriel is on holiday. Amina will therefore be alone with Cédric (a service conscript), even though it is payday. I can feel that it is going to be complicated to be just the two of them at the center. They are wondering whether they should ask someone to come. I don't really dare to offer them my help – not knowing how I can really help them. But after a while, Amina asks me what day I was thinking of coming to the center – Wednesday or Thursday? I understand that it would help her if I was there that day and offered to come on Thursday. I immediately see that it suits everyone and seems to bring Amina some relief. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

My specific location within the office has also meant that, without really being asked, I have adopted a role — here, that of "the person at the reception counter". In Chamfors, after a desk became vacant following the relocation of a computer to a new reception center, I took the opportunity to settle there. This altered my position in several ways: first, I was no longer sitting in my usual chair in the corner of the office and was therefore moving out of my role as "distant observer". Second, the desk I was now sitting at was across from the counter where the residents of the center came every day for all sorts of questions. I therefore put myself in an awkward position: I did not know whether to open the door to residents who wanted to come to the counter or to adopt a neutral stance and not intervene. This second option seemed particularly unbearable to me since I myself was then the closest person to the counter and the officers were already overloaded most of the time. One afternoon when Murat was alone in

the office, I eventually decided to help him by taking over the counter. This happened several times afterwards: I did all sorts of small tasks, such as giving out keys to the laundry room and gym, checking signatures on the attendance register and photocopying some documents. At times I was distraught by the situation — for example, when I had to translate a letter to a young couple informing them that the SEM had ruled that Switzerland was not responsible for their asylum application and that they would be sent back to Italy under the Dublin agreement (fieldnotes, autumn 2016). After that, my presence at the counter was taken for granted by the officers, who did not care much about it when I was in the office myself.

Finally, my presence in the center also made it possible to organize some external activities. In Chamfors and Tirossa, I accompanied several groups of young residents, thus coming as a reinforcement to the agent in charge of the outing. In Chamfors, seeing that an excursion was potentially going to be canceled due to a lack of staff to accompany a volunteer, I agreed to take on this role after the agents strongly encouraged me to do so.

These few examples illustrate that positionality is never static. Instead, the researcher's participation in his or her fieldwork setting navigates between different levels of involvement and detachment. In my case, my participation ranged along a continuum from observer-as-participant to participant-as-observer (R. L. Gold 1958).[71] None of these roles are fixed or acquired once and for all in a research project: I constantly alternated between these different roles according to the circumstances encountered in the setting. In my case, however, I noticed that a back and forth between these roles did not become possible over time. Indeed, as soon as I began to actively participate, the agents' expectations of my participation increased, making it difficult to return to a lower level of participation; not only because I myself was now included in the center's workforce, but also because I was afraid to tarnish the relationship I had established with those in the field. I thus felt that my degree of involvement in the field corresponded with the degrees to which reception officers viewed me as an insider to the setting of the reception center. In the same way, the more I participated, the more they certainly had the impression that I was getting closer to the role they had assigned to me from the outset: that of a trainee coming to do an observation mission.

3.5.5. Managing multiple loyalties

My first field experience with ORS challenged, or at least nuanced, the preconception with which I approached my research topic, i.e., the "monstrous" character of ORS (and by extension of the private sphere). As mentioned earlier, I initially saw ORS as a cold and inhumane entity, which, moreover, sought to make a profit from its work with asylum seekers.

[71] Gold also distinguishes two other postures at the extremities of the participation continuum — namely, the complete observer and the complete participant. However, I did not experience them in the field, as my identity was never hidden in the setting I was observing or participating in.

The month I spent in Chamfors working with ORS employees unsettled this preconception, as they revealed to me a more human and diversified dimension of the reception work. In other words, the monolithic nature of ORS was suddenly embodied in a multitude of faces, emotions, and fragilities to which I had been particularly sensitive while encountering my fieldwork. This experience then laid the foundation for my questioning as to whom I should or wanted to be loyal to.

Navigating between multiple "loyalties" (Lavanchy 2013; see also Rezzonico 2017) in the field has not always been easy. I constantly had to position myself between four distinct but closely related groups of actors: cantonal leaders, directors of organizations, reception officers, and residents. Gaining the trust of some often meant discrediting others or meeting certain expectations. Although I was very clear from the outset about my role in the field and the fact that it did not consist of an employee satisfaction survey, I nevertheless had to constantly reaffirm my role and gain the trust of my interlocutors: explaining to the agents that I was not there to assess them and pass on these observations to their superiors, or specifying to the cantonal officials and/or directors of the organizations that my objective was not to detect good or bad practices in terms of reception and therefore not to compare one canton and/or organization with another. This was subject to daily adjustments constituted in response to different audiences, demands, and contexts throughout research (Darling 2014c: 206). These ethical negotiations were aimed at maintaining the relationship of trust established with my interlocutors, while not compromising my own integrity.

It is worth mentioning that loyalty issues have arisen within the teams at the centers themselves. While this was not necessarily the case everywhere, dissensions within the reception staff meant that it was sometimes not easy for me to position myself there for fear of disappointing or losing their trust. This was particularly prevalent in Tirossa, where recurring and entrenched tensions within the staff made the internal atmosphere very tense. I had to navigate between several small groups of officers, especially during lunch breaks when they rarely mixed, trying not to offend either party.

On another level, my loyalty to the reception staff at Tirossa was suddenly and stealthily compromised when a cantonal asylum officer decided to come to the center following my request to conduct an interview with her. I then felt that I had broken the trust that I had established with the agents by having unwittingly provoked her visit within the center itself, perceived as a kind of intrusion by the reception agents. Although in the form of jokes, it is an episode that regularly came up in my daily encounters with the agents who repeatedly teased me by saying, "now that you are friends with her, you could do this or that..." (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). The arrival of external persons in the center systematically caused a certain amount of nervousness and mistrust among the officers, as if they were entering their

"private" world. As I already mentioned, my own arrival as an external researcher also required a period of adaptation on my part as well as theirs.

More broadly, I also faced a dilemma in terms of "public debt" (Fassin 2013) and for whom my research really matters. I wondered whether I should be loyal to the organizations that had given me access to my field and had agreed to be the subject of this research, to the reception officers, who are strongly affected by the repercussions of cantonal policies and organizational constraints, or to the residents of the centers who, although not the focus of my research, were directly affected by the dynamics analyzed in my thesis. In Fassin's (ibid.: 640-641) words, I felt torn between loyalty on deontological grounds, i.e., defined by daily interactions in a professional context, and loyalty on ethical grounds determined by more general concerns about a certain state of the world viewed from the perspective of social justice. Following Fassin (ibid.), who in turn draws inspiration from Becker (1967), I have resolved this dilemma by not choosing a party – for example, that of the "subordinates" as proposed by Becker – but instead by positioning myself precisely at the interface (Fresia 2007) between cantonal authorities, street-level organizations, street-level bureaucrats, and asylum seekers. This indeed made it possible to "later relate these findings to the larger picture of state interventions regarding certain populations" (Fassin 2013: 641) and to thus somehow repay a debt to the inhabitants of reception centers (officers and residents) when putting this work into words.

But my loyalty to the reception agents that I accompanied daily for several months and who introduced me to the intricacies of their work is the one that has aroused the most concern. This question became particularly acute when I was writing my thesis, not knowing how to include their perspective properly after choosing to focus my analysis at a meso level. Although it was the management of ORS, ABR, and CRS that had given me access to my field, I really felt that it was the reception officers who had truly introduced me to the daily life of asylum reception and hosted me for several months. I therefore faced a constant dilemma: whether to include a specific chapter on street-level bureaucrats to somehow honor their views and experiences, knowing that I already had a lot (perhaps too much) of material to handle and that I could have written a whole thesis about them? For very pragmatic reasons, I finally decided, with a heavy heart, not to include a chapter of analysis specifically dedicated to them. Nevertheless, I hope that I still managed to indirectly include their words, feelings, and emotions throughout this thesis.

3.6. Account of the analysis of data

The fieldnotes, together with the transcribed interviews and documents collected in the field, formed the basis of the data for this study. The analysis of these data was, for me, at first glance, a rather anxious phase. Once my fieldwork was completed, I genuinely had the

impression that I was faced with a mountain of data that I did not know by what means or by which paths to climb. Here, I outline the different steps I took to analyze and interpret my data. I was inspired by the methods proposed by grounded theory analysis (Charmaz 2000, 2006) and "thematic coding" (Flick 2009), extended with a theoretically driven reading of the emerging codes.

As emphasized by S. Beaud & Weber (2010: 203), it is misleading to think that when the data collection is finished, the analysis starts from scratch. Some of the material has indeed already been analyzed in the heat of the moment, in particular through the informal analytical notes (Charmaz 2006: 72) – commonly known as memos – taken throughout the data collection process. For my part, although these were written very spontaneously and unevenly over time, I realized afterward that between the first one dated 21 August 2016 and the last one dated 25 January 2019, I had written about a hundred of them. These memos were combined with more muddled and schematized reflections noted in several personal notebooks. The (re)reading of the memos through which I had already captured some of my ideas and crystallized certain questionings gave me indications as to the codes or categories to be mobilized within the framework of the analysis. This is very much in line with what Schatzman & Strauss (1973: 111) referred to as "key linkages" — namely, the creation of links between groups of data and the formulation of interpretative notes.

Relatedly, Bilge (2009) developed a "two-step hybrid approach" that combines inductive thematic analysis and a more deductive approach to her empirical data (see also Menet 2019; Moret 2018). I drew inspiration from this method to analyze my data. For this, I used a software program for qualitative data analysis. The first stage of data analysis was therefore inductive and based on theoretical coding. In doing so, I let the data "speak for themselves" and let codes and categories emerge from my material. I did not, however, undertake an exhaustive analysis, but rather what Flick (2009: 328) qualifies as a global analysis, i.e., a review of all the empirical and theoretical material collected to get an overview and see what topics were already emerging. This first stage of analysis thus enabled me to identify emerging codes in the data, which I then organized into different categories in a preliminary analysis grid. In this grid, different types of codes were articulated (Flick 2009: 309): *in vivo* (or emic) codes based on the expressions of my interlocutors, descriptive codes to summarize or exemplify a certain theme, but also constructed codes, i.e., elaborated on the basis of existing literature. This stage allowed me, for example, to discern the *in vivo* code of the "operational arm of the state" and in turn to analytically distinguish between the decisional and operational spheres of the state. The recurrence of the *in vivo* codes of "corporate culture" and "culture shock" made me aware of the many ways in which organizational environments resonated or came into tension with that of the cantonal administration. I was also able to trace the intricate ways in which the economic and managerial rationality fits into the nexus between humanitarianism

and bureaucracy. More broadly, I was able to contextualize the working conditions of reception agents through the lexical fields of temporality and uncertainty.

The second stage of data analysis was more deductive. I reanalyzed my interviews more finely and systematically on the basis of the procedure of a "thematic coding" (Flick 2009: 318). More precisely, based on the previously developed analysis grid, I developed a thematic structure that I applied to each interview. This then enabled me to put into perspective the practices and experiences of different groups on specific themes — for example, the way in which the three organizations studied, interpreted, and defined "reception" or the way in which the cantonal officials in Bern, Fribourg and Ticino defined the relationship with their contractual partners. Contrary to the first method, this approach thus "remains sensitive and open to the specific contents of each individual case and the social group with regard to the issue under study" (Flick 2009: 323). It is hence not a purely deductive approach either. While preserving the specificity of each of my interlocutors and/or case studies, I was thus able to observe the way in which they were, in turn, inserted and articulated in the larger process of the governing of asylum reception.

Once the material was coded with the two described methods, I started to write first drafts of chapters, still exclusively grounded on my interpretation of the material. It was only after this first step that I began to make my data interact with the theory to create a "story" from it. As Flick (2009: 323) puts it, "the analysis goes beyond [the] descriptive level when the storyline is elaborated – a concept is attached to the central phenomenon of the story and related to the other categories." In the context of this dissertation, the writing process was therefore an integral part of the analysis. This writing and rewriting helped me to bring out implicit arguments and critically examine the relationship between the codes, as well as to make connections with extant literatures. In other words, the first inductive interpretation of my data was followed by a second, more deductive reading (through writing), as I included the theoretical concepts presented in the following chapter. This multi-step, sometimes chaotic analysis that included several methods of coding, inductive and deductive logic, led to the interpretations presented in this study.

4. Studying the intermediaries of state action

> Speaking of the privatization of the state is not a play on words; it reflects the concomitant processes of diffusion of the use of private intermediaries for functions previously devolved to the state, and of the redeployment of the latter.[72] (Hibou 1998: 153, personal translation)

After a first immersion in the field of asylum reception, this chapter presents the conceptual basis for understanding the complexity of the asylum reception governance through outsourcing and contracting mechanisms, where distinct rationales, actors, organizations, and infrastructures are entangled. Thus, the backdrop to this research is one of regulation, control, and management of population movements – in this case, refugees seeking protection. This thesis is part of a body of research contributing to the understanding of everyday governance (Blundo & Le Meur 2008b), in which I participate by analyzing *intermediaries of state action*.

Based on a literature combining sociology, anthropology, political science, human geography, and public administration, I argue that intermediaries should not only be understood as individuals or groups of individuals (i.e., organizations), but also as material elements and/or rationalities of government. In this sense, I approach intermediaries as "filters" through which the state governs asylum reception. I present three ways of grasping the process of governing through a *meso* level: the infrastructures, the street-level organizations, and the rationalities and technologies of government. The analysis of these elements informs my constructivist conceptual perspective of the state, seeking to understand and articulate its different spaces and components.

As a preamble to this, I propose an ontological reflection on "the state" and the different ways of conceiving its action. Following Allen (1990: 34), I suggest that several categories, dimensions, and processes are important in understanding the state.

4.1. The state as concept, relation, and multiple character

In this section, I engage with the concept of "the state" to continue existing debates on its nature. In particular, I aim to give clearer contours of what is or might be part of "state action" in the field of asylum. I show that state action results from interrelated, shifting, and

[72] Original quotation, in French : *Parler de privatisation de l'État n'est pas jouer sur les mots ; cette expression traduit les processus concomitants de diffusion de l'usage d'intermédiaires privés pour des fonctions antérieurement dévolues à l'État, et de redéploiement de ce dernier.*

heterogeneous relations between public and private, but also global and local. My research is thus situated in a constructivist perspective. I am interested in the fabrication of social phenomena as an aggregate of complex factors combining structure and agents through constant interdependence. The social construction of reality is perceived as situated in a given socio-historical context from multiple perspectives.

4.1.1. An ontology of the state

What and where is the state? How to approach it? To what extent is the political realm – more specifically, the state – separated from the social and structural aspect of the society, but also the market? For decades, these questions have marked the social and political sciences literature on the nature and the functioning of "the state". While it is often portrayed as a rationalized and autonomous institution clearly bounded by state-centric theories (e.g., P. B. Evans et al. 1985), anthropologists and geographers propose a disaggregated perception of the state and its power. Scholars like Bierschenk (2010), Hansen & Stepputat (2005), Jessop (2001), T. Mitchell (1991), Sharma & Gupta (2006), and Trouillot (2001) have critically interrogated the assumption that "the state" is an *a priori* conceptual or empirical object, demonstrating its constructed, fluid, multidimensional, deterritorialized, and pluricentric character.

This literature reveals that the transformations affecting the state and the exercise of its power are numerous and complex. Whether horizontal, for example, through the evolution of spaces and levels of control, or vertical, through the association with various actors, these changes demonstrate an evolution of the state paradigm and the reconfiguration of the principle of state sovereignty. In a Foucauldian reading of statecraft, power is thus understood as ubiquitous, variable, and diffuse, and not only in the hands of an all-powerful state:

> […] the state is not a universal nor in itself an autonomous source of power. The state is nothing else but the effect, the profile, the mobile shape of a perpetual statification (*étatisation*) or statifications, […]. The state is nothing else but the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities. (Foucault 2004b: 79)

As developed in the next section, the concept of governmentality proposed by Foucault is indeed a means of making sense analytically of the many elements of the exercise of power.

Consequently, I approach the state through its fragmented and dispersed nature. It is not just a unified and centralized political organization governing a given territory and its population, or a "political association" as Weber maintains, or a "sovereign force" as Durkheim proposes. Rather, following Fassin et al. (2015), I contend that the state is a concrete and situated reality, yet fragile and provisional, which is simultaneously embodied in the individuals and inscribed in a temporality.

This dissertation seeks to understand how the state comes into being by bringing together various aspects of its construction. For this purpose, I mobilize Gill's (2019: 107) assertion that "the state has a multiple character that is at once ideational and very real". This conception of the state actually originates from Abrams (1988) who makes a distinction between its material manifestations ("state-system") and its ideological reifications ("state-idea"):

> There *is* a state-system […]; a palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centered in government and more or less extensive, unified and dominant in any given society. And its sources, structure and variations can be examined in fairly straightforward empirical ways. There *is,* too, a state-idea, projected, purveyed and variously believed in different societies at different times. And its modes, effects and variations are also susceptible to research. It is the multiplicity of the character of the state itself that calls forth multiple critical activist responses: some deconstructive, some oppositional, some reconciliatory, some progressive. (Abrams 1988: 82)

Different understandings of the nature of both the state-system and the state-idea emerge from the literature. In particular, Jasanoff (2004: 3) mentions the existence of three "ontological states": organizational, material, and embodied. These different facets or characteristics of the state refine my understanding of its nature and functioning. More specifically, they provide a conceptual frame to grasp the different dimensions and incarnations of state action in the asylum reception field.

The *organizational state* is often studied in terms of the formation, structure, and functions that it adopts to account, for example, for its historical success as a dominant structure (Weber 2013 (1978)) or to interpret the meanings and ideological contents of its structuration (Olsen & March 1989). Much of this research is indeed historical and generates insights into both the historical and contemporary effects of particular types of political institutions and structural arrangements. Along these lines, Weber (1919) defined the modern state as a homogeneous institution with managerial and regulatory autonomy resulting from three joint processes of monopolization, bureaucratization, and legitimization (see below).

The second *materializes* – now exceptional (De Genova 2013), now unremarkable and unglamorous (Darling 2019) – in different forms, including documents, infrastructures, and the organization of space (Cabot 2012; Chalfin 2010; Das & Poole 2004; Ferguson & Gupta 2002; Hull 2012). Focusing on its bureaucratic production, scholars show that the state materializes through the letters asylum seekers receive in reception centers (Darling 2014a) or the spatiotemporal trajectories of asylum case files (Poertner 2017; see also Gill 2009). Other scholars have drawn attention to state violence, sometimes hidden beyond layers of bureaucratic artifacts (Graeber 2015) or paperwork performances (Borrelli & Lindberg 2019; Pfirter 2019), at times, spectacularly exposed through surveillance and militarized infrastructures, for instance Andersson (2014) and Van Reekum (2016).

Finally, the *embodied state* can relate to two different ways of conceiving and approaching the state. On the one hand, in the everyday work of street-level individuals and organizations (Brodkin 1990; Brodkin & Marston 2013; Crozier & Friedberg 1977; Lipsky 2010). A vast literature deals with the everyday practices of a variety of actors – be they civil servants, tribunals, private companies, security agents, NGOs or interest groups – that participate in the dynamic and contradictory nature of state formation processes (e.g., Achermann 2008, 2018; Affolter 2017; Alpes & Spire 2014; Eule et al. 2019a; Fassin et al. 2015; Miaz 2017b; Rosset 2019a). The state is thus what its agents and agencies do under the multiple influences of the policies they implement.

On the other hand, the state is also embodied within the members of society, e.g., through the "metaphysical effect" it produces to become recognized as a structure, as argued by T. Mitchell (1991). This is what Bourdieu (1993) refers to as *la pensée* or *les esprits d'État*, i.e., categories of thought produced by the state and inculcated in everyone. Following Scott (1999: 311), the state is, in this sense, composed of practical knowledge (*mētis*), i.e., "forms of knowledge embedded in local experiences", such as street-level perspectives which differ from "the more general abstract knowledge deployed by the state and its technical agencies".

As Rosset (2019a: 36), it is important to note that the different ontological states are not distinct from each other. Instead, they exist in parallel and are intertwined. They are an analytical distinction to shed light on different aspects of the same object and are necessarily related to each other. In this dissertation, the state appears in the three ontological manifestations: a political structure which holds institutionalized power over persons seeking asylum in Switzerland; reception centers, but also paperwork and bureaucratic artifacts through which state action and, more particularly, government rationalities are embodied; and the everyday practices of contracted organizations, and field workers, responsible for the implementation of reception policy.

4.1.2. Governing

In this dissertation, I take a specific approach to the governing of asylum reception by, on the one hand, considering the everyday, mundane, and routine practices. On the other hand, I consider the rationalities and technologies of government, through which individuals are managed and regulated. By doing so, I trace the ways in which the entanglement of these elements comes to manifest and thus perform programs of government.

On this basis, my conceptual approach situates the process of governing in a heterogeneous and multiple set of practices and relations, which I grasp by a Foucauldian notion of governmentality. The main strength of a governmental approach is that it provides a means of analytically linking elements of the exercise of power, which may appear to be disconnected,

and of capturing their rationalities and combined effects. This approach thus provides a conceptual framework for a decentralized perception of power and the state.

Governmentality, in its most general meaning, deals with how to think about governing with different "mentalities of government" (Miller & Rose 1990), i.e., any way of reasoning, calculating, and responding to a problem in activities of government. Thus, governmentality is a flexible category that encompasses:

> Different styles of thought, their conditions of formation, the principles and knowledges that they borrow from and generate, the practices that they consist of, how they are carried out, their contestations and alliances with other arts of governing. (Rose et al. 2006: 84)

Yet the idea of mentalities of government is not an account of a collective consciousness or way of thinking. Instead, as specified by Dean (1999: 25), it emphasizes both "the way in which the thinking involved in practices of government is explicit and embedded in language and other technical instruments but is also relatively taken for granted, […]." This is in line with the distinction between the state-system and the state-idea discussed above.

This dissertation is, however, not a study of governmentality. Rather, by incorporating the element of an "analytics of government" (Dean 1999: 30-31), I consider the ways in which the governing of asylum reception draws upon and performs particular rationalities and technologies of power.

I believe a governmental approach highlights four theoretical issues, which all revolve around the question of power, i.e., "actions on others' actions" (Foucault 1982): Power acts through different forms and vectors; the exercise of power is practical and technical; power pursues specific rationalities and operates toward certain ends; power is exercised over a multiplicity of objects. These four elements underlie the governing of asylum reception and will be considered in its analysis.

First, power is not the exercise of one person or group, but the result of various forms of power. This implies two points: On the one hand, that the nature of the state is the result of a change in practices of government and not the other way around (Gordon 1991: 4). On the other hand, that relations of power – and hence the analysis that must be made of them – extend beyond the limits of the state and depend upon a complex set of relations between state and non-state authorities (Rose 1999: 15). In this sense, it is the scattered practices of actors from different spheres, in different sites, and with different objectives, that contribute to the formation of the state.

Second, in the words of Foucault (1984, 1988), the exercise of power is technical as it attaches itself to a technology for its realization. Instead of focusing on abstract principles of rule, the notion of technologies suggested by Foucault draws attention to the specific procedures,

mechanisms, and tactics involved in and materializing government practices. Following Miller & Rose (2008: 32), a technology of government is:

> The actual mechanisms through which authorities of various sorts have sought to shape, normalize and instrumentalize the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others to achieve the objectives they consider desirable. […] apparently humble and mundane mechanisms which appear to make it possible to govern: techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and assessment; the invention of devices such as surveys and presentational forms such as tables; the standardization of systems for training and the inculcation of habits; the inauguration of professional specialisms and vocabularies; building design and architectural forms – the list is heterogeneous and is, in principle, unlimited.

More specifically, technologies of government can be distinguished into technologies to govern others, i.e., to discipline individual bodies or population processes and "technologies of the self" (Lemke 2007: 49). Thus, technologies not only refer to material devices but also encompasses symbolic devices (ibid.: 50).

Third, I view power as operating in terms of specific logics and direct toward certain ends. The exercise of power responds, on the one hand, to *problematization*, i.e., the emergence of a problem around a set of previously unquestioned and unproblematic activities of government (Foucault 2001: 74). Power is therefore directed toward the resolution of a specific issue. In this sense, such an approach directs us to examine the different contexts in which governing is called into question. These moments or situations may occur at particular locales or within specific institutions or organizations (Dean 1999: 38). At the same time, the resolution of a problem is organized on the basis of different rationalities as specific ways of thinking and reasoning. These may change over time, although the problem to be solved remains the same. The exercise of power does not therefore concern a central rationality. Rather, rationalities are multiple, sometimes contradictory and resisted in practice.

Finally, power has the population as its main target. Yet, this power is exercised over a multiplicity of objects. Through its different declinations, it can either target the subjects of the state within a definite territory, a homogeneous group or population within that territory, and the bodies of individuals. As Foucault (2004c: 13) schematically describes it, "sovereignty is exercised within the borders of a territory, discipline is exercised on the bodies of individuals, and security [biopower] is exercised over a whole population". Each of these forms of power has a specific effect. While discipline is individualizing – or "a mode of individualization of multiplicities" (ibid.: 14) – biopower is massifying.

In challenging a centralized image of the state, the preceding points reinforce the assertion already made previously that the variegated components of the exercise of power should be analyzed as constructed, assembled, contested, and transformed from multiple and

heterogeneous elements. More concretely, the analytical concept that I believe best captures the "messy", "polymorphous", and "polycontextual" nature of the state (Jessop 2016: 16; see also Gill 2016: 38) is that of apparatus (*dispositif*), namely:

> A thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. (Foucault 1977: 194)

Indeed, as argued by Walters (2015), this concept looks for unexpected, paradoxical, and perhaps unstable assemblages of actors, rationalities, and techniques, as well as movements of tension or fracture.

4.1.3. The apparatus: a reading key

By drawing on the considerations discussed in the previous section and by operationalizing the concept of apparatus in the form of an analytical grid, I present in what follows an analytical tool that allows me to grasp the subtleties, embodiments, and tensions that characterize state action in the field of asylum. The concept of apparatus thus allows me to disentangle the heterogeneous elements that constitute the governance of asylum while assembling them under the same conceptual umbrella.

To construct this analytical grid, I asked myself the following general questions: Who or what are the objects of government? Why are they governed? How and by what means are they governed? What are the functions and effects of these modes of government? Without being exhaustive, these questions allowed me to identify various characteristics of state action. The network assembling them forms the apparatus itself. In this sense, this analytical grid can be applied to any governmental issue.

In what follows, I present the general contours of an apparatus. To better grasp its characteristics and for illustrative purposes, parallels are drawn with the issue of asylum. However, I deliberately do not go into detail, as these will be amply detailed and elaborated upon in Chapters 5 to 9 dealing with the *apparatus of asylum reception*, which I also refer to as the *apparatus of bodies management* to designate the networked arrangements in which asylum reception becomes governed. This apparatus is itself a sub-component of the governance of asylum, which is composed of the apparatus of flow management, of case management, of bodies management, and of subject management (C. Alberti et al. 2018).

Plurality • Broadly speaking, an apparatus entails the attempt to govern, with some degree of deliberation, a population according to sets of norms and for a variety of ends. As highlighted previously, governing is, in this sense, an undertaking conducted in the plural (Dean 1999: 18).

It is concerned with a plurality of governing authorities or agencies, of (moral) figures to be governed and how they are conceived, of forms of knowledge, techniques and other means employed, of norms and values invoked, of goals and ends to be achieved, and of specific effects and consequences.

Rationalities • More specifically, the formation and transformation of strategies and technologies for governing exist in the form of a variety of rationalities, i.e., "different ways of thinking in a fairly systematic manner, of making calculations, of defining purposes and employing knowledge" (Dean 1999: 19). Indeed, as Feldman (2012: 16) argues, a key device that pulls the scattered elements of an apparatus together is rationales of governance, which succeed because of their "simplicity", "plasticity" and "abstract, generic, and highly rationalized quality that allows for their easy application to new social 'problems'." Rationalities inform practices of governing asylum "to make things work" (Garland 1997: 184).

Technologies of government • As mentioned above, the apparatus also has a technical or technological dimension. This implies that it attempts to achieve its goals through specific assemblages, techniques, procedures, instruments, and mechanisms. These may be assemblages of various actors, for example, from different spheres or institutions. Infrastructures, in the material and spatio-temporal sense of the term, are also the means through which an apparatus operates. The creation of procedure, accommodation or detention centers is, for example, a means of bringing individuals together in the same place, thus facilitating their management by speeding up the processing of their asylum application, facilitating their daily care, or controlling their presence. An apparatus also acts through instruments with a dedicated purpose, such as, for example, the assessment of credibility or the restriction of the freedom of movement.

In particular, Hibou (2015) shows that managerial and humanitarian rationales both generate "bureaucratic abstractions" that allow their users to deploy them as an obvious and comfortable solution, thus facilitating the governing of everyday life. This applies notably in asylum, where refugees are governed through the deployment of a whole battery of laws, criteria, norms, and procedures (Fresia 2012), and thus a gradual standardization of treatment in assessing files (Miaz 2017b). It also concerns the management of their everyday lives in reception centers, as shown in this dissertation, as well as through "protocols of compassion" (Fassin 2010), such as medical certificates (Fassin & d'Halluin 2007), and the mobilization of techniques for seeking out the truth of the facts (Rosset 2019a).

Moral economies • The rational attempt to shape conduct also implies *moral* and *legitimacy* questions (Fassin et al. 2015; Gill 2016). Indeed, as Dean (1999: 19) puts it, governing is moral because it presumes to know, with varying degrees of explicitness and using specific forms of knowledge, what constitutes a good society, good welfare or justice, and the appropriate

conduct of individuals and collectives. However, as emphasized by Feldman (2012: 16), "the effect is not to create a moral world but to shut out alternative moral positions". Hence, following Eckert (2020b), one can approach legitimacy of government by disentangling the *ethics* associated with the state's substantive goal of fostering a "commonweal"[73] from the *ethos* that underlies and legitimizes its action.

Ethics • Ethics concerns, for instance, the values and norms associated with the substantive goals an apparatus is geared toward (ibid.: 12). More specifically, the ways in which different authorities perceive and define the idea of "the good" — for example, in terms of system survival, economic efficiency or individual rights. Representation of the public good or good order may, however, reflect contradictory imperatives; for example, the affirmation of sovereignty and the nation-state, which clashes with humanitarian considerations, human rights regimes, or the ideals of liberal democracies. Such concurrent imperatives produce institutional contradictions, or "ambiguities" (Fassin 2010: 223), the resolution of which demands their differential prioritization. Such prioritizations are also embedded in historical legacies and their contemporary legitimatory functions (Eckert 2020b: 17-18). For example, as Fassin (2010: 414) demonstrates in his analysis of contemporary politics, the transition from a humanitarian to a security rationale in the 2000s does not mean that the former has faded away in governing, but indicates that the latter has become predominant, especially when the two compete in interpreting situations and choosing appropriate responses. Ethics thus reflect the goals and projects attributed to "the state" at a historical moment; it is specific to a time and place.

Ethos • Furthermore, an apparatus is characterized by a set of values that underpin everyday practices (Eckert 2020b: 11), such as efficiency, cost-effectivity, "human manner", but also accountability, depersonalization or obedience. Ethos thus describes the assemblage of procedural behaviors deemed proper for fulfilling the purposes that an apparatus is concerned with (Affolter 2020: 30). It may, for instance, guide the actions of street-level workers, whose personal ethical considerations may be eschewed by the values imposed by another, conflicting professional ethos. In the same way, ethos can also conflict with ethics, in particular when shifts in fashion affect proper procedures (such as the introduction of new public management techniques). Alternatively, ethos may also concern asylum seekers who are constituted as individuals engaged in self-government, capable of monitoring and regulating various aspects of their own conduct despite the rather inhibiting situation they are in. Governing is thus intensely moral in that it seeks to engage with how both the "governed"

[73] Eckert (2020b: 9) merges the terms "commonwealth" and "common good" to signal a confluence between a vision of community and the goods that a community shares in.

and "governors" regulate themselves (Dean 1999: 19-20). It entails an attempt to affect and shape in some way who and what individuals and collectives are and should be.

Moral figures • In particular, an apparatus targets specific *moral figures*. The asylum seeker may, for example, be regarded as a vulnerable person requiring special attention, or in other words as a passive object of medical and humanitarian care, but also as a profiteering or manipulative individual whose "deservingness" has yet to be assessed (Feldman 2012: 11-12).

Finalities and regimes of practices • Consequently, the apparatus is the entanglement of more or less organized, sometimes contradictory practices, at a given time and place, geared toward specific aims or finalities. In Foucault's (1991 (1981): 75) account, it is composed of a large, but finite, number of intermeshing regimes of practices. These are, for example, regimes of practices of filtering and deterring, of controlling, of sorting and classifying, of calculation and accounting, of healing and caring, of disciplining, of punishing, and so on. Yet, Dean (1999: 31) shows that such regimes are never identical within a particular institution or even system. Within the governing of asylum, the regime of sorting may indeed find a central institutional support in the apparatus of case management. However, how legal cases are processed also affects what happens in reception or detention centers, i.e., in the apparatus of bodies management. In addition, regimes of practices do not evolve separately. There are borrowings across these regimes themselves, and there are forms of cooperation, overlap, and contestation between them (Dean 1999: 31). One regime may also invade another, e.g., the way in which the regime of calculation appears to be increasingly used in the everyday practices of supporting asylum seekers (Darling 2016a, 2016b) or in the processing of asylum cases (Miaz 2019; Poertner 2017).

Effects • Finally, the analysis of an apparatus also involves asking what happens when governing. In other words, it is examining the effects of historically constituted assemblages of actors, practices, infrastructures, values, norms, techniques, and technologies.

The interface: an analytical and terminological *intermezzo*

In the previous section, I have outlined a conceptual framework to grasp the process of governing asylum reception. By arguing for a decentralized, fragmented, and dispersed understanding of governing, my conceptual approach thus avoids common starting points, such as the state, the non-state, the public, the private, or bureaucracy. Nevertheless, the challenge is to be able to study these categories in an inductive way to bring out their characteristics and functions, as well as the resulting issues, without presupposing them.

Such a conception of the state shows that the process of governing and the exercise of power, far from being the prerogative of a single and homogeneous institutional entity, is plural. It not only has multiple institutional faces, but also materializes through a multiplicity of places,

spaces, and infrastructures. Moreover, it does not follow a single and coherent logic: It operates through the entanglement of manifold, often contradictory rationalities. The network that assembles these scattered elements forms the apparatus: the conceptual reading grid at the heart of this thesis.

However, my conceptual contribution does not stop there. It would indeed be a simplified approach to limit the analysis of the governing of asylum reception to one or other of the characteristics of the apparatus, or, on the contrary, to emphasize only the diversity that makes it up. To really grasp the complexity of the outsourcing of reception services, and more particularly, its implications and effects, but also its subtleties and particularities, I propose focusing on the *intermediaries* of state action. This *meso* perspective allows, in my opinion, for two major contributions: On the one hand, it contributes to the theoretical literature on state action by broadening the micro- and macroscale perspectives that have hitherto been predominant in the study of "the state". On the other hand, it contributes to the thematic literature on asylum reception and, more broadly, on the regulation of migration by revealing the governmental rationalities and lived power effects of outsourcing.

Before presenting three ways of grasping the intermediaries of state action, however, some terminological and analytical clarification is necessary.

In the literature, an *intermediary* is generally understood as a person or an organization (middleman) that serves as a link, that is at the interface between two parties. The role of intermediaries has notably been studied by Ambrosini (2017) in the context of irregular migration.

The notion of intermediary implies a dimension of *(inter)mediation*, i.e., the action in mediating between parties (Brodkin 2013, 2020), or alternatively a personal or material intervention in a process or relationship. For Ambrosini (2017: 14), intermediation involves several types of practices on different institutional and legal grounds, ranging from providing services or help to exerting, in some cases, political pressure in favor of irregular migrants. Following Gill (2016: 33) referring to Bauman (1989), mediation also refers to the degree to which one's own actions are separated from their final consequences by either middlemen or technologies.

In this work, while I am also interested in organizations at the interface between public authorities and migrants, I extend beyond the definition proposed by Ambrosini. Drawing inspiration from Hibou (2015), I propose to understand the *intermediaries of state action* as the actors, but also the instruments, infrastructures, and rationalities through which public authorities govern and manage a specific issue – in this case, the reception of asylum seekers. I therefore see intermediaries as filters that stand between the public authorities and the beneficiaries of the reception policy. I use the term *private intermediaries* to designate actors, instruments, and rationalities from the private sphere.

More specifically, the articulation of intermediaries forms what I call an *interface of distance*, both a common boundary and an area of exchange between two parties. This interface acts as a porous mirror that reflects their respective practices with regard to the formalities that navigate between these two poles. In this dissertation, the interface of distance is part of the manufacturing of asylum reception in binding and distancing both public authorities and the ground, i.e., street-level workers and the actual practices of reception. This concept provides the conceptual backdrop for the analytical part of this thesis and serves as a key to understanding different facets of asylum reception.

Two points can be made here. First, on an epistemological level, the analysis of interfaces, i.e., encounters of spaces governed by different norms and institutions, allows the complexity of the process of governing to be grasped. Following Fresia (2007), it is indeed a tool that enables the different perspectives that are necessary to understand complex human phenomena to be included. It is a means of linking different levels of analysis (or "spaces"), such as structural, organizational, infrastructural, and individual dimensions. As an example, De Coulon (2019) analyzes, on this basis, the interface "in tension" between the Swiss authorities and rejected asylum seekers living under the emergency aid system to show how the plural subjectivities that meet there are intertwined. In this dissertation, by reading the governing of asylum reception through the interface, I also go beyond a purely individualizing understanding or, conversely, one that focuses solely on structure, to articulate a plurality of spaces in the analysis of asylum reception.

Second, an interface posture also allows one to approach the character and nature of the state cautiously. In my view, the conceptual consideration of the interface does indeed highlight the different spaces of the state, or rather the spaces that draw the contours of the state. In particular, I posit that the interface connects — and at the same time distances — the decision-making and operational spaces of the state. As mentioned above, this posture thus allows state action to be thought about not only in terms of pre-established statuses or categories of actors, but rather in terms of functions. Moreover, it shows that the implementation of public policies, i.e., public policies as they are carried out in the field through multiple practices and interactions, is a central site for negotiating changes that affect state action (Brodkin 2020; Hamidi & Paquet 2019). It is therefore at the very heart of the interface that several fields of tension crystallize, between different levels of government, between collective and individual actors from different backgrounds, but above all, in terms of instruments and logics of action. It is at the interface between the decision-making and operational spaces of the state that the transformations of state action become visible.

The characteristics, functions and effects of this interface are at the core of the analytical chapters of this thesis. For this purpose, I detail in what follows three theoretical notions and perspectives, namely infrastructures, street-level organizations, and neoliberalism (as a

rationality and technology of government). All three are regarded as intermediaries through which asylum reception is governed. The status of the next chapters, however, is not (yet) to offer an empirical analysis of these three perspectives. Rather, they aim to lay the conceptual foundations that will serve as a backdrop for the analytical chapters of this work.

4.2. An infrastructural perspective

The reception center constitutes the material interface at which the cantonal authorities, the implementing organizations, and the beneficiaries of the reception policy meet. It is also the interface at which the international migration space, the international humanitarian space, the national and cantonal legal space, and the national and local historical space come into tension. The reception center is therefore the place where different norms, sets of rules and subjectivities converge and collide. It embodies, on the one hand, the rationalities of the reception policy as defined by the public authorities. On the other hand, it reflects what street-level actors make of these rationalities through their everyday and discretionary practices. An infrastructural perspective is therefore important to grasp the material and spatio-temporal context in which the governing of asylum reception takes place. This section presents the conceptual outlines of this perspective.

4.2.1. Situating reception in space and time

Today, infrastructure is a widely used term in the social sciences. In recent years, many researchers have used this perspective to analyze the migration phenomenon, such as the migration movements of low-skilled workers from China to Indonesia (Xiang & Lindquist 2014), the mechanisms and spaces of immigration detention and deportation (Gill 2009; Hiemstra 2013; Walters 2016, 2017), or the spaces of "urban arrival" in which newcomers enter and evolve on a territory (Meeus et al. 2019; Schrooten & Meeus 2019). These "migration", "deportation", and "arrival" infrastructures are seen as an interlacing of material and organizational elements: "the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions and actors that facilitate and condition mobility" (Xiang & Lindquist 2014: 122).

In view of these definitions, one could then ask oneself what is the difference between the concepts of apparatus, or regime, and that of infrastructure? Some conceptual precision is, therefore, necessary.

First, as highlighted by Walters (2017: 3-4), the emergence of an infrastructural perspective in migration studies is largely due to the desire to include the "built networks" in the analysis of mobilities and circulations. Clustered around the theme of infrastructure, a range of studies explore themes of topology (Collier 2009), (chaotic) geographies (Hiemstra 2013), corridors, zones, and logistics (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013; Neilson 2012), aircraft (Walters 2017), and

railways (Blue 2015), and show that the (coerced) movements of people would not be possible in the absence of built infrastructures. The definition proposed by Larkin in a survey of anthropologies of infrastructure is, in this sense, relevant and illuminating:

> Infrastructures are the built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space. As physical forms, they shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movements, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown. They comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergirding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life. (Larkin 2013: 328)

In line with this definition, I use an infrastructural perspective to approach asylum reception in its material dimension, i.e., the buildings, rooms and apartments, furniture, paperwork, documents and files, and other material moorings that configure and enable the housing and gathering of persons awaiting a response to their refugee claim. Following Xiang & Lindquist (2014) and Walters (2017), the analysis of the infrastructure of reception also lays the basis to explore the way in which street-level actors interact with, use and negotiate these built structures on the ground.

Second, as argued by Walters (2017: 7), "built infrastructures do not simply sit within space but actively *produce* time-space through their ability to channel, speed, and connect (and disconnect) places and persons". Such a perspective therefore also makes it possible to grasp the spatio-temporal dimension of asylum reception. This means, on the one hand, that infrastructure is not simply "out there". It is not composed by fixed, unchanging structures, but by evolving spaces, which can materialize in different forms. On the other hand, asylum reception is also a spatial experience that may encourage or discourage certain kinds of activities. The furniture layout, for example, may indeed dictate the nature of the spatial interactions. Further, reception centers as material artifacts not only shape experiences of temporariness but are also themselves shaped by particular conceptions of temporariness (Oesch 2019: 232). The materiality of reception facilities is thus always evolving within the horizon of temporariness, just as the meaning attributed to infrastructure might evolve.

Finally, in line with Xiang & Lindquist (2014), the notion of infrastructure opens up "spaces of mediation" to analysis, that is, specific dimensions which indicate distinct "logics of operation" (e.g., commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian, and social). It is therefore their deep entanglement that is the key to understanding infrastructure. The infrastructure itself generates insight into the wider system of power in which it operates. Through its material and spatio-temporal dimension, the infrastructure of reception is also the expression of the rationalities that underpin asylum governance in Switzerland. It is more than a mere instrument of states; it actively shapes asylum reception.

4.2.2. Reception centers as sites of inclusive exclusions and transgression

Previous research in the field of forced migration has established the centrality of space and temporality for understanding geographies of asylum (e.g., Coutin 2010; Gill 2016; Hiemstra & Conlon 2017; Kobelinsky 2014; Mountz 2010). As argued by Zill et al. (2018: 4-5), asylum accommodation is indeed one among many spatial tactics of control and containment. It illustrates the physical space of administrative and political acts of power. Yet, asylum accommodation is also described as a "porous institution", a "half-open camp" (Pieper 2008: 351; Kreichauf 2018), or as spaces of legal "openness" where individuals can "leave at will or within reasonable confines" (Guild 2005: 3), thus challenging the image of reception centers as completely closed. By drawing on the literature dealing with the "encampment" of refugee accommodation (e.g., Agier & Lecadet 2014; Campesi 2015; Darling 2009; Fresia & Von Känel 2015; Kreichauf 2018; Oesch 2017, 2019; Szczepanikova 2013), this section conceptualizes the underlying processes that constitute and generate the socio-spatial arrangements of asylum reception.

Box 4.1 Reception centers?

While after the Second World War, the term *refugee camp* was widely used, today we regularly refer to (reception and accommodation) *centers*, (asylum) *shelters*, and *homes* (Kreichauf 2018: 2). In the literature on the institutionalized collective reception of refugees in Europe, scholars refer to "European accommodation centers for asylum seekers" (Szczepanikova 2013), "asylum seekers hospitality center" (Altin & Minca 2016), "refugee processing center" (M. Gold 2019), "reception centers for asylum seekers" (Campesi 2015) or "asylum centers" (Morville & Erlandsson 2013). The term "refugee camp" is now mostly used to refer to three types of accommodations: camps in the global South; informal encampments for transiting refugees; and hotspots, as well as detention and transit centers in border areas (Kreichauf 2018: 2).

In Switzerland, the official terms are "federal asylum centers" (*centres fédéraux pour requérants d'asile, CFA*) and "cantonal accommodation reception structures" or "cantonal reception structures" (*structures cantonales d'hébergement ou d'accueil*). In this thesis, I use "reception" or "accommodation centers" to refer to collective accommodation structures for people in the field of asylum. By deliberately using a broad term, I leave room for a more detailed analysis based on the everyday discourses and practices of the actors in charge of implementing the reception policy. The term "reception center" remains relevant in the Swiss context in view of the legal vagueness left in the definition of reception, on the one hand, and the clear desire to place and house people in procedure in common areas to facilitate their supervision and (minimal) care, on the other hand. I also choose to speak of asylum centers and not of refugee centers to express the ambivalent status of these places and the people who live there; places in which *asylum seekers* or *asylum applicants* live waiting to know whether they can stay in Switzerland or not, and who, in the eyes of the federal authorities, do not

yet deserve recognized refugee status. This choice of terminology also reflects the political doubt as to the "real" motivations of these "candidates" (Bolzman 2012: 28; see also Parini & Gianni 2005; Riaño & Wastl-Walter 2006: 11).

In the literature, applying Bourdieu (1991) or Lefebvre (1991), the refugee camp is often analyzed as a space to explain its structures, its socio-spatial nature, and representations of existing power structures. Augé's (1995) theory of "non-places", Goffman's (1961) total institutions, and Foucault's heterotopias (2004a) and biopolitics (2004b) are also applied to conceptualize mass accommodation.

The concept of the refugee camp was also conceptualized in relation to camps in African countries and the Middle East, in particular by Agier (2008), Malkki (1995), Oesch (2017) and Turner (2016). In this literature, the camp is usually positioned between "formality and informality, mobility and immobility, permanence and impermanence" (Grbac 2013: 3), as well as exception and norm (Malkki 2002).

These extremes can be contextualized by applying two major theoretical angles. The idea in presenting these two approaches is not to choose one or favor the other. Rather, through their respective contributions, i.e., the reception center as a space of exception and power on the one hand, and as a space of multiplicity and as a laboratory of citizenship-making on the other, I lay the conceptual foundations that will serve as a backdrop for my analysis of the roles and functions of the reception infrastructure.

First, in an Agambenian and Foucauldian view, the camp is perceived as a space of exception and biopolitics, of surveillance, control, and discipline. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1997 (1995), 2003) sees the camp as the paradigmatic expression of the sovereign power, defined as the capacity to proclaim the exception, to banish and to exclude certain individuals from any meaningful social existence. By doing so, he captures the contradictions of sovereign power and paradoxical zones that he renders at once internal and external to sovereign power:

> The sovereign exception is the fundamental localization, which does not limit itself to distinguishing what is inside from what is outside but instead traces a threshold (state of exception) between the two, on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible. (Agamben 1998: 19)

Accordingly, Agamben conceives the camp as a permanent "state of exception"; a site of inclusive exclusion in which, on behalf of a declared state of emergency, individuals are submitted to a separate regime of power that suspends ordinary law for an indefinite time, deprives them of their rights as citizens and casts them as pure biological life. Reduced to "bare

life", asylum seekers find themselves "'before the law'… [a position which] entails a paradox: even though they are *outside it*, they are supposedly *subject to* its power" (Zylinska 2004: 530, original emphasis). Thus, the camp represents the point at which the exception becomes a spatialized rule: It is located outside the recourse to law, but not outside its application and imposition (Darling 2009: 651-652).

Despite the reservations expressed by several researchers about Agamben's theorization (e.g., K. Mitchell 2006; Mountz 2011), his conceptual work proves helpful in understanding the temporalities and spaces discussed in this dissertation. In reception centers, residents are simultaneously internal and external to sovereign territory, both included and excluded, neither fully in nor out. Spaces of exception thus tell us something about where and how sovereign power orders territory and people.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the camp is the materialization of mechanisms and tactics of power focused on life. Camps are conceived as spaces that are put into place to control, contain and discipline a population perceived as disturbing "the national order of things" (Malkki 1995), namely, an order(ing) of things in which the displacement of people is perceived as an exception to the sedentary view of the world. Two key concepts developed by Foucault, individual discipline and biopolitics to govern populations, are relevant to deconstruct asylum reception in the context of bodily control and conditioning. Indeed, housing policies and routine practices within asylum centers exemplify the overlapping and sometimes convergent relations between mechanisms of discipline and biopower. The policy of asylum reception highlights the tension between asylum seekers as a homogeneous group to be controlled and the asylum seeker as an individual who should be (self-)disciplined.

Second, other scholars, such as Fresia & Von Känel (2015), Ramadan (2013) and Sigona (2015), propose to go beyond the camp as a space of exception and a device of power. They follow the approach of studying camps (also) as striking but ordinary sites of life. By doing so, they invite us to look at camp institutions in their articulation with other global concerns than the mere control of human mobility:

> To capture not only what refugees are excluded from, but also what they are included into and thus to inquire into the multiple logics of governance that characterize the camp – apprehended here as a bureaucratic device of intervention. (Fresia & Von Känel 2015: 251)

Here, the camp not only appears as governed by a single rationality, e.g., either a logic of control or a humanitarian one. Rather, it appears as a polyhierarchical administrative structure (Inhetveen 2014), within which coexist various stakeholders and rationalities, as well as manifold regimes of law and sets of rules (Fresia & Von Känel 2015: 251). In this sense, by the overlapping of these multiple authorities, the reception center simultaneously functions as a

tool for confinement and exclusion from the political community of citizens, and as "a laboratory of citizenship-making" (ibid.).

These scholars also call for not only perceiving the camp as a device of power based on the logic of subsistence, but also for taking into account the capacity of refugees themselves to challenge or transcend the apparatus of reception through multiple appropriations of the camp space (Agier 2008; Hyndman 2000). In an attempt to revisit Agamben's ideas, Mountz (2011), for example, suggests conceptualizing the intimacies and everyday dimensions of exclusion by engaging transnational feminist scholarship. Sigona (2015), for his part, proposes to reimagine the camp as a social and political space to complexify the analysis of the social relations in and around the camps as well as resident's everyday practices and experiences of political membership. The camp is therefore also depicted in terms of refugees' capacity to contest and transform it. More than just a space of exception and power, it is also a space of transgression.

Intermediate conclusion

The main conceptual contributions of an infrastructural perspective are threefold. Such a perspective allows me, on the one hand, to capture the topological dimension of asylum reception, that is, its spatial, territorial, and material moorings, as well as its temporal dimension. It provides the conceptual tool to examine the roles of architecture and the built environment in the context of asylum accommodation.

On the other hand, this perspective allows me to emphasize the relations between infrastructure and state action by approaching "infrastructuring as a political process" (Schrooten & Meeus 2019: 5). The approach emphasized by Fresia & Von Känel (2015) seems in this respect particularly relevant. By understanding reception centers as "bureaucratic devices of intervention", it is about analyzing how the infrastructure of reception is part of and (re)produce the rationalities of a broader political strategy, namely the governing of individuals seeking asylum. These do not only concern the control and surveillance of these individuals, but also their well-being or education.

Finally, I argue that an infrastructural perspective is fully connected and complementary with a street-level approach. In particular, the articulation of these two perspectives provides an opportunity to question the appearance of what Dalakoglou (2016) calls "infrastructural gaps", namely the increasing fragmentation of service provisioning resulting from the privatization of asylum, detention and processing centers. In what follows, I present the conceptual bases for understanding "infrastructurers" (Birk 2017: 778): the practical work that is enacted by a variety of actors through everyday practices of intervention in the infrastructure of reception.

4.3. A street-level implementation perspective

To consider the wide array of actors and agencies that put the reception policy into practice, I also draw on a street-level implementation perspective. The implementation of public policies generally refers to the actions that are undertaken to achieve the mandates, laws, policies and programs set forth by a government or holders of executive power (Hamidi & Paquet 2019). It refers to public policies as they are implemented on the ground by street-level actors through multiple practices and interactions (Tomkinson & Miaz 2019).

This dissertation mobilizes the theoretical approach conceptualized by Evelyn Z. Brodkin (1990, 2011b, 2012, 2020), which combines political institutionalism and street-level bureaucracy. Brodkin thereby places the focus on *street-level organizations* (SLO) arguing that they occupy a critical structural position in the welfare state, "where they effectively mediate between individuals and the state and, in more practical terms, between formal policy and informal provision" (2020: 63). Accordingly, the objective of this thesis is to include "the public, private, and hybrid agencies" (Brodkin & Marston 2013: 3) increasingly operating under the influence of shifting governance and managerial regimes. Such a perspective allows the multiple agencies involved in the implementation of a sovereign function not only to be disentangled, but also to reveal the effects of outsourcing and the role of street-level organizations on the outcomes of public policy.

Following Brodkin (2011b: 199), a street-level implementation perspective sheds light on "*what* street-level organizations construct as policy through their informal practices, *how* they do it, and *why* they produce policy in the ways that they do".

4.3.1. Expanding street-level bureaucracy

As argued by many authors (e.g., Dubois 1999; T. Evans 2010; Infantino 2019; Miaz 2017a; Spire 2007; Tomkinson 2018), street-level implementation is a distinct and central stage of the policymaking process. Policy outcomes are indeed shaped at that level rather than at the level of its design. As shown in the literature, through their daily work routine, street-level implementers not only use their discretion to put (the ambiguity of) policy and law into practice, but also interpret policy by making decisions on its objectives and meanings. Following Lipsky (2010), individuals putting policy into action can therefore be considered as *de facto* policymakers in the sense that they informally (re)construct policy in the course of their daily work.

However, as stressed by Infantino (2016: 13-14), when it comes to describing policy implementation that non-state actors carry out on governments' behalf, the terms "street-level bureaucrat" and "street-level bureaucracy" are obsolete. Indeed, it is now accepted that implementation is no longer the sole responsibility of the state administration. While public

policy has always been shaped by various types of actors, such as interest groups, public administrators and street-level bureaucrats, non-profit and market actors have also gained the role of implementation agents (Eule et al. 2017; Infantino 2017). As Hamidi & Paquet (2019: 5) put it, implementation has become a central site of negotiation of the multidirectional changes that affect the state: actors acting on its behalf evolve and chains of actors become more complex.

Consequently, the focus on street-level bureaucracy has been greatly expanded to include both middle-ranking public officials (Barrier et al. 2015; Miaz 2019), but also, and above all, actors who are not civil servants (*fonctionnaires*), but who are mandated to deliver services (Brodkin 2011a). As Brodkin (2012: 944) puts it:

> The world that gave rise to street-level bureaucracies has been transformed. The public sector no longer dominates policy delivery as it once did. Contracting and privatization have reshaped the organizational landscape, creating new, mixed forms of provision and complex delivery arrangements. Today, policy delivery occurs not only through public bureaucracies, but also through non-profit organizations, for-profit firms, and mixed public–private arrangements.

Much like public bureaucracies, these actors have significant discretion over the publicly funded services they provide. Paying attention to the internal dynamics of the collective actors responsible for implementation thus facilitates the understanding of how they make use of their discretion. Discretion corresponds to the sphere of autonomy within which agents, but also organizations, can make different decisions while acting in accordance with the law (O. Beaud 1994: 474).

4.3.2. Bureaucracies, ethics, and discretion

At the beginning of the twentieth century, sociologist Max Weber analyzed what he calls "bureaucratic domination", which is characterized by its rationality. Weber describes the bureaucrat in the following way:

> *Sine ira et studio*, without hatred or passion, and hence without affection or enthusiasm. The dominant norms are concepts of straightforward duty without regard to personal considerations […] This is the spirit in which the ideal official conducts his office. (Weber 2013 (1978): 225)

Thus, he considers that bureaucratic administration means domination because of its legal legitimacy, that is, an authority based on rule or norm and procedure. Bureaucratic work is, in this sense, characterized by formal and technical knowledge, the most rational type. For Weber, impersonality and formality, ensured by bureaucratic rationalization, guarantee that organizational objectives are not confused with personal motivations or other interests.

While Weber's analyses continue to be an important reference point, subsequent research has introduced diversity to the image of the bureaucrat as a rule-following automaton. In particular, the image of the "street-level bureaucrats" analyzed by Lipsky (2010) refers to state agents – whether they are police officers, teachers, judges, social workers, or other types of public service agents – who interact directly with citizens, in particular through the figure of "the counter" (Dubois 1999). The question of the discretionary power of frontline workers is here central, as are the legal, social, and institutional mediations that frame and guide its use. Thus, recent research tells us that discretion is fundamental to understanding how bureaucracies work and their role as policymakers (e.g., T. Evans & Hupe 2020). Public servants are as much individual subjects with characteristics, emotions, and histories as the individuals with whom they interact. Contrary to the Weberian ideal and the fiction of impersonal and standardized bureaucrats whose role is limited to being mere executors of law and public policy, this approach shifts the conception of their role toward that of producers of public action.

In this sense, the everyday work of street-level bureaucrats is characterized by three central aspects (Achermann 2018): first, they have discretionary power in their interactions with target audiences for public action. Second, through their practices and decisions, they carry out public policies and determine their content and orientation. Finally, the organizational context in which these interactions take place – in particular, the frequent lack of resources and time – has important effects on the use of discretionary power.

Fassin et al. (2015), followed in particular by Eckert (2020a), in turn complicate the analysis of bureaucratic discretion. Through the analysis of many state administrative services, they underline, respectively, the interrelation of professional ethics and affects, and the interrelation of the ethics of office and bureaucratic practice. Breaking away from an individualistic vision of bureaucratic discretion, they thus highlight how it is also shaped, structured and informed by a moral economy of state bureaucracies, i.e., "the ethos and ethics that pertain to a specific bureaucracy at a given time and place, and that are trained and cultivated formally and informally in bureaucratic sociabilities" (Eckert 2020b: 16). They thus call for refocusing attention on the possible influence of personal and public moral, and how these interpretations of the "commonweal" shape bureaucratic practice. Such a reading of governing therefore suggests that bureaucratic administrations are not fundamentally amoral or "anethical" in character, as Weber (2013 (1978)), Graeber (2015) and Herzfeld (1992) have claimed. Instead, they (re)produce ideological frames through the specific narratives, categorizations and normative orientations that shape bureaucratic practice (Eckert 2020b: 8).

In analyzing street-level organizations in welfare state politics, Brodkin (2020) adds an important dimension to this analysis by considering the ways in which discretion is structured in specific organizational and political contexts and operates *systematically*, but indirectly.

According to her, "discretion can thus be understood to be political when its exercise becomes systematized and produces patterns of practice that have consequences for 'who gets what, when [and] how' and also for who gets *heard*, when and how" (ibid.: 64, original emphasis). In other words, discretion becomes political when discretionary practices shape social provision and structure opportunities for claiming and voice.

It is precisely this stance that I adopt in this dissertation by addressing the politics of discretion in the context of outsourced asylum reception. Following Eckert (2020b) and Brodkin (2020), my argument is twofold. First, I argue that ethics are intrinsic to bureaucratic work. Second, rather than treating discretion as an individual-level phenomenon, I argue that bureaucratic discretion can also be approached at a meso level, that of street-level organizations. In so doing, I show how the discretionary practices of state-mandated organizations and their agents are structured by their respective organizational environment, which, in turn, influences their idea of the substantive goal(s) the apparatus of reception is geared toward (see Chapters 7 to 9). It is not, therefore, a question of identifying whether this or that organization acts in an (im)moral or amoral manner. Rather, I shed light on the multiplicity, but also conflicting moral considerations that intervene in the day-to-day implementation of reception and question how these might be hierarchized differently depending on the contracted organization, thus possibly resulting in the fragmented provision of reception services. More broadly, I reflect on the effects of discretionary practices on the ground.

4.3.3. Mediating politics

The reasons why organizations decide to use, or not to use, their discretion is revealing of the way they conceive their own role, but also of their central role in negotiating the practical meaning of a policy. Beyond the way in which discretion is implemented, it is also by analyzing the *reasons* for its use that we can understand how street-level organizations, by expressing their interests and concerns, become key players in processes of policy transformation.

For this purpose, I draw on what Brodkin (2013: 32) has called a "three-dimensional view of street-level organizations": the perspective that "also directs attention to how street-level organizations mediate politics by structuring the possibilities for advancing claims on the state, asserting rights, and pursuing redress". Concretely, this perspective proposes to bring the analysis one step further by apprehending street-level organizations as "sites of policy conflict", i.e., sites within which they indirectly negotiate policy through their everyday and mundane practices. This process of policymaking unfolds in two ways: through the *altering of practices* of policy delivery and the *altering of the arrangements* for policy delivery. Its visibility is limited, and its implications are often difficult to grasp.

This perspective involves, on the one hand, approaching street-level organizations as actors who may effectively mediate the possibilities linked to a sociopolitical status. This is made possible through the critical structural position that places them at the intersection of the state, its policies, and individuals. By possibilities, I mean the rights, resources, and benefits that a certain population can access – for example, asylum seekers during their stay in a reception center.

The informal process of altering practices of policy delivery can take two different but closely related forms: a mundane and banal form, in the context of daily encounters with the beneficiaries of public policy, and a more exceptional form, involving direct confrontation with public authorities. This second form is reminiscent of one of the typical roles of intermediaries (Ambrosini 2017: 5): the exercise of political pressure.

By doing so, although this is not their primary function, street-level organizations indirectly provide avenues for the beneficiaries of public policy to question or contest the benefits to which they are entitled. Thus, as Brodkin (2013: 32) puts it, "street-level organizations not only structure opportunities for expression; in a more practical sense, they also structure possibilities for claims-making and realizing rights."

However, street-level organizations may also discourage or even suppress efforts by individuals to discuss their needs and life circumstances (ibid.). For example, the negotiation of the infrastructure in which they operate daily is not negligible; depending on the internal arrangements made by the street-level organizations (e.g., presence of a counter) and the organization of interpersonal relations, the ability to advance claims can either be facilitated or hindered. Moreover, depending on how they perceive their role, street-level organizations can also completely extricate themselves from the relationship between the state and policy recipients by adopting a resolutely neutral stance.

Thus, as a large literature on non-state actors that increasingly take up functions of the state demonstrate (e.g., Pette 2014; Trudeau & Veronis 2009; Weill 2014), it becomes difficult to distinguish between "supportive" and "antagonistic" organizations (Kalir & Wissink 2016). These, indeed, assume multifaceted roles in the implementation of policy. Nevertheless, following Fyall (2017), such a perspective prompts us to move away from an apolitical vision of government-funded service providers.

On the other hand, putting street-level organizations first also means questioning the context in which they operate. In particular, this means analyzing the way in which the service sector and its non-profit providers have been transformed under "the subtle pressures of the contracting regime" (S. R. Smith & Lipsky 1993). But the question can also be reversed by questioning the way in which street-level organizations, in turn, change the conditions of street-level work. The literature offers mixed answers to these questions.

Some scholars, like Boswell (2018), Brodkin (2011a, 2015), Darling (2016b) and Hibou (1998, 2015), illustrate that there is an increase in the mechanisms that transform the conditions of street-level work. Managerial norms, performance management and other strategies associated with new public management appear as powerful norms of constraint on the action of street-level actors. Although invisibly and indirectly, they may shape policy projects by influencing the street-level policy production. Indeed, as I show in Chapter 6, the actors mandated to deliver reception services are subject to regular controls, particularly in the form of auditing and certification techniques. These mechanisms, in turn, produce many (structural and moral) uncertainties in their daily work: They have the effect of creating precarious working conditions, as well as establishing a climate of pressure, suspicion and frustration on the ground.

Nevertheless, the extensive literature on the implementation of policy also indicates that the diversification of actors responsible for implementation has the potential effect of increasing the heterogeneous policy outcomes that can be attributed to discretion policies (on the implementation of migration policies, see e.g. Eule et al. 2017; Eule et al. 2019a; Infantino 2016). In particular, Brodkin (2011a: i255) shows that street-level practitioners use their "routine discretion" to adjust to performance incentives. As highlighted in Chapters 8 and 9, these practices produce what Hibou (2015) calls "informalities", i.e., "simultaneously violations of formalities, compromises with formalities, and games played around them" (ibid.: 135), that are substantively different from what policymakers tend to recognize. It is therefore also by negotiating the (contractual) arrangements for policy delivery through administrative means that street-level organizations mediate or even contest the character and scope of the state.

Intermediate conclusion

Based on the conceptual elements presented above, I argue that the analysis of the governing of asylum reception through the lens of street-level organizations is important for many reasons.

First, by reversing the analytical perspective from policy design to policy implementation, a street-level approach brings insights into the day-to-day making of asylum reception. It enables us to see how this policy is translated into practice on the ground, but also how it is negotiated. Implementation can be understood as "policy politics" (Brodkin 1990): the stage of the policymaking process in which the contest about what policy should be continues.

Second, the analysis of a variety of street-level organizations offers the opportunity to identify general patterns in organizational practices. It allows broader reflection on the rationalities that constitute the reception apparatus, and how these are (re)produced on a daily basis by street-level implementers through their different values, subjectivities, and organizational

environment (Fyall 2017: 122). This is even more important in a federalist context, such as that of Switzerland, where the network of public and private organizations providing accommodation and care for persons in the field of asylum is extremely heterogeneous.

Third, the focus on private contractors not only makes it possible to look at how these actors fit into the reception apparatus and position themselves vis-à-vis "the state", but also to go beyond the discourse of privatization and macro-economic considerations. As argued by many scholars (e.g., Hibou 1998, 1999c; Hiemstra & Conlon 2017; Infantino 2017), the cost-benefit logic is indeed one factor that underpins private-public cooperation, but it is not the only one. The street-level view of asylum reception therefore puts forward other dimensions of outsourcing and contracting processes that remain obscure in the literature. In this sense, I propose to consider the involvement of service providers in the light of their hierarchization of the moral considerations surrounding reception policy (e.g., between the objectives of hospitality, surveillance, efficiency, and cost reduction) rather than starting from the premise that technical and managerial considerations necessarily imply an amoral way of governing.

Finally, unlike the sectors of public policy traditionally studied in a street-level organization perspective (e.g., education, food banking, delivering of social services, and access to housing), I am talking here about individuals living at the edge of the (welfare) state. Asylum seekers are indeed physically present in a territory under Switzerland's sovereignty, which is therefore required to provide for their minimum needs under international law, but they are still waiting for a status that allows them to access all of their rights. The analysis of everyday organizational practices is therefore interesting from the point of view of Switzerland's migration-related welfare policy and of their effects on the services and benefits to which asylum seekers are entitled. By shaping the places where asylum seekers live – who literally live for several months or even years with(in) the organizations in charge of the policy of reception – the role of street-level organizations is therefore crucial. What they do, or do not do, is significant in the daily lives of these individuals.

4.4. Neoliberalism as a rationality and a technology of government

After examining the material and spatio-temporal context in which asylum reception takes place, as well as the actors who are responsible for implementing this policy, this section deals more specifically with the structural and organizational framework in which street-level organizations operate daily. It presents the conceptual tools for understanding the significant developments in management and governance that are transforming the conditions under which policy delivery occurs. This section proposes an analytical frame to consider how neoliberal dynamics, such as outsourcing, contracting, and privatization, impact the nature and the character of the state.

For this purpose, I pay particular attention to what Hibou (2015) refers to as one of the main figures of neoliberalism: the *neoliberal bureaucratization* of society and of government action. This process is defined as:

> A process of abstraction aimed at bringing a complex reality within general and formal categories, norms, and rules as they emerge from a way of thinking that rationalizes society and the government of goods, human beings, and territories on the basis of market and enterprise mechanisms. (Hibou 2015: 27)

This Weberian reading of neoliberalism – that is to say, a bureaucratization that extends to all fields of life in society and which is not aimed to the state's administrative system alone – is important for my argument, as it provides a very rich toolbox for thinking about the transformations of state action. In particular, as argued by Hibou (2015: 16), it highlights two features that set the neoliberalism of contemporary bureaucracy. The first is the "private" character of the norms and procedures that comprise bureaucratization, i.e., formalities based on the reference to the market and managerial enterprise. To be more precise, the particularity of these formalities is that they are co-produced by the so-called "public" and "private" spheres. The second feature of neoliberal bureaucracy is the exacerbation of processes of abstraction, normalization, and generalization. Bureaucratic abstraction becomes, in this sense, a fiction of reality.

Within the framework of this thesis, this conceptual frame allows to reflect on different components and processes seemingly partaking in the (neoliberal) redeployment of state action: the outsourcing of some sovereign tasks to the private sphere, but also the cultivation of an "ethos of business" and of "managerial thinking" within the state itself. This chapter thus presents neoliberalism both as a rationality and a technology of government. It is also an analytical notion that should be approached and operationalized with caution.

4.4.1. Unpacking neoliberalism

"Neoliberalism seems to be everywhere." With this assertion, Peck & Tickell (2002: 380) refer to the omnipresence and importance that the notion of neoliberalism has taken on in the explanation of contemporary forms of economic restructuring. Sometimes seen as a political ideology, a unitary force acting upon the word, or a generalized practice of "economizing" spheres and activities heretofore governed by other tables of value, it expresses everything and nothing at the same time. It has become an abstraction (Weller & O'Neill 2014), a catch-all concept (S. Hall 2011) too often "inflated" and "overblown" (Collier 2012).

As Brown (2015: 20-21) puts it, neoliberalism is both a global phenomenon and a distinctive mode of reason, an economic grid for the perception and evaluation of things. Neoliberalism does not, however, mean the ubiquitous marketization of society, even if such marketization is certainly one of its important effects. Rather, as argued by Hibou (2015), the point is that

neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all areas of everyday life. It is a rationality that reconfigures all aspects of existence in economic terms.

In this dissertation, following critical theories of neoliberalization (Clarke 2004; Higgins & Larner 2017a; Maskovsky & Kingfischer 2001; Peck & Tickell 2002; Tretjak & Abrell 2011), I do not apprehend neoliberalism as a *fait accompli* (Kingfischer & Maskovsky 2008) or a coherent institutional logic (Wacquant 2012). Instead, I emphasize the "actually existing neoliberalism" (Brenner & Theodore 2002) by questioning and problematizing the peculiarities of historically and geographically contextualized situations through the grounded study of concrete spaces, people and institutions. I am thus interested in the diffuse, contingent, contradictory, and unstable character of neoliberalism. Two precautions must, however, be taken. It means, on the one hand, positioning local cases in relational and conjunctural terms, rather than as exceptional case studies. On the other hand, as Peck (2013: 152) puts it, local manifestations of neoliberal logics must not be detached from extra-local domains and shorn of their "constitutive outsides".

For this purpose, I suggest that understanding neoliberalism as governmentality (Ferguson & Gupta 2002; Lemke 2001) opens useful avenues for the investigation of governing processes. I believe this perspective allows neoliberalism to be approached through its technical or technological dimension, e.g., audits, contracts, standards or performance indicators, rather than understanding neoliberalism as a unified set of policies or a top-down impositional discourse. By exploring "the apparently mundane practices through which neoliberal spaces, states and subjects are being constituted in particular forms" (Larner 2003: 511), this framework allows the more subtle ways in which neoliberalism is at work to be grasped.

More concretely, following Walters (2015: 5), I suggest approaching neoliberalism through "mid-range concepts". The understanding of the process of neoliberalization is surely enhanced once we can grasp the fact that it bears strong family resemblances to a transversal field of action, such as processes of standardization, bureaucratization, commodification, or depoliticization (see also Darling 2016b). It is thus a question of fracturing this notion in order to focus on "what is emerging and what is under transformation" (Walters 2015: 4). Further, it is by recognizing "how heterogeneous elements may come together in ways that have neoliberal effects" (Higgins & Larner 2017b: 2) that we can really understand what is at stake in governing practices. Therefore, as argued by Peck (2013: 152-153), "citing the process of neoliberalization must not be a substitute of explanation; it should be an *occasion* for explanation".

Therefore, one could not reflect on the dynamics partaking in the privatization of asylum reception without addressing the role of the state in the context of contemporary forms of neoliberal restructuring. In the next two chapters, I present a conceptual frame that allows me

to grasp the current governing of reception through outsourcing and contracting mechanisms. By mobilizing the expression of "the privatization of the state" presented in the preamble of this chapter, I reflect on how to make analytical sense of public-private arrangements and their (supposedly) functions in migration policies. Of course, other areas of public policy, as well as contexts other than Switzerland, apply to this reflection.

4.4.2. The privatization of the state: a conceptual frame

Inspired by Hibou (1999a: 13, see also 1998, 1999b), I define the privatization of the state as a process of diffusion of the use of private intermediaries – in the broad sense of actors, logics, rhetoric, or instruments from the private sphere – for an increasing number of tasks previously assigned to the state. Following Miller & Rose (2008: 32), I consider the public-private boundary itself is a technology of government, namely, a mode of government "enabling certain practices, material arrangements and logics" (Martin 2016a: 33) through which the state redeploys itself. Thus, in the framework of this thesis, I suggest that the mobilization of the public and private boundary (partly) inscribes asylum reception in a marketized regime of value (Darling 2016b), thereby "giving states and other actors opportunities to manage human mobility in new ways" (Martin 2016b). The question is therefore not whether there is more or less state, but rather which state is emerging as the transformations take place.

As the literature shows, public-private partnerships are rather unexceptional in the context of neoliberal state restructuring, both in the "global South" (Hibou 1999c) and in the "global North" (e.g., Argento et al. 2010; Favre et al. 2016). As illustrated both in migration policies (Guiraudon 2002) and in other areas of society (Favre et al. 2016; S. R. Smith & Lipsky 1993), the "neoliberalized state" (Menz 2013) justifies the use of public-private arrangements with greater flexibility and economic efficiency in the performance of its functions, even if several studies point out that public-private partnerships are sometimes more costly than public management, particularly in terms of transaction costs (e.g., Giauque 2009). In this context, the performance imperative to which public services are subject legitimizes delegation to private organizations.

At the same time, one can assume that outsourcing can also be explained by the desire to avoid criticism by transferring responsibility for certain policies. Following Gill et al. (2014), the neoliberalization of immigration enforcement would enable public authorities to deflect criticism of migrant control policies onto contracted entities. As such, delegation might not only allow time and money to be saved, but may also shift responsibility for possible decisions, problems or failures (Gill 2016: 38). This would, in some respects, enable the state to distance itself from the consequences of its actions, or at least to displace or dilute its responsibilities. As Gammeltoft-Hansen (2013: 143) states, "the privatization of migration control [...] not only serves to partially insulate states from legal responsibility, but also provides an institutional

distancing of control practices away from the state." In her work on the implementation of the Schengen visa policy, Infantino (2016: xi) also shows that "outsourcing visa policy implementation does not diminish state sovereignty but rather expands state capacity to order the flows since it keeps policy recipients away from sight and away from mind." By doing so, the state interposes intermediate actors in its encounter with the governed.

In other words, the privatization of the state would not imply the loss of its capacity for control, nor its "cannibalization" (Hibou 1998: 152) by the private sector, but its redeployment, the modification of modes of government (Ferguson & Gupta 2002: 989). By delegating its tasks to the private sphere, the state reorients itself toward "meta-governmental functions" (Gill 2016):

> The core state function becomes one of steering and conducting rather than one of carrying out. The state busies itself with setting the meta-coordinates of action and designing the architecture for negotiation and engagement between differently positioned partners in governing. (Gill 2016: 38)

Governing "at a distance" (Rose & Miller 1992) and "through the distance" (Infantino 2016) are thus crucial dimensions of the devolution of the state's functions to private actors. As I show in this work, the dimension of distance also concerns the governance of asylum reception in Switzerland, where the interposition between the public authorities and asylum seekers of actors, logics, and instruments from the private sphere transforms state action, as well as the conditions under which policy delivery occurs.

In particular, it is in the everyday governance of reception that the construction and (in)formal cultivation of procedural ethoses – in other words, representations of the world that produce normative rules and forms of conduct deemed proper to fulfill the purposes this policy is concerned with – take place. One of these is the ethos of business. Without yet entering into an empirical analysis of this notion (proposed in Chapters 6 and 8 in particular), the following chapter provides a conceptual overview of it in order to suggest some keys to understanding the continuation of this work.

4.4.3. The ethos of business

As argued by Gill (2016: 39), one particular development tied to the government at a distance is the establishment of an entrepreneurial way of governing. More specifically, the cultivation of an "ethos of business" (Rose 1999) within the state itself. According to this ethos, which results from new public management reforms, "the focus is upon accountability, explicit standards and measures of performances, emphasis on outputs […] contracts and competition, and insistence on parsimony maintained by budget discipline" (ibid: 150).

As illustrated by Rose, this required a shift from a highly bureaucratized administration dictated by the logic of the system, as Weber (2013 (1978)) analyzes it, to one dictated by the

logic of the market and competition. In other words, a shift from an ethos of public service to one of private management:

> The solution was not to seek to govern bureaucracy better, but to transform the very organization of the governmental bureaucracy itself and, in doing so, transform its ethos from one of bureaucracy to one of business, from one of planning to one of competition, from one dictated by the logics of the system to one dictated by the logics of the market […]. (Rose 1999: 150)

Quite paradoxically, however, the spread of managerial thinking is not synonymous with the "de-bureaucratization" of the state's administrative apparatus; on the contrary. As claimed by Hibou (2015: xiii), the invasion of organizational and everyday lives by "neoliberal formalities" – i.e., norms, procedures, instruments, and rationalities that emerge from the private sector, especially from the market – goes along with the neoliberal bureaucratization of governmental action.

Hybridization between public and private is precisely a characteristic element of this process that Hibou distinguishes from bureaucratization by the private nature of the formalities it disseminates. Thus, although bureaucratization has always been a normative and rationalization process based on the dual principles of calculability and predictability (Weber 2013 (1978)), the specificity of neoliberal bureaucratization lies in the fact that this dynamic stems from a particular world, that of business and managerial capitalism while at the same time being diffused throughout society, both in the public and in the private sphere. In this work, I show that the reception policy means intense bureaucratic activity, with calculations and indicators, constantly updated predictions, perpetual reporting, and compliance with standards, evaluations, and audits. Chapter 6 illustrates that public authorities increasingly consider that these are the proper tools for carrying out the reception policy efficiently, while Chapter 8 in turn discusses how neoliberal formalities, both valued and contested on the ground, are negotiated by street-level actors.

Consequently, governing at a distance would not only take the form of a "remote control" (Guiraudon & Lahav 2000), i.e., the shifting of control outside the central state apparatus. It appears as a more complex and diffuse distance that proceeds by moving a task from the public to the private sphere, but it also manifests itself in the articulation of formalities that become powerful technologies of structuring and control as of legitimization.

In the governance of asylum in Great Britain, Boswell (2018) demonstrates how the deployment of technocratic instruments imported into the public sector from the private sphere gives credibility to political leaders and organizations by creating modes of governance that are considered objective, neutral, and precise. By enabling the monitoring of performance, such tools bring clarity and precision to public service goals, increase transparency and inform

choice. More broadly, Power (1997), Shore & Wright (2000), and Strathern (2000) highlight how "verification rituals", such as performance measurement and audits, ultimately represent a means of exercising control over actors or processes that are otherwise difficult to supervise. As Power (1994: 9) puts it, audit is indeed a "risk reduction practice which inhibits the deviant actions of agents".

Intermediate conclusion

The aim of this last section was twofold. On the one hand, it has presented a concrete way of understanding the concept of neoliberalism to operationalize it in the analysis of asylum reception. On this basis, it was also a matter of proposing a conceptual reflection, supported by a few theoretical examples from the literature in the social and political sciences, on the dynamics currently affecting the state. This will serve as a conceptual foundation for the rest of this work.

What I retain as important from this theoretical reflection is that the analysis of neoliberalism, both as a rationality and a technology of government, does not mean analyzing a homogeneous strategy of government nor a specific instrument of government. Rather, it involves highlighting the transversal processes that constitute this disunited phenomenon, such as privatization, contractualization, bureaucratization, and standardization. It is thus by decomposing the notion of neoliberalism that I can understand what is eventually at stake in the privatization of asylum reception.

Although based only on theoretical assumptions that need to be supported by empirical data, I assume that one of these phenomena is that of moral distancing (Gill 2016). The concept of the interface of distance, briefly presented above, illustrates this dynamic. It embodies the process by which contracting and the use of intermediaries allows both decision-makers and front-line actors to engage in "moral outsourcing" (A. Williams et al. 2016): the localization of responsibility for the apparatus of reception and its effects always to an elsewhere. This phenomenon consists of several stages, the contours of which, roughly presented here, will have to be refined, or even confirmed with the help of ethnographic material.

First, through outsourcing and contractualization, one can easily assume that the interface of distance intervenes primarily through the dissociation of the state's decision-making and operational spheres, both of which are connected and separated by a set of contractual norms, allowing communication and the implementation of the reception policy. Consequently, the distance that separates these spheres is not a hollow and insignificant space. It is filled with a complex web of (neoliberal) formalities that increase the literal distance between decision-makers and the ground, i.e., the actual practices of asylum reception.

Second, one of the effects of the thickening of intermediary layers between public authorities and the ground may also reside in the development of forms of blame avoidance (Weaver 1986): Neoliberal formalities are likely to block their respective fields of vision and obfuscate lines of accountability. But this presumable dilution of responsibilities not only acts through the physical and symbolic distancing of subjects from managers and functionaries, and vice versa. As Gill (2016: 7-8) illustrates, there are also different forms of distance "at close quarters". Bureaucratic modes of rule can indeed also be associated with moral distance.

Third, the translation of asylum reception into a marketized regime of value requires certain abstractions, which, in some respects, transforms it into an issue of "smooth flow management" (Infantino 2016: 74). The definition and daily (re)production of abstract concepts, such as "quality" or "efficiency", would thus participate in making invisible the diversity and plurality that characterize this field. In this sense, the interface of distance may potentially also foster the indifference toward the processes whereby results are obtained (Hibou 2015: 95-96). By presenting policymaking as a neutral and indisputable process, it is likely to participate in the compression of the multi-dimensional webs that are embedded in the apparatus of reception in ways that shield them from critical inquiry.

Obviously, we must not lose sight that managerial and financial rationalities are articulated with other rationalities in the governance of asylum reception, such as humanitarian or security ones. What I would like to suggest in this thesis, however, is that the former tend to be predominant (or at least of greater importance than before) in the current framing of this policy, thus having specific effects on this field. Overall, taking neoliberal dynamics into consideration in the analysis of the governing of asylum reception enables me to shed light on the continuous displacements of politics, and thus of the resulting responsibilities, that seem to take place though the use of private intermediaries.

4.5. Conclusion

Pulling together the theoretical threads presented in this chapter, I would like to conclude by providing an initial and conceptual answer to the question that initially guided this dissertation — namely, how is asylum reception governed in Switzerland today? More specifically, I bring some additional clarifications about my understanding of the variety of actors and spheres intertwined in the process of governing asylum reception.

Building on the theoretical tools presented in this chapter and drawing in particular on Gill (2016: 36), Eckert (2020b), and Fresia & Von Känel (2015), I suggest that framing the discussion of the governing of asylum reception primarily around its bureaucratic tendencies allows breaking with the normative considerations commonly related to "privatization" and the category "private actors". Indeed, just like public actors, bureaucratic tendencies seem to be

(one of) the common point(s) between the contracted organizations, through the way bureaucratic practices organize and structure their daily functioning, but also through the bureaucratic artifacts and neoliberal formalities that shape their everyday work. Accordingly, I choose to understand state and non-state, public and private, for-profit, and not-for-profit organizations as "bureaucratic administrations". Framing the discussion in this way holds a series of advantages over discussing the previously mentioned categories.

First, by approaching these different types of organizations through the bureaucratic tendencies inherent in them, it allows me to consider them jointly, particularly through their "bureaucratic culture" (Allen 1990: 22). Indeed, as I have shown, bureaucratic organization concerns both the public and private sectors. Every organization depends on an internal bureaucratic structure that allows it to function and to manage uncertainty (see Chapter 6). In this sense, the bureaucratic phenomenon is not specific to the public (or state) organizations and concerns private (or non-state) organizations as well. Along with their differences, notably related to their (non-)lucrative objectives, it is therefore also in the analysis of the continuities between the mandated organizations that the interest of studying them from the perspective of their bureaucratic practices lies, in particular when it comes to the neoliberal formalities they have to deal with.

Second, referring to bureaucratic administrations allows me to consider them as part of the same bureaucratic "system". By apprehending the reception apparatus as the entanglement of more or less organized, sometimes contradictory bureaucratic actors, artifacts and practices geared toward specific aims or finalities, I can include the variety of organizations – whatever their status or (normative) categories of belonging – that constitute it and participate in the resolution of the "problem" of asylum reception. In this sense, this allows me to understand them as agencies, or services, partaking in the broader process of the governance or administration of asylum that perform tasks that are interrelated with other (state) administrative services (Eckert 2020b: 7-8), both through structural arrangements (outsourcing, contracting) and through the common aim they are entrusted with.

Third, it allows me to think of governing in terms of spheres and functions. Taking an interest in street-level organizations thus means moving beyond disembodied accounts of "the state" to take account of the organizations that form its operational core (Brodkin 2020: 64). As mentioned above, this implies distinguishing between the decision-making and operational spheres of the state in the analysis of the governing of reception, while considering them together, notably through the interface of distance that both links and separates them.

Finally, drawing inspiration from the anthropology of public policy (Wedel et al. 2005), I believe that the analysis of these heterogeneous networks, actors and elements allows me to understand different levels (e.g., state and private, but also local, national, and international)

and actors (public administrations, for-profit enterprises, non-governmental organizations, charities, or some combinations of these) in one frame of study and to observe how they are interwoven. It allows me to counteract the use of flawed dichotomous frameworks, while capturing current dynamics of public policy – in this case, of the policy of asylum reception.

Summary Part I

As I have shown in Part I, the (un)certainties that mark out the field of asylum reception – whether structural, legal, political, epistemological, ethical, or methodological – are numerous. These highlight the series of challenges that go hand in hand with doing research in the field of asylum; a field that is volatile and changing, a field that sees its contours and dynamics of government constantly redefined, a field where both a "normative vagueness" yet also "legislative" and "normative frenzy" prevail, a field that empirically destabilizes certain preconceived categories, a field that requires precautions to be taken when accessing "the state", a field that gives rise to many ethical questions.

If I retain one thing from all these (un)certainties, it is ultimately the need to remain flexible and modest in the way of approaching and constructing research. Above all, a necessary open-mindedness that leaves one open to unsettle common habits of thoughts (Gill 2019), whether they are constructed by others or by ourselves. As contend by Jazeel & McFarlane (2010: 115), doing research is indeed a "commitment to uncertainty, humility and *un*learning". Encountering the field is in this sense never a final or full accomplishment. As such, "fieldwork demands the continual acknowledgement that the accounts we produce are incomplete reflections of a 'here and now' never to be repeated" (Darling 2014c: 211).

Parts II and III present the results of my reflections on my multiple encounters and experiences on the field. It is not an exhaustive analysis of the field of asylum reception and of its fabrication and implementation daily by a whole range of actors. Instead, they offer specific reading glasses that allow to apprehend this question in a comprehensive way, through the question of the reception apparatus, but diversified and specific, through the multiple elements, actors, and rationalities that make it up.

PART II • Manufacturing the apparatus of reception

Introduction to Part II

This part focuses on the infrastructural, yet also structural and organizational dimension of the management of (un)certainty in the governance of contemporary asylum reception. The construction of certainty – both in its internal procedures and in its outputs – is indeed the primary objective of any bureaucratic administration, whether public or private. This goes back to the "rational" character of bureaucracy, through which, Max Weber held, a high degree of calculability and predictability of results could be achieved. Uncertainty, as both an organizing principle and an object of management, thus becomes a "risk" to be managed, namely, an object or domain which implies a decision and action about the future and the corresponding allocation of responsibility (Power 2007).

Therefore, I understand the manufacturing of the reception apparatus as an attempt to produce more certainty in an intrinsically uncertain field. Following Boswell (2018: vii), the verb "to manufacture" has two meanings: to make something on a large-scale using machinery, and to invent and fabricate. My usage of this word combines these two dimensions. On the one hand, I illuminate the way in which asylum reception is managed on a large scale through the infrastructure of reception (Chapter 5). Secondly, I highlight the bureaucratic and neoliberal mechanics that contribute to the fabrication and (re)invention of the governance of reception (Chapter 6).

5. The infrastructure of asylum reception

> Architecture is a discipline of bordering: it divides space even when it opens it. … A delimited space can indeed be a promise of security; but it all depends on the security of the person in question: a delimitation can protect those inside from outside (it is the principle of the home) or vice versa (it is the prison). Somewhere between these poles are Swiss asylum centers. (Groisman 2019: 56, personal translation)

Through an infrastructural approach, this chapter aims to capture the topological dimension of asylum reception, that is, its spatial, territorial, and material moorings, as well as its temporal dimension. It examines the roles of architecture and the built environment in the context of asylum accommodation and seeks to unravel what I refer to as the "infrastructure of asylum reception" to bring out the rationalities behind the material, temporal, and spatial incarnation of sovereign power. By doing so, the objective of this chapter is twofold: to analyze how the reception infrastructure is part of the rationality(s) of a broader political strategy, namely the governance and management of individuals seeking asylum in Switzerland, but also to provide contextual information on asylum reception based on my data. It lays out the basis for understanding the day-to-day and practical work of "infrastructurers", i.e., the organizations mandated to implement the reception policy.

Based on my own experience as a researcher, this chapter is a pathway leading from the outside to the inside of the reception center. By doing so, I propose to approach asylum accommodation by first of all paying particular attention to its visibility and accessibility in the public space (5.1), then to the way in which the reception infrastructure is concretely characterized in Swiss cantons (5.2), and finally to the daily atmosphere of these centers, their intimacy, and their internal organization (5.3). It is based on an in-depth analysis of three reception centers – Chamfors, Bürgistadt, Tirossa – but is also supplemented by more occasional observation of other accommodation facilities of different types. Without wishing to generalize it to the whole of Switzerland, knowing in particular that each "local migration regime" is different (see Zill et al. 2018: 5) due to the spatial, material, and institutional dimensions that shape the infrastructure of reception, I consider that these case studies reflect the main characteristics of asylum accommodation in Switzerland, while also highlighting its subtleties and particularities.

Following decisions related to the design of this research (see Chapter 3), the perspective of the residents of the reception centers – the asylum seekers – is not considered in this analysis.

However, this chapter's conclusion will seek to partially include their perspective by proposing a critical reflection on the allegedly "suspension" of these spaces. "Suspended" has two meanings here: the state of being suspended (in the sense of delayed, arrested, as for a decision), or holding something suspended (as a balloon in the air). I draw on Mountz (2010), who uses the metaphor of the "long tunnel thesis" to conceptualize Canadian detention facilities. Indeed, the metaphor of this tunnel, which Mountz (2010: xiv) designates as "an interstitial processing zone, somewhere between Canada and not-Canada", corresponds, to a certain extent, to the time of waiting that characterizes the arrival of asylum seekers in Switzerland.

5.1. Paradoxical (in)visibility

My arrival at the three reception centers that were to be the subject of this thesis was each time accompanied by a certain uncertainty, as well as a certain apprehension, as to whether I would be able to find them without too much trouble. While the internet could tell me their exact location on a map, the last few meters "on the spot" proved to be tricky and difficult. Systematically, I found myself wondering if I was in the right place – even though I knew I was – and looking for external signs that could show me the way and reassure me. I was thus confronted with the tension between (media) visibility and (territorial) invisibility that characterizes asylum reception in Switzerland.

On a dull and foggy autumn day, my arrival at the center of Chamfors in the canton of Fribourg looked like this:

> The "program" prepared by [ORS Fribourg's executive assistant] indicates that my "immersion days" will last from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Therefore, I decide to arrive at 8 a.m. for my first day of observation at the center. I get there a little early (around 7:45 a.m.) and don't dare to park in the places in front of what I assume to be the accommodation center, not knowing if they are reserved. I park on a square in one of the parallel alleyways. Around 8 a.m., I walk toward the building. The atmosphere is extremely calm. I don't meet anyone around the building, except for a man cleaning the outside with a broom. He smiles at me and greets me as I pass by. From the outside, it's impossible to know who occupies the building. There are no signs, stickers, posters, or anything else indicating "ORS Service AG", not even on the letterboxes outside the door. I even briefly wonder if I'm in the right place. As I walk in through the main door, I recognize some "typical" documents that I have already seen [in another center], including the facility's rules and regulations. On my right, I see a door with timetables marked on it; this is the office. The door is closed, so I ring the bell. After a few seconds, which feel long to me, an electronic noise indicates that the door is being opened. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

This building, which in 2016 was used to house around 100 asylum seekers, is located in a residential area consisting of six such buildings, which were bought in the 1990s by the canton of Fribourg following the bankruptcy of the residential development. The reception center blends into the landscape and disappears among the other buildings, which are identical to it, yet not intended to accommodate asylum seekers. They are grey windowed apartment buildings, with two entrances, about four to five storeys high, with small gardens on the ground floor. There are parking spaces at the entrances to the buildings and in the surrounding lanes. Concrete seems to dominate; a few touches of greenery brighten up this predominantly grey landscape. I will discover later that this residential area is itself on the outskirts of the town (a small municipality) in which it is located. From the reception center, the railway station, the town center and the main shops can be reached in 10-15 minutes on foot. Behind the district begins a large area of agricultural fields.

Although similar in size to the previous one, the center of Bürgistadt, observed in the canton of Bern, was located in a completely different context: It was in the heart of a medium-sized town, in the middle of a shopping area and an urban environment. The building intended for the accommodation of asylum seekers – now demolished to build a shopping center – was originally a hotel, which had been located there for many years. Within this area of the town, the building was not out of the ordinary and blended into the surrounding constructions and atmosphere. Again, my identification of the center on the first day was not so obvious. I spent a few minutes "circling around" before I realized that a small narrow passage between two buildings, in which many second-hand bikes were parked (or rather crammed), as well as rubbish bags, was, in fact, the access to the front door of the facility. This door was well hidden from the main street and invisible to everyone's sight. For Gabriel, the person in charge of the center, this invisibility, or rather *invisibilization*, is typical of the asylum field:

> ... one of the offices [of ABR] is on [name of the street], here, very close by, you probably passed in front of it coming from the station, without noticing it, since it is on the third floor and that in general, like everything related to asylum, we are a bit hidden. As you have seen here too, the institution is at the same time very special because it is right in the town center – this is rare for a reception center – but we are not very visible.
>
> *I admit [that] I recognized it from the bikes.*
>
> Fortunately! If you'd told me, "I recognized you from the broken windows and the garbage cans" ...
>
> *No, not at all (laugh).*
>
> ...I wouldn't have liked it so much (laugh) but the bikes, well, I'll take it! (Interview, autumn 2017)

Several other people – including those living in the locality in question – also expressed their surprise when I told them that I was carrying out a research project in a reception center for asylum seekers located in the heart of the town. The area in which the center is located is also characterized by the presence of many bars, nightclubs, and shops. It has a rather bad reputation, mainly due to a turbulent drug-related past as one center director recalls (Interview, autumn 2017).

After two reception centers easily accessible by public transport and located in more or less dynamic areas, my third research field in the canton of Ticino felt very different – especially from a practical and accessibility point of view. There was no direct public transport to the center of Tirossa and the first bus stop was a 20-30 minutes' walk away. Like the residents, I had to put a strategy in place to access the facility on a daily basis myself, i.e., by bicycle:

> I have an appointment at 9 a.m. at the accommodation center. Since it is outside of the town center, I took my bike to get there. Public transport doesn't extend this far, so you either have to have a car or travel by bike. The journey is pleasant and not very tiring as everything is flat. It takes about 20 minutes by bike from the center of [the locality]. It is interesting to get there because when you start from the town center, you leave the town little by little, gradually getting closer to the more industrial areas. In the last hundred meters, the facility is indicated by signs. Yet, when I arrive, I get a second of "panic" when I see the number of sheds and buildings in this area. I am afraid I won't find the reception center and I am already a little late. But I quickly find the building because it is indicated by another sign. By following these signs, I arrive in front of a large electronic barrier that delimits the access zone to the center. A van is going out and the gate is opening. A man dressed in a Securitas uniform is present and seems to control the exit. I get off my bike and walk to the pedestrian entrance gate. The man from the security company (that is what it says on his uniform) comes to see me. I tell him that I have an appointment with [the operations manager] and he opens the door for me. (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

In the morning, my journey to the accommodation center is thus made against the current, in the opposite direction of all the people going to the town to work. I leave the town, cross the adjacent commercial area, and finally enter the industrial zone on the outskirts of the urban center. The latter can only be reached by leaving the main road leading to the surrounding valleys and villages and taking a secondary road winding along a river among the trees. This almost bucolic transition is even more unexpected as it suddenly leads to an industrial zone – a dead end – in which there is a succession of garages, factories, construction companies, metal workshops, rubbish dumps, and a kennel. Hidden in the middle is the reception center, a new accommodation structure inaugurated in 2017 and with a capacity of up to 180 people, located next to the old, now dilapidated reception center.

What these three centers have in common, then, is their invisible character – or at least the way in which they have been designed as invisible in the local environment. Whether by placing

them in peripheral areas that are difficult to reach or by ensuring that the buildings chosen to house asylum seekers blend into the landscape and do not show any particular signs that make them stand out at first glance, the political authorities in charge of the asylum sector seem to want to erase the "exceptional" character (Diken & Laustsen 2005) of the reception structures. The example of Tirossa, the accommodation center in the canton of Ticino, is particularly telling: This brand-new building, which attracts attention by its very imposing and peculiar character (see below), is made completely invisible by its off-center location, an industrial zone hidden by the forest. Conversely, despite their (more or less) central location in local social life, Chamfors and Bürgistadt are made invisible by their "unremarkable" and ordinary character.

In this sense, I do not entirely agree with Kreichauf's (2019: 267) analysis when he states that:

> Because of the allocation of refugees to a negatively connoted space, they become visible, which is the starting point for processes of racialization and 'territorial stigmatization' (Wacquant, 2007). To the outside world, the camp conveys an image of residents who do not accord with societal norms and who deserve to live like that.

Indeed, although the three reception centers studied are located in areas with negative connotations – i.e., a peri-urban neighborhood that has gone bankrupt, a somewhat hectic neighborhood (especially at night), and an off-center industrial zone – they are not subject to an overt process of racialization or stigmatization by the local population. Moreover, in contrast to Kreichauf's (2018: 12-13) observations, and although this is not systematically the case (as in the canton of Ticino), the reception center is not necessarily architecturally distinctive and is therefore not separated from urban settlements. This is certainly linked to the fact that, in Switzerland, at the cantonal level, existing accommodation structures, which are already part of the landscape, are given priority over new buildings built specifically for asylum.

Yet, as Kreichauf (2019), Basu & Fiedler (2017), and Kwan (2013) also observe, the cantonal reception centers contribute in practice to the containment of their inhabitants, both by their remote and/or difficultly accessible locations and by limiting interaction with the neighborhoods, despite the fact that they are "open" centers from a legal point of view. Indeed, while we cannot entirely speak of "marginalization" (*mise à l'écart*), as in the case of the "foreigners' camps" (*camps d'étrangers*) in France mentioned by Bernardot (2008: 43), or the refugee camps analyzed by Agier (2008) marked by the triptych "extraterritoriality, relegation and exception", they are ambivalent spaces that are both included and excluded. As argued by Diken (2004: 92), the life of asylum seekers is thus marked by extreme isolation — not only physically but also socioeconomically and culturally. Social contacts and access to the "outside world", in effect, often depend on the good will of staff in the centers, or alternatively of volunteers who "bring the outside in", or vice versa.

The (in)visibility of asylum accommodation in Swiss cantons therefore resonates with the invisibility-visibility nexus as described by Merleau-Ponty (1968: 151) and cited by Caraus (2019: 79):

> Not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, that would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of the being.

In this sense, some aspects of asylum reception are unseen or unperceivable while others are exposed and apprehensible. For a large population, asylum seekers are, on the one hand, unseen, hidden. On the other hand, for the population at large, there is a supra-visibility of migrants in the mass media.

Hence, following Oesch (2012: 10) referring to Rahola (2007), camps or reception centers might be perceived as devices through which a "difference" is instituted. As Pasquetti (2015: 704) also points out, through the practices of surveillance to which they are subjected, people seeking asylum in general "live under forms of control that do not apply to other citizens." As spaces that are difficultly *accessible* and/or *affordable* (Zill et al. 2018: 5), reception centers participate both in the inclusion and exclusion of the populations they house, but are the product of complex and shifting practices of instituting difference. "Open" asylum centers can indeed confine their inhabitants due to their spatially remote location or due to limited access to means of transportation, just as centers located in an urban area might prevent interaction by their location in a neighborhood offering few opportunities to interact in the public realm. By their relative degrees of access to public space, goods and services, asylum centers not only represent spatial tactic of control, but certainly also contribute to what Zill et al. (2018: 14) refer to as "processes of (un)familiarization" between asylum seekers and local residents.

5.2. The (extra-)ordinary architecture of waiting

In what follows, I enter the infrastructure of asylum reception by offering a glimpse into the everyday materiality of asylum accommodation. The aim here is not to make an exhaustive analysis of the material moorings of asylum reception, but rather to focus on certain material "fragments" to question the role of architecture and materiality in the context of asylum reception. The spatial and material characteristics of accommodation centers are argued to shape the work and experiences of reception, as well as to limit or facilitate the agency of both staff members and residents (e.g., Kynsilehto & Puumala 2017; Michalon 2015). They have an impact on how individuals move and interact in such spaces.

5.2.1. The convent, the hotel, the apartment building

As mentioned earlier, the reception centers in which I have carried out my fieldwork differ in many ways, in terms of their size, location, original function, appearance, and internal layout. Nevertheless, they all have in common the fact that they accommodate and offer a daily structure to people awaiting a decision on their asylum application.

Materially and architecturally speaking, Tirossa is an interesting example of the logics privileged by the cantonal authorities to manage moments of waiting and transition. Indeed, unlike many cantonal accommodation facilities, this building is the result of several years of planning and was built specifically to house asylum seekers. The construction reflects a desire to offer a modern, neutral, and functional, "safe" and controllable reception place, combining living and working zones, private and shared areas, educational and recreational spaces. It is, in other words, a multifunctional space defined by its "functional malleability" (Bernardot 2009: 105), as my initial observation also illustrates:

> The center is still very new as it was opened in 2018. It has a capacity of 180 places (beds) and consists of four floors (one ground floor and three upper floors). The center is "U" shaped; it has three sides that overlook a large inner courtyard. An oval-shaped control tower with 360-degree windows somehow closes off this open space.
>
> Although the center is in the heart of an industrial zone, it seems to have been built in such a way that it is oriented toward the forest and the river flowing beyond it. Despite a predominance of grey, sheet metal and concrete, and the fact that the center is surrounded by fences (about 1.5 meters high), this gives a paradoxical impression of openness and greenery surrounding the building. Each floor has its own open balcony overlooking the central courtyard. All the apartments and studios therefore look out onto a kind of corridor/terrace/balcony that faces into the heart of the building. Several benches are arranged on the balconies and seem to be used by the residents. Wherever they are, the residents of the center, as well as the staff, will have a view of the other floors.
>
> The right wing of the ground floor (when standing at the entrance of the building) is composed of the offices of the agents. There is a central one that is designed for this purpose and which also includes a counter (reception desk) and a small apartment that is used as an office. On the first floor, above the offices, there are "multi-purpose" classrooms, which are used for various activities (language courses, meetings, activities, etc.). The room (which extends more or less the entire length of the building) can be divided into three smaller rooms.
>
> The right and left wings of the building are comprised of small apartments, which are usually built as follows: one, two or three bedrooms with a shared bathroom. These apartments do not have a kitchen. In the central wing, there are large apartments, usually for families. Each floor has its own communal kitchen, which is reserved for the residents of that floor. Residents can access the kitchen with a badge that serves as a key. There are

> no locks in the center; everything is operated with badges. The kitchens are constructed as small personal kitchen units, each with a sink, two hotplates, a small fridge and cupboards. At the entrance to the kitchens, there is always a large open space with large dining tables and chairs. In the basement of the center are the laundry room (days assigned per floor), storage rooms (furniture, clothes, etc.), and a playroom. There is a ping-pong table, a football table, as well as several small tables and blackboards for the children. (Edited fieldnotes, summer 2018)

The shape of the building – very imposing in size – and the division of spaces is reminiscent of a prison facility, or also of a convent as the designers of the building suggest (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). Everything seems to have been designed to be functional for community living: external spaces for circulation, "cells" for sleeping, common areas such as refectories, rooms for integration activities, a large courtyard with aggregation function and a generous green area shielded by an oval-shaped artifact intended for surveillance. The architecture of Tirossa is reminiscent of the *panopticon* invented by the Bentham brothers at the end of the 18th century, the peculiarity of which is that it allows all inmates to be observed by a single security guard, without them being able to tell whether they are being watched. Later taken up by Foucault (1975), this panopticon reflects more broadly the threat of all-time surveillance.

Yet, unlike the convent and to some extent also the prison, the reception center has the function of being a place of passage, as well symbolized by the hotel structure that characterizes Bürgistadt in the canton of Bern. The function of the reception center is clearly not that of a long-term establishment, but rather that of a place with many comings and goings, for people awaiting the continuation of their journey. The impersonal character of the facilities is, in this sense, blatant and seems to want to prevent asylum seekers from taking root in these cold and aseptic spaces. This is particularly striking in Tirossa: All the walls of the center, both external and internal, are blank; no (attempt at) decoration brightens them up. This is, however, certainly linked to the fact that the building is relatively new and has not been personalized by its users, whether they live or work there. The materials used in the construction of the building – concrete, corrugated steel, limestone, aluminum – contribute to this feeling of coldness. The same goes for the (light and dark) grey and white colors that predominate to a large extent. All the apartments also have dark-grey tiled floors, with metal/stainless steel beds, white walls, and white wall cupboards. The only touch of color comes from the (plastic) chairs, which are fluorescent yellow, and the entrance doors of the apartments, which are painted orange. Some of the external facades of the building are also made of red sheet metal. The garden at the edge of the building brings the only touch of green inside the fence that surrounds this space of "hospitality".

While Tirossa distinguishes itself by its extra-ordinary character, which both breaks with the surrounding environment and impresses with its stature, the accommodation structures

observed in the cantons of Bern and Fribourg are, on the contrary, characterized by their "ordinarity". By this, I mean that these buildings, originally intended as temporary (hotel) and non-temporary (residential building) accommodations, have retained many of their original features, both in terms of their external appearance and their internal organization. These reception centers thus blend into the mass and go almost unnoticed in the local context, like Chamfors in the canton of Fribourg:

> The facility has a total of 18 apartments with 3.5 and 4.5 rooms, two of which are not used to house asylum seekers but are a place of activity and an office space for staff. A total of 16 apartments are thus intended for accommodation. In theory, there are 97 places to sleep, but "it's wishful thinking," says Simon [the head of the center], "it's always moving." For example, at the moment, there are 102 people in the building. "We're drowning in the neighborhood," says Simon. There's nothing to indicate the presence of asylum seekers here; there's no sign. (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

It is thus a multitude of internal details, specific places, and artifacts that contribute to transforming these buildings into spaces of "ordinary exception" (Agier 2009), i.e., spaces that reflect the complex and mundane reality in which asylum seekers find themselves:

> The building has two entrances. The entrance to the building is free, but the doors are closed at 10 p.m. The residents each have a key to open it; they also have a key for their apartment, but not for the rooms. There is a surveillance camera at each entrance to monitor who comes in and who goes out. When entering the center, the first apartment on the left, on the ground floor, is made available to the residents for various activities. The furniture is donated by [a cantonal religious institution]. There are, for example, many round bistro tables with chairs. There are also fridges and hotplates available. This apartment overlooks a small yard. On the right-hand side, at the entrance to the building, is the staff office, which is also an entire apartment. The stairs, which connect the two buildings from the inside, then lead to the upper floors or the basement.
>
> In the basement, there are many rooms with different functions: a classroom, a gym (called the "fitness" room), a laundry room (two machines for the residents, two for the staff) with a drying area (the drying machine is currently out of order), tool storage (huge reserve!), storage for furniture and various supplies, rooms with clothes donated by people and food crates brought by Table Suisse, and a technical room. In another room, they also prepare the necessary furniture for the newcomers. Unlike the one used to furnish the apartments, all this material is new and comes from IKEA.
>
> Simon, the head of the center, also shows me some of the apartments on the second floor. There is nobody home. Simon knocks and rings the bell before entering. The apartments are open, but the residents could lock them with their keys. These are the two apartments (or *collocations*, i.e., sharing accommodation) of the unaccompanied minors. The lights are on – even though it's daylight – and Simon tells me that they have a huge problem with the minors leaving everything on. According to him, the kitchen is another problem —

> more specifically, the stove, which is usually very dirty. I notice that eggs are being cooked in a pan even though there is nobody in the apartment. Simon turns off the heat to prevent the water from overflowing. He also turns off the lights. He tells me that posters should be put up on the wall to make the apartments feel more lively/pleasant. (Edited fieldnotes, Chamfors, autumn 2016)

The previous excerpt illustrates, in this sense, a pattern that can be found in several other reception centers. First, three distinct but communicating spaces are systematically observed: a private living space for the residents of the centers, composed of a multitude of individual rooms or shared apartments; one or more common "recreational" spaces, internal (living room, sports hall, games room, etc.) or external (terrace, garden, internal courtyard, etc.), accessible to everyone freely or with a key provided by the staff; a workspace for reception staff. These three areas are connected by a fourth space characteristic of reception centers: the corridors of the buildings, which, although they may seem like innocuous places of passage, sometimes represent important spaces for informal interaction between residents and staff. As I show in chapter 9.2, the "social dynamics of corridors" do indeed say a lot about the different philosophies of work and conceptions of reception implemented in accommodation centers.

Second, these spaces, which at the base lack character and distinctive marks, are the subject of attempts at decoration and embellishment – all the more so as they are often old buildings, sometimes quite deteriorated. Often, pictures, drawings, posters, and paintings are hung on the walls by the staff, sometimes in a rather clumsy and hasty way. Again, this varies depending on the organizations and individuals working in the reception facilities, but the desire to brighten up the somewhat dull side of the centers seems to be a constant. "Put in windows! I'd like some sunshine!" exclaims Kemal, a center manager (here, an underground shelter), when I ask him what he would like to change in the shelter structure, adding that: "there is not much we can do here... I have lots of ideas to change, but since this is a military shelter, even to make holes, you must ask [permission]. Otherwise, we could make a lot of decorations!" (Interview, autumn 2016). However, there are still many attempts to decorate, and this can be felt when visiting the underground center:

> I observe many decorations on the wall, (real and fake) plants, sofa corners where space permits, small bookcases with books, photos of migrant groups, etc. I also see a lot of pictures on the wall. Kemal tells me that he would like to set up a decoration system that changes every month. He would also like to use what the residents make. On the wall, there are some rather kitschy pictures of kittens, beaches with palm trees, but also pictures of the residents, a world map where asylum seekers mark their countries (but it is broken and should be changed, Kemal tells me). (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

Third, unlike Tirossa, where all the furniture is new and comes from IKEA, the other two centers are mostly furnished with second- and even third-hand furniture. The centers also

systematically include a room to store all the furniture and equipment necessary for the facility to function properly. This is usually a large cellar, or an attic as in Bürgistadt, which is regularly visited by reception staff or logistics staff to rummage through the piles of plates, cutlery, pots and pans, linen, quilts and cushions, and other miscellaneous items. A clothing storeroom is often also organized. These often tend to accumulate and reception officers – or rather trainees, civil servants or even "university researchers in immersion", like me – regularly organize "clearance sales" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018) to distribute them to the residents.

Finally, as already mentioned, the surveillance systems installed in the buildings constitute an important feature of reception centers. This is materialized around two interconnected objects: the surveillance cameras and the monitoring screens placed in the staff offices. While this type of security device sometimes takes on an imposing and (extremely) visible form, as in Tirossa, at other times, it seems to blend in with the rest of the furniture, almost becoming part of the banal and the mundane environment of asylum reception.

By oscillating between residential and service functions, the reception center offers not only the provision of essential needs, such as accommodation and medical care, but also education, integration, occupation, and entertainment services. Beyond the control and surveillance function, this comprehensive care evokes the "total institutions" analyzed by Goffman (1961), within which the three spheres of life "sleep, play and work" are gathered in the same place. Hence, following Goffman's (1961: 4-5) classification, the reception center can, under certain conditions, be seen as a total institution. First, two of its characteristics are isolation and promiscuity between inmates. Second, it is a place of (temporary) residence, in which all phases of the day's activities are scheduled from above by a system of formal rulings. Finally, it is also a space within which there is a split between a large managed group (asylum seekers) and a small supervisory staff (reception agents). The latter evolve daily in a central, albeit tiny, space within the reception center: the office. The next section examines its characteristics and functions.

Before diving into these places, however, it should be pointed out that the people who inhabit them on a daily basis – the reception agents – are far from being homogeneous in terms of their profiles and background. The teams I observed were composed, for example, of university graduates, social workers, people trained in hotel management, former refugees (usually without any job profile), economists, architects, micro-mechanics, or nurses. The age of the agents ranged from about 25 to 60, although there was a frequent turnover among agents that encouraged the arrival of new "youth". As shown in Chapter 6, this is largely related to difficult working conditions, particularly in the context of what Darling (2016a) and Kreichauf (2020) call "asylum austerity". Overall, I also observed a tendency for newcomers to be more educated than old-timers – or at least with a more extensive toolkit for reception work, either

because they had graduated from a higher school (of social work) or because they had just completed their academic studies (particularly in the humanities or social sciences). This may be part of the reason for the numerous tensions between the "old" agents (often considered more restrictive) and the "new" ones (described as "teddy bears" or "peace and love"), as for example witnessed in Tirossa (Fieldnotes, autumn 2018). Also, as suggested by some of my interlocutors in Bürgistadt, a plausible explanation for this is that the recruitment policy is no longer the same as it was in the 1980s and 1990s and that there is now more caution in hiring people without training in the social and migration field (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). As discussed in Chapter 6, young employees obviously also represent a cheaper workforce. Finally, although there were disparities between the different centers (for example, the Chamfors team was all male and the Tirossa team mainly female), I observed a general balance between men and women among the staff. As for the nationality of the agents, the origins were very diverse. From my observations, a small majority of my interlocutors seemed to be of foreign nationality (EU and non-EU). The managers (at the management and center levels) were, however, almost all Swiss nationals. When reading the following, it is therefore necessary to keep in mind that "the reception staff" in question, under its homogeneous appearances, is composed of individuals with extremely diverse origins, life and professional backgrounds, and socio-economic characteristics.

5.2.2. Office and counters

The staff's office is physically reminiscent of the interface of distance, which was mentioned in Chapter 4. Indeed, it appears as an airlock, a sealed or protected space located between two environments that differ in nature and that allows passage from one to the other. Although physically completely immersed in the reception center, this space is both a junction and a separation, both material and symbolic (Chevallier 1983; Dubois 1999). Within reception centers, this material interface between asylum seekers and agents takes different forms and fulfills several functions, both formal and informal.

Its contours are generally well defined and clearly delimit the living space of the residents from the agents' workspace. Depending on the building and its internal layout, it is usually a room or apartment specifically and solely dedicated to this function. Staff members have personal workstations there, equipped with computers, telephones, and the material necessary for their daily work. They spend a large part of the day dealing with administrative matters related to the residents' files, and, if their schedule permits, they sometimes circulate throughout the rest of the building and interact with the residents. Opening hours are usually posted at the entrance to the office and define the time slots at which the office opens its doors to the outside world or, rather, at which residents of the center can access it.

More specifically, interaction between the office and the rest of the center is usually provided through a reception desk. This, as a physical communication interface, is both an opening and a closing to the outside, or rather to the inside of the reception center. This means of mediation is subject to different practices depending on the organizational environment and work philosophy: It can be used systematically, or it can be bypassed, or sometimes even completely removed (see Chapter 9). Nevertheless, it disciplines and structures interactions in a routinized way and has a significant impact on the atmosphere of the center.

In this sense, beyond the counter and its functionalities, the presence of an "office space", a space that is both ordinary and specific, regulates interactions within the center in a particular way. First, the office takes on the form and function of a *secure space*, mainly for reception staff. It appears as a closed and (more or less) exclusive space, therefore accessible under certain conditions, for which asylum seekers must be invited to access it. In fact, despite the opening hours, access to the office by the center's residents is not entirely free and must comply with certain rules, such as going to the counter during opening hours, making an appointment with a member of staff, or ringing the bell at the door so that it can be unlocked by the staff. This allows the officers to work in a calm environment, "far" from the frenzy of the center, just like Andrea describes in the following excerpt, but also allows them to feel safe and protected from the potential altercations and fights that sometimes break out in the center:

> At noon, we eat together with Andrea. I suggest eating outside as the weather is nice and cooler than in the office, but she prefers to stay quiet inside. After the morning, which was quite full of "contacts", she tells me she needs a moment to refocus a little. (Fieldnotes, Tirossa, summer 2018)

Besides, one Monday, when I arrived in Tirossa, I noticed that storage cupboards had been placed against the large window overlooking the inner courtyard of the center. Martina, a reception agent, tells me that this prevents the residents from spending their time looking inside (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). It is, however, to be noted that despite the presence of "protective walls", reception agents are still connected to the outside world through the retransmission of images filmed by the surveillance cameras. This unequal relationship reflects a power gap between residents, who cannot easily look inside the office, and reception agents who can surveil outside their secure space.

Yet the protective and calming function of the office space does not only concern the reception agents. It sometimes extends to the residents of the center when they are invited to enter by the staff. On several occasions, I have observed agents bringing a resident in to explain a complicated situation or following the announcement of bad news, particularly in relation to the daily reception of mail (see also below). "I thought he was going to collapse," says Julien, the social educator responsible for unaccompanied minors in Chamfors, after having invited a young boy into the office kitchen to explain to him "calmly" that he had been summoned to

Bern for a second hearing and that the letter he had just received did not concern a negative decision on his asylum application (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016).

Secondly, the office also appears to be a *space of frustration and dissatisfaction* for the staff with the accumulation of administrative tasks it has to carry out on a daily basis. More than a secure space, the office is therefore also perceived as a place of (bureaucratic) confinement that prevents them from "getting out" and talking to the center's residents. Although this varies according to the staff members, their professional backgrounds, and interests – some of them feel rather reassured by the presence of walls or a counter separating them from the asylum seekers – the desire to escape from the office comes up again and again in the staff members' discourse and practices. For many, completing all the administrative tasks seems to be the main objective of the day and then spending time "outside". For example, a staff member in Tirossa feels that the hiring of a secretary would allow the social worker team to "get out of the office" more often and "concentrate on aspects of relations with asylum seekers" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2018). The office is thus a space that materializes and symbolizes the tension that inhabits the daily work of reception officers, between administrative and relational tasks, internal and external, attachment and detachment.

Thirdly, the office also symbolizes a *space of inequity,* as already mentioned above with Goffman: a numerical imbalance between inmates and officers, who are clearly in the minority but make decisions for the majority of residents. This imbalance is, for instance, spatially marked by the tension in the living spaces of asylum seekers and the office, which is regularly, during staff meetings, transformed into a space inaccessible to residents and takes on the appearance of a closed-door office. It thus materializes a decisional exclusion of the inhabitants of the reception center within the place where they reside. By becoming a space of asymmetrical interactions (Allard 2012) and power (Eule et al. 2017; Eule et al. 2019a), the office thus more broadly reflects the migration regime into which the apparatus of asylum reception fits.

Finally, and in connection with the previous point, the office is also a *space of mediation*, where mediation takes place between asylum seekers and politics (at the national, cantonal or even local level), such as, for instance, the processing of mail. The mail is, in effect, never distributed directly to the inhabitants of the center, but goes through the hands of the reception staff who, in turn, distribute it to the residents, yet not without some challenges:

> This morning, the social worker team discusses the reception and management of mail, including registered letters. The first question is who should collect them: the asylum seekers or the staff who have easier access to the post office? Secondly, and this seems to be the most important point today, how can they ensure that these letters – which, as they explain to me, very often contain important and official documents, particularly in connection with the asylum procedure – are read and processed quickly? Giulia makes me

> aware of the time limits for appeals against decisions, which are short and do not allow for too many errors on their part. It is, in fact, up to them, as reception officers, to contact a lawyer and transfer the information to him or her quickly so that he or she can make the appeal. She therefore asks her colleagues to always note the date of receipt of the letter, which is the date from which the time limit for appeal is calculated. (Fieldnotes, Tirossa, summer 2018)

Thus, officers assume an enabling and somehow also empowering role in mediating the encounter between asylum seekers and public authorities. As I will come back to this in Chapter 7, the latter are perceived by street-level workers as "the repressive state", from which they stand out strongly by perceiving their reception function as neutral. Consequently, as Darling (2014a) also observes, the letter materializes "the state" and the politics of asylum. As such, although reception agents never open migrants' letters without their agreement, they take on the role of "translators" to explain the contents of the letter to the person concerned. This often puts them in delicate positions vis-à-vis asylum seekers since they consider themselves as neutral but are responsible for communicating decisions with potentially significant impacts on the lives of migrants. In this respect, the heterogeneity of the reception staff – especially in terms of knowledge of the legal bases of asylum – is not without consequences and, although often not intentional, can lead to shortcomings in the processing of mail. This, in turn, may have significant impact on appealing against decisions, the delay of which ranges from five to thirty days according to the type of decision and procedure. At the same time, regardless of their profession, the migration paths of the agents lead some of them to be more attentive and sensitive to these issues; they themselves have sometimes been confronted with the same problems. The office is therefore the space in which the agents, through the "state intrusion" represented by the incoming mail, are continuously brought to position themselves vis-à-vis the residents, the migration regime, and "the state".

5.2.3. Artifacts of bureaucratic work

While the living spaces of the residents seem to be characterized by emptiness and a certain coldness, due in part to the impersonality of these places, one term that defines the agents' main workspace is that of accumulation: of papers, files, folders, post-its, and lists, or objects, keys, furniture, and lockers. All these seemingly insignificant elements contribute to creating a materially charged and somewhat oppressive atmosphere. They also reflect questions of power (Borrelli & Andreetta 2019). The office symbolizes the space within reception centers where the residents, as individuals, become photos and/or files that must fit into precise and predefined categories: male/female, adult/child, N/F permit or other, sick or not, vulnerable or not, etc. As I will show in Chapters 6 and 8, it is also the space that incarnates and crystallizes the organizational and moral struggles around the (neoliberal) bureaucratization of asylum reception.

Paperwork – in both physical and digital form – is indeed a crucial part of everyday life within reception centers, where officers are continually required to produce, read and file documents of all kinds. Paper trails, which can be defined as a "series of documents providing written evidence of a sequence of events or the activities of a person or organization" (Oxford Dictionary), are produced consequently:

> While we are all sitting in the office, Giulia and Andrea explain to me that they waste a lot of time on the various bureaucratic tasks they have to do on a daily basis. They give me the example of a medical appointment that must be written down and copied at least five times: in [the computer program], in the diary, on the board, on a communication sheet for the "transport team", on a sheet for the nurses, etc. (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

This "transposition on paper" can take several forms.

Individual files • The "individual files" of residents constitute a significant portion of the mass of paper that accumulates in the office.[74] In fact, each asylum seeker has his or her own file, in which the reception officers systematically store all the documents that concern them: a copy of their identity document, a copy of their residence permit, administrative documents (insurance, schooling, etc.), bills (medical appointments, transport passes, etc.), appointments, medical certificates, and so forth. Thus, as highlighted by Cabot (2012), referring to the Greek asylum procedure, these paper trails function as means to materialize asylum seekers' existences. A file is often made up of a paper folder, in which various colored plastic inserts with different headings are inserted. They are usually filed alphabetically in storage cabinets with drawers. Officers seem to move back and forth between this cabinet and their workstations, on which a portion of the files of residents are often piled.

Symbolically, it is interesting to see that when residents leave in the second phase of reception, they take "their file" with them to pass it on to the new referents. This collection of sheets and various documents is, in this way, an integral part of their luggage. The paper file thereby symbolizes the time, more or less long, spent at the center. As Julie noticed, the thicker the file, the longer the wait:

> Julie is putting away all the files she took out today. She stores them in the drawers in alphabetical order. She and Selim [a colleague] both laugh, saying that the thickness of the files could be a starting point for the second phase [of accommodation]. Julie is holding the family Rezid file, which is very thick, in her hands and shows me that nothing more can be put in it. "Maybe one day Gabriel will understand this?!" says Julie, who seems to be saying that the head of the center is not sensitive to the thickness of the files and the fact

[74] It should be noted that although files existed electronically in the three centers, or at least were in the process of being computerized, they were still systematically duplicated by a paper file. This often meant doing the double work of filing paper documents and photocopying them.

that it can indicate that the residents are ready to leave. (Fieldnotes, Bürgistadt, autumn 2017)

In reception centers, officers regularly update a list of "persons suitable for transfer" (Fieldnotes, Tirossa, summer 2018) to be consulted when individual apartments become available. It is, in fact, they who propose residents whenever vacancies are announced by the canton. However, it is always the canton that takes the final decision on who to transfer or not. Generally, these are residents who have been provisionally admitted (F permit) or persons who still have asylum seeker status (N permit), but who have been living in the reception center for a long time.

More broadly, a particularly thick file may also indicate a "difficult case" or a particularly vulnerable person (e.g., in terms of health).

Miscellaneous paper trails (or the fear of forgetting) • The agents' offices are also surrounded by a multitude of loose sheets hanging on the walls. These seem to pile up on the walls, sometimes in an orderly fashion, sometimes in a completely chaotic manner. They compile information that is needed daily: schedules, organization charts, contact lists, lists of participants for various activities, emergency numbers, checklists for various tasks to be carried out, lists of codes and abbreviations for the computer system, opening hours of the infirmary or of the on-call pharmacy, people who are not allowed to enter the center, etc. In the middle of these documents, there are also drawings (often donated by the children at the center) and small touches of humor or sarcasm, particularly in relation to daily work.

Paradoxically, paperwork may, in effect, become a cause and a (informal) means of protest against the increasing bureaucratization of their daily work. For instance, Murat, an officer at Chamfors, explains to me that he has decided to hang up two sheets of paper with the words "Stop the time-consuming administration!" and "Stop time-consuming sessions!" above his workstation to show his frustration with the administrative burden of certain tasks (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). The head of the same center also wrote a personal letter to the staff monitoring system "Tutoflex[75]" (timekeeping program) to express his frustration and disappointment at the uselessness of the program, nicknamed "Tutoflop". During my fieldwork, this sheet was hanging behind his desk and had even been updated for the "second anniversary of the program" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016).

Post-it notes and to-do lists are also an integral part of the daily life of reception staff. These small annotations enable them to transcribe on paper the many and varied tasks they have to carry out on a daily basis. The fear of forgetting some of these tasks seems to be a constant in the agents' daily work and is a real concern. Writing reminders thus allows them to freeze

[75] Fictional name

their ideas on paper, just like Andrea, who starts her working day by listing the various tasks, more or less urgent, that she has to perform:

> Wednesday, 8 a.m. Andrea explains that she has a lot of things to do today — a big to-do list. She starts by taking out her phone and shows me the list she made yesterday while she was waiting for a medical appointment in [name of the city] with some residents. She copies the items listed on her phone onto a blank piece of paper and describes a few of the things she has to do: the "legal stuff" (i.e., dealing with applications for disability insurance, authorizations and permits, school registrations); tasks to be done right away (e-mails to organize appointments, translators to call, notes to insert in [the common computer interface] so as not to forget); the residents she wants to talk to, the people she thinks need to be listened to or "who are not doing well". Andrea then continues to sort through her tasks and tells me that she absolutely must tidy up her desk. She takes each pile of paper one by one and looks at what can be thrown away, what needs to be filed, what needs to be done, and so on. She sees the name of a young Sri Lankan boy from the center written down and says to me, "He is not well. He is very aggressive, angry. I need to talk to him." "School placement, done!" and she throws away the sheet with the to-do list associated with it. In another pile of documents, she finds a sheet of paper with pictures of men (Sri Lankan, presumably) and a list of names and surnames. Andrea laughs and says to me: "Ah, look, Giulia's cheat sheet!" It is, in fact, a list that Giulia [a colleague] made for herself to remember the names of the Sri Lankans in the center. (Edited fieldnotes, Tirossa, summer 2018)

The need to write in order not to forget and the accumulation of memos reflect the frenzy that characterizes the working days in the reception centers. Paradoxically, as also observed by Kobelinsky (2010: 170), while the daily life of asylum seekers is marked by waiting and long stretches of time, that of reception agents is rather defined by urgency and lack of time, as I had strongly felt during my fieldwork (see Chapter 3). Interestingly, staff in detention centers seem, on the contrary, to experience boredom and idleness while waiting alongside detainees (Eule et al. 2019c: 154). I wonder, however, whether the frenzy that seems to characterize reception centers might not also turn into a certain monotony during "quieter" periods, with less regular and frequent arrivals and departures than those that characterized the period in which I conducted this research.

Regulations, procedures, and guidelines • In addition, many binders are added to the bureaucratic landscape of the agent's office; they are typically all gathered in a cabinet and their contents are indicated by a white label. They usually contain the internal regulations and guidelines of each reception center and organization, which concern both the running of the facility and the daily activities of the reception staff.

However, as thoroughly discussed in Chapter 8, this system of documentation takes on a different scope and form depending on the organizational environment. For example, ORS is

characterized by a particularly elaborate, computerized "practice documentation system", which includes all the procedures and guidelines drawn up by the organization's management. A member of ORS management even defines it as "the bible of common procedures" (Interview, autumn 2016). As I show in Chapter 8, this highly bureaucratic culture strictly in accordance with the ISO 9001 standard greatly contributes to what I call the "ISO(9001)-morphism" process that defines ORS, namely, a specific, neoliberal mechanism of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Conversely, despite apparent similarities, the ABR documentation system differs in many respects, particularly in the function assigned to these guidelines, but also in the informal discourses and practices they conceal.

Visualization and communication • Finally, two essential elements define the specific character of reception centers, and more particularly of the office: the center's dashboard (*le tableau du centre*) and the logbook (*le journal de bord*). The daily dynamics of the reception centers — the everyday life of the agents and, by extension, that of the residents — seem to be built and organized around these two working tools. The first is used to visualize all the center's residents, their distribution in rooms or apartments, as well as their main characteristics (photo, age, origin, illness, etc.). Many discussions and interactions between the officers take place in front of this board, which seems to be central in the office, as in Chamfors:

> The "board of the foyer", which allows agents to visualize the people living in the center, is located in the office area. Many discussions and interactions between the agents take place in front of this board. It is used for many things, such as checking the name of an asylum seeker, seeing who a certain resident is, marking who has scabies, who is pregnant, who goes to school, who is in the occupation program, etc. It is basically a panel that serves as a dashboard to visualize the entire household and ensure its proper functioning. (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

While the dashboard appears to be a logistical tool for visualization, the logbook is an important means of communication between reception agents:

> On the table where the officers work, there is often a blue binder, entitled "Journal: General remarks" (*Giornale: Osservazioni generali*). It contains all the annotations and observations that the agents have inserted in the [computer interface]. Every evening, the person who has the third shift (who therefore finishes work at 7 p.m.) is in charge of printing out the day's observations. The following morning, all the agents seem to automatically consult the binder to get up to date with the previous day's events. Everyone signs the document once it has been read. The annotations are written directly under the name of the resident concerned. For example, if an officer makes a medical appointment for a resident, he or she will go into the file in the computer and insert a new note. Several headings are possible depending on the person who writes the note: supervision, assistance, health service,

absence, etc. All annotations are signed and dated. (Edited fieldnotes, Tirossa, summer 2018)

As the person responsible for the first phase of reception at ORS also explains to me: "[the] logbook is the means of communication in the centers. [...] Taking a service in general for everyone means looking at the logbook to see if there is any particular information" (Interview, autumn 2016). As observed on many occasions, reading the logbook is the morning ritual of the reception staff on arrival at the office, who systematically sign it to indicate that they have been informed of the previous day's events. Most of the time, this reading is done individually, silently, and in a particularly concentrated manner. The officers seem to attach great importance to it and rarely forget to carry out this morning ritual. In Tirossa, the agents regularly had the reflex of handing me the folder with the daily observations and asking me if I had had the time to read it. This gesture was obviously made possible by the paper form of the logbook, whereas in the other centers, the logbook took the form of a word document or a computer interface that the agents consult from their computers.

It is indeed often during the morning reading of the logbook that the agents give their opinion on incidents or decisions taken with regard to certain residents. This may take the form of a spontaneous discussion or a written comment added directly to the logbook, as in the case of Gabriel, the center manager of Bürgistadt, who seemed to systematically respond to the comments of his colleagues by adding a small personal note saying, for example, "you did well" or "good decision" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). Conversely, the end of the working day corresponds to the writing of the observations and events of the day; again, in silence. The information contained in the logbook is not insignificant and can be used for the drafting of the monthly report of the center requested by the ORS management, as explained to me by the deputy head of Chamfors (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016), or as evidence of the work carried out (see Chapters 6 and 8).

5.3. The *longue-durée* of arrival

Although the reception center is officially a transitory place, in which asylum seekers are only supposed to reside for a limited amount of time, the temporality of the reception is that of a lasting temporary stay (Kobelinsky 2010: 52). Elastic and sticky time (Griffiths 2014) characterize the daily life of reception centers and that of asylum seekers who, depending on their case, reside there for varying lengths of time without knowing when this "suspended" time will start up again. In what follows, focusing on temporality, I retrace the journey of an asylum seeker from his or her arrival at the center to his or her departure. I show that while these two moments are well defined and mark a before and after, the in-between, that is, the time of waiting, is much more uncertain.

Yet, it is to be noted that the daily routine of the reception centers is also one of comings and goings, with new residents arriving and others leaving (transfer to an apartment, or sometimes voluntary departures, i.e., "disappearances"). In 2016, during my fieldwork in Chamfors, changes of residents followed each other at a weekly rhythm; the departure of a resident was systematically followed by the entry of a new person. On the contrary, these were very irregular and scattered movements in 2018. In Tirossa, two transfers to apartments (families) and three arrivals (single persons) took place over a period of four weeks. This was due to the fact that Switzerland was faced with a reduced number of refugee arrivals, but partly also to an (unofficial) political will to save money by moving some "long-term residents" – in other words, those who could hardly be removed to their country of origin despite a denied asylum application – to individual apartments that did not require continuous (and therefore expensive) care like in collective dwellings (Fieldnotes, autumn 2018; see also Chapter 6). Thus, the dynamism of movements is closely linked to the structural, yet also political context.

5.3.1. Entering the center, becoming a resident

The process of arrival of asylum seekers in the canton begins with an announcement from the SEM to the canton concerned on the number and identity of persons to be accommodated in reception centers. The latter then relays this information to the entity in charge of implementing reception, which is responsible for placing the new arrival in one of its accommodation centers according to criteria of gender, nationality, or specific needs. "The allocation [of an asylum seeker] to a canton is an extremely short process," explains Alessandro (Interview, summer 2016), the person responsible for the first phase of reception at ORS in the canton of Fribourg, who adds that it is not unusual for them to receive the information in the late afternoon, around 4 p.m., for the following day. Once the logistical aspects have been clarified, the new arrivals present themselves at the organization's central office on D-day and are given information about their place of allocation and residence, where they usually go independently.[76]

Much like Goffman's analysis of becoming an inmate in a total institution, for asylum seekers, entering the reception center implies a new categorization, that of "resident". This process of transformation and assignment of a new bureaucratic identification involves learning on the part of newcomers. Arrival at the center is also a special moment of encounter between the organization in charge of reception and the new arrivals. The former, through its reception officers, has the role of communicating to the second their rights and obligations, as well as the codes that govern the reception infrastructure and the time of waiting. The following scene

[76] Exceptions are made for people with reduced mobility and for centers that are particularly remote and difficult to reach by public transport. Although this is the case for Tirossa, no transport measures seemed to be in place for new arrivals.

illustrates the process of entrance that formalizes the arrival of Zina, a young asylum seeker, in Tirossa, as well as the assignment of her new identification of resident:

> Around 11:30 a.m., the new resident, Zina, arrives from the transit center in [name of town]. She arrived alone, by public transport and on foot. She carries with her a single travel bag in pink-purple tones. Giulia, who has prepared her file, is in charge of the entrance interview. She puts all the documents in front of her and takes her "cheat sheet" to remember everything she needs to tell her. Giulia first introduces herself, the center, and the rest of the team. She then explains the different rules of the center: no visitors after 10 p.m. (they cannot stay overnight); if men come to visit a woman, they cannot go into the room but into the common areas (kitchens); no alcohol allowed; etc. She also explains that every resident is entitled to seven days of absence per month; it is sufficient to ask the office for permission. Exceptions and special absences can be requested and should be discussed with the center coordinator. Giulia then explains that "many people from different cultures, languages and origins" live in the center and that tensions and conflicts can occur. It is therefore "important to always be respectful." Giulia then takes the pile of documents she has in front of her, and Zina has to sign it. All the documents are written in Italian and Giulia has to translate and explain them (in outline):
>
> (1) She starts by filling in the personal data form, asking her last name, first name, date of birth, place of birth, education/occupation, parents' names, etc.
>
> (2) The second document is entitled "acknowledgment of debt"; it stipulates that in case of breakage, the agents can take away up to CHF 150 of the money a resident receives. Giulia specifies that this has never happened – "it's bureaucracy," says Giulia – but that this document must be signed anyway.
>
> (3) A third document specifies that at the beginning of each month, CHF 6 is taken from the residents to pay those who clean the center (CHF 3/hour). A single person like Zina therefore receives CHF 102 per week.
>
> (4) The fourth document explains that after three unjustified absences, a sanction can be applied, "but we try to avoid it," says Giulia.
>
> (5) An attendance check is also carried out every evening at 9 p.m. by the security agents. She specifies that in the event of absence, which is authorized on an occasional basis, she must imperatively inform a reception officer or a security agent.
>
> (6) Giulia also gets her to sign the "agreement on objectives", explaining that with this signature, she demonstrates her "willingness to learn" (and therefore by extension to adopt the rules and codes of the Swiss society).
>
> (7) She makes her take the literacy test to see if she can write and recognize the alphabet; Zina does not speak Italian at all but speaks good English.
>
> (8) The last document certifies that all the information has been given to the person.

> Finally, after all this, Giulia takes a picture of the newcomer so that she can insert her photo in their files and folders. She also shows her around the kitchen, the laundry room, and finally introduces her to her bedroom, which she is going to share with another woman. (Edited fieldnotes, summer 2018)

Thus, the admission procedure takes the form of a veritable bureaucratic rite of passage in which the newcomer is somehow dispossessed of his or her role and personal characteristics in the wider world to assume the arrangements of the new establishment. Through this "trimming" or "programming procedure", the new inmate "is shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment" (Goffman 1961: 16). The visit to the accommodation building, then, marks the physical arrival of the asylum seekers in the reception center, the moment he or she truly enters "the inside" and is assigned to a new living space.

This entrance, sometimes carried out hastily by reception staff depending on their availability, codifies the rest of the stay. As an initial moment of socialization, it also lays the foundations for the relationship between the new arrival and the reception officers who, as Kobelinsky (2012b: 55) also observes, sometimes remain more attached to the purely official and bureaucratic aspects of reception on arrival at the center, while others try to establish a relationship of trust with the new arrivals by asking them questions about their country of origin, habits, religion, and occupation (see Chapter 9). My observation, however, reflects a standardized way of receiving newcomers for the signing of the reception contract.

5.3.2. Managing waiting time

In the ORS internal charter, one can read: "we help asylum seekers to compensate judiciously and to bear the uncertainty of their fate as well as the time of waiting" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). Unlike the time of entry into the reception center, which is rapid and straightforward, the time of waiting is indeed characterized by uncertainty as to its duration. As an "interstitial time" (Tisato 2017) between the arrival of asylum seekers in Switzerland and their establishment in an individual accommodation, it is an empty time-space that reception organizations and agents, but also residents are responsible for filling and occupying. Asylum seekers are, in this sense, subjected to a specific spatio-temporal regime that frames their days, both outside and especially inside the reception facilities. In what follows, I propose to address the institutional measures put in place to manage the (in)activity of the residents. The analysis is inspired by the sequences observed by Kobelinsky (2012b) in the temporal experience of asylum seekers in reception centers in France, as well as by Griffiths (2014) and Marti (2017) on the different experiential temporalities they identify in immigration detention and prisons.

Control, monitoring and supervision • As previously mentioned, the semi-confinement of asylum seekers is an integral part of the reception apparatus and makes it possible to control

and monitor the movement of individuals. As "constrained bodies" (Kobelinsky 2012b: 184), asylum seekers arriving in Switzerland are subjected to a wide spectrum of "exclusionary" situations where they are constrained both to mobility and immobility. This indefinite but "frenzied time" (Griffiths 2014: 1999) is marked by temporal breaks, at which time developments can happen suddenly and without warning.

At the same time, the practices of control and supervision that take place in reception centers impose constant repetition on the everyday life of asylum seekers. A good example of this is the attendance register that the residents are obliged to sign several times a week, as discussed in Chapter 9.2.2. This goes hand in hand with the regular control of their activities, the weekly or even daily inspection of their rooms, as well as the monitoring of their mail. By affecting the autonomy of residents, these practices transform them into "confined bodies" (Kobelinsky 2012b: 186-187) subjected to a circular and codified temporality.

Care • Further, arriving in a reception center also provides the migrant with the minimum but necessary material conditions to ensure survival, i.e., eating, sleeping, healing. One of the main functions of the reception centers is indeed to provide (basic) medical care to asylum seekers. A nurse or doctor is regularly present in the accommodation facilities and responds to the different needs of the residents. Reception centers therefore also become a time of tranquility and a space of self-reconstruction (ibid.: 185). Although it varies considerably between organizations and reception officers, this also goes in parallel with a "time for listening" (Kobelinsky 2010: 187), during which asylum seekers can express their problems, pain, and anxiety. As illustrated in Chapter 9.2.3, medical care may therefore be accompanied by (in)formal forms of encounter and more or less institutionalized psychological care.

Workfare • Yet, the encampment and constrained mobility of asylum seekers is simultaneously combined with the obligation to be active. Managing the residents' free time is indeed a way of maintaining, supervising, but also entertaining them (Kobelinsky 2012b). In Chamfors, Bürgistadt, and Tirossa, the main system put in place to keep the residents in activity, and to allow them to earn some money, is the "workfare" system, common to all the facilities, which strongly structures the daily life of the reception centers, both from the point of view of the residents and of the agents who supervise these activities. This system works on the principle of "service for service" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017) and aims to ensure order and cleanliness in the reception centers. All kinds of tasks, more or less constraining, revolving mainly around cleaning and housekeeping tasks, are proposed daily to the residents who must first register to carry them out. In return, they are paid CHF 3 per hour (but cannot receive more than CHF 150 per month). A weekly or monthly turnover is usually set up to ensure that everyone can participate.

Although these tasks are not mandatory, there seems to be indirect pressure on residents who are rather negatively perceived by the officers if they do not perform them. "Insufficient self-governance or responsibility-taking" (Kohl 2020a) are indeed recurring assertions. Further, as I return to below, these tasks also appear to be an opportunity to "teach" residents how to clean "well" (or at least by supposedly Swiss or Western standards). Therefore, the exercise of these activities results in many appraisals by reception staff of the behavior of residents, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> Marc-André, an officer who deals a lot with the workfare in the center, marks the names of the residents who currently undertake these tasks in his little notebook. He explains a few things about them by looking at the center's dashboard: "He is too intellectual to work", "I don't really like him, even if I don't know him" (in a low voice), "He is a good worker", "Him I give him his last chance" (after the resident having done his work badly). (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

Gendering effects intervene in these activities, even though they are usually contrary to the intentions of street-level workers and policymakers. For example, asylum-seeking women, who are frequently accompanied by young children, often encounter difficulties in participating in them as there is no childcare available (on this topic, see also Kohl 2020b). Among couples with children, it is also often the men who seem to carry out the workfare, thus remaining the main breadwinner in the family. However, this is probably also because certain tasks related to building maintenance (e.g., moving heavy furniture) are only offered to the men, as they are usually considered more "masculine" by stewardship officers, who in turn are most men. Conversely, cleaning tasks are assigned interchangeably to women and men (but this might also be related to the fact that the latter are in the majority within the centers). Thus, the workfare system specific to the reception centers represents a sort of "miniature labor market" in which the gendered dynamics that prevail in the wider Swiss society (e.g., Fischer & Dahinden 2017; Moret et al. 2012) seem to be reproduced. To a certain extent, it also reproduces power structures in which migrants are led to accept poorly paid and demeaning jobs to prove their willingness to work and to avoid sanctions (G. Alberti 2017).

Occupation programs • Additionally, occupation programs (also known by their diminutive "O.P.") are offered to asylum seekers on a regular basis. Most of the time, these activities are offered in collaboration with external companies or individuals in need of temporary labor. However, it can also happen that an organization completely internalizes these employment programs, such as ORS in the canton of Fribourg:

> Today I am visiting the premises of the occupation program designed by ORS. Sven, the person in charge, takes me on a tour of the building. *Bicycle workshop*: there are currently eight asylum seekers, two teams of four taking turns. They are mandated by a municipality

> to maintain the bicycles in public service and also take care of the bicycles of ORS employees and asylum seekers. They do not repair bicycles of external persons. *Bakery*: Sven tells me that it doesn't really work anymore. They don't have the necessary equipment. But he recently developed a new project that he submitted to ORS and the canton to improve the O.P. It involves a "cold catering" activity, which would also allow participants to have lunch. The next room is reserved for *French classes*. Then, at the end of the corridor, there is a room for *dry cleaning and sewing department* – workshop in which only women were participating at the time of my visit. They take care of the center's affairs (washing, ironing, etc.). In sewing, they learn the basics. For example, they make layettes for babies, curtains, alterations to clothes, etc. Overall, everyone tells me that in three months (i.e., the duration of the training) the participants cannot learn much, that it is too short. In addition, they face a significant lack of space. The waiting list is enormous; some have been waiting since 2015. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

Contrary to external O.P., this "bubble" inside ORS implies that asylum seekers adapt to the mold imposed on them by the same organization that supervises them daily in their place of residence. Overall, as observed by Kohl (2020a: 179), the workfare system and occupation programs contribute to making the (meagre) income of asylum seekers dependent on the performance of tasks often of little value in the outside world. The "potato" O.P. – which I have heard a lot about in Bürgistadt – is a telling example: Although the reception staff all agree that potato harvesting is a difficult and demanding activity, which they themselves would not like to carry out, they are surprised that no resident wants to take part in it, even though they are paid CHF 250 at the end of the month (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). In fact, they are constantly looking for interested people.

Recreational and educational activities • To counter residents' idleness, accommodation facilities also offer cultural, recreational, and educational activities, which are supposed to present asylum seekers with the "reality" of the "host" society. At the same time, asylum seekers are obliged to participate in language courses to acquire basic communication skills in the local language, i.e., German, French or Italian, depending on the canton (see below).

The management of (in)activity appears to be rather chaotic and uneven depending on the organizational environment. Without wishing to generalize these observations, it is nevertheless interesting to observe their contours and specificities, which certainly reveal broader dynamics. It appears that the organization of activities is mostly carried out on an *ad hoc* basis and often does not fit into a (pre-)defined daily or weekly program. Like his colleagues, Julien, a reception agent at Chamfors, explains to me that he organizes activities only when he has "a few free hours", namely, spontaneously, for example to organize a soccer match or go shopping for cheap clothes. He explains that he "generally doesn't have enough time because he also does other things, such as dealing with the [reception] counter when he shouldn't" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). In 2016, ORS' desire to add "recreational activities"

(*activités d'animation*) to the specifications for reception agents had, moreover, aroused much criticism and indignation in the face of working conditions that were already considered problematic, particularly in terms of personnel and workload. As a result, the organization of activities is most of the time only made possible thanks to the involvement of volunteers or voluntary civil conscripts, who either supervise the activities organized by the organizations or propose them themselves (on this topic, see also Chapter 7).

As the many "activity reports" in Bürgistadt show, these activities take place in or outside the center and take many forms. They are very similar to those offered in other centers: picnics by the river or the lake, (guided) visits to exhibitions, or sometimes to the municipal library, participation in a film festival, modeling clay with the children of the center, organization of a lottery, projection of films or documentaries in the center, sewing courses, cooking classes (often to learn how to cook with little money), bicycle tours (for those who own one), walks in the forest or in the mountains, visit of a monument, card tournaments, "community" meals, participation in a symphony concert, and so forth.[77] In this respect, my observations indicate a recurrence: the systematic hustle and bustle before each activity to bring participants together. The following excerpt is one example among others:

> Tuesday, 2 p.m. A volunteer arrives in Chamfors for the French activity. Problem: no resident is there, and the staff members were not (or no longer) aware of this activity. The lady is surprised that the participants do not know how to keep an appointment. Barzan, a reception officer, tells her that this is indeed how it is, that it is always up to the agents to remind them. "They'll have to learn this for their integration…", the lady says. A resident who happened to be passing by goes to pick up the others for the course. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

Thus, whether during activities organized inside or outside the center, by reception agents or volunteers, the half-hour beforehand is characterized by agents and even residents running around to remind people of the day's activities and/or knocking on the doors of those who are late, especially when transportation is organized.

Yet, the problem illustrated by these situations does not seem so much that of the asylum seekers who do not know how to keep an appointment, nor that of the agents who forget the activities and communicate them poorly, but rather that of their meaningfulness. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, the forced stillness produced by the reception apparatus pushes it to come up with motivational activities, which often do not consider the users' skills and interests, nor does it allow asylum seekers to work — or, at least, not according to their actual

[77] Generally speaking, the prices of these activities are not high and vary between CHF 15 and CHF 200. However, the means available seem to be unequal depending on the organization. While ABR and ORS were juggling with rather limited financial means, this did not seem to be the case at CRS. As discussed in Chapter 7, this can certainly be explained by the internal policy of the CRS, which supplements the cantonal budget by seeking external funding from private foundations. In addition, unlike other organizations, CRS operates with a "structured" volunteering base that allows the organization to easily access additional manpower in the organization of activities.

abilities. Likewise, following a neoliberal logic, this system reinforces the idea of an "ideal behavior", in which human beings need to be productive, contradicted by the structural impositions, which hinder migrant individuals' action. Besides, although some activities (a minority) are followed by a collective discussion, for example on the theme addressed by an exhibition or more broadly on the subjective experiences of the participants, most of the time they hardly connect with a broader socio-political environment, in or outside the center. Therefore, like the residents, some of the agents also do not find it entirely meaningful to organize these activities, such as Andrea in Tirossa, who would like to take more advantage of them to create a link with and among the residents:

> Giulia, Lorenza, and Andrea talk again about Monday's outing to the farm. Lorenza asks Andrea how the outing was, if it was interesting. Andrea explains that it was great, that they had several different activities, but that it was mostly very hot, and the day was long for the (young) participants. She adds that, for her, there was a missing "education" side – "I lack [social] education". She would have liked to be able to benefit from the activities to explain certain things to the participants and to make them aware of others. (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

However, the difficult working conditions, as well as the extremely diverse professional profiles of reception agents, mean that most of them do not have the time or the tools to ask themselves such questions; the main concern being how to fit such a task into an already busy daily routine. Often, my interlocutors made me understand that in their eyes the most meaningful thing to do would be to hire additional staff. In contrast to them, the latter would ideally be specialized in the field of socio-cultural activities.

Thus, asylum seekers are subjected to paradoxical expectations: Even though the (non-compulsory) activities proposed are not very valorizing and stimulating and are moreover often organized in a chaotic and rather unexpected manner, residents are expected to participate in them (and therefore to be constantly present in the center). Consequently, the absence of an asylum seeker is sometimes used by some officers as a means of reprimanding these residents by telling them that they cannot as a consequence organize activities "for them":

> Julien, a reception officer, talks to a young man (Nahom, originally from Eritrea) who arrived about a month ago. He doesn't understand French well, so it is difficult to communicate with him. Julien wants to scold him because lately he has often left the home on weekends without saying where he was going. He tells him what he should do, namely, tell him where he is going and ask permission. He really wants Nahom to understand that what he has done "is not right", even though the youth was actually going to see his family in [name of the city]. Julien tries to make him understand that if he is not at the center, he cannot organize activities for him (French classes, school, or other). He asks him if he would like to participate "like the others" and Nahom answers that he would. "But you

> have to be at the center for that!", tells Julien, adding that if he is absent too often, he will be punished (money withdrawn at the beginning of the month). (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

Although this example concerns the case of an unaccompanied youth, that is, a population in need of substantial supervision, these expectations can also be observed with regard to adults who are somehow infantilized by the constant (disciplinary) interventions of reception agents in their daily life.

Activities and animations thereby create a rhythm, impose a cadence to a time-space characterized by the monotony of waiting, yet characterized by a continual coming and going of (new) residents. As can be seen from the previous examples, they have a twofold purpose. First, they target the temporality experienced by asylum seekers. The challenge is to occupy them, to fill the residents' time; a little like one would do with children, as Kobelinsky (2010: 173) argues. The second objective of managing residents' time of waiting is education. In a way, it is a question of taking advantage of this empty temporality to educate residents and teach them the codes of Swiss society, with a view to preparing them for their (potential) future integration. Ironically, while their skills are assessed to decide on their ability to live individually, asylum seekers are not (fully) allowed to work and take on eventually meaningful tasks to become independent. Instead, the system navigates and strongly controls what migrants are and are not allowed to do while placing responsibility and agency to be active on the individual.

5.3.3. Optimizing waiting time: the normalization of residents?

The temporality, or rather the directionality of the management of waiting, is therefore twofold. On the one hand, it is a matter of occupying the daily life of the inhabitants of reception centers to prevent them from becoming bored and falling into idleness. But the management of waiting also takes place over a longer time frame than the daily routine and already looks toward the "after": leaving the center and integrating into Swiss society, by settling into an individual dwelling without supervision and comprehensive care. In this sense, the time-space of reception also aims to build a doorway to the outside world, or at least to provide asylum seekers with the tools deemed necessary to integrate into a world that is supposedly unknown to them. Thus, as also highlighted by Kohl (2020a) in the Danish asylum system, asylum seekers become subjects supposedly in need of intervention to foster their agency and their integration readiness.

In this sense, a shift in terms of objects of governance can be observed: a shift between "bodies" to be occupied and "subjects" to be disciplined. In effect, the reception center seems to be located at the intersection between two apparatuses of governance, that of bodies management and that of social and economic subjects management. Accordingly, although based on similar

regimes of practices, this second apparatus is specifically aimed at the socio-economic inclusion of potential residents, or even future citizens.[78] While acknowledging the ambivalences and entangled rationalities of asylum reception, this section reflects on the extent to which this points to a process of normalization through which asylum seekers would be (un)intentionally integrated in a national order of things (see Fresia & Von Känel 2015). This reflection will be continued in the conclusion of this chapter.

As observed during my fieldwork, the transition out of the reception center corresponds with a veritable ritual of skills learning and assessment. This process aims to instill the necessary knowledge and skills in asylum seekers in preparation for their release from the center. It already starts with the activities discussed in the previous section but is also carried out through the organization of compulsory courses, or modules, dealing with different matters, such as language, housing, finance, schooling, health, habits and customs, sex and gender, as well as professional integration.[79] Non-participation in these courses is very badly perceived by reception staff and can result in punishment (e.g., removing the person from the opportunity to perform workfare) or financial penalties. Based on this training, the agents assess whether a person is ready to be transferred to individual housing and to settle on his or her own. Therefore, the neoliberal mantra of active citizenship (Swyngedouw 2019), which sees the autonomous, self-governing and self-sufficient citizen as someone who is ideally no longer dependent on the welfare state, appears as central here.

In the canton of Ticino, for example, "skills assessment" (*bilancio delle competenze*) is based on the evaluation of the following five criteria: language courses taken, general learning/cultural modules in which they participated, other activities in which they took part, behavior, and independence. The evaluation of the latter two points is carried out by the staff members based on their daily interactions with the person concerned. "Good" behavior is defined as one in which residents "comply with the rules" of the center and those defined by the agents, but also "civil coexistence with others [residents]" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). While the internal document defining these different points emphasizes that it is difficult to set a quantifiable objective for the assessment of behavior and thus places responsibility for the evaluation onto the agent, the following points are mentioned:

> The migrant has assumed a high degree of independence: own administrative management, independence from the social and health service, punctuality, [...] (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

In the category "other activities", it is stipulated that the asylum seeker must "have developed at least one area of interest (ideally having participated in an occupation program) and have

[78] The book edited by Meeus et al. (2019), for example, offers a detailed analysis of these processes of arrival toward settlement and integration.
[79] These are very similar to the "activation program" analyzed by Kohl (2020a) and Kreichauf (2020) in Danish reception centers.

participated in at least two activities [organized] by the staff during his or her stay in the reception facility." For the organization in charge of the reception work and the canton, it is argued that the objectives of activities programs are to "keep asylum seekers occupied, get [them] to know the territory better, improve [their] integration" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018).

Therefore, the management of subjects also reveals important stereotypes in the perception of asylum seekers and their difficulty in integrating: the "migrant other" from a different culture, the "abusive asylum seeker" as less inclined to be motivated and active, but also the "vulnerable refugee" who requires special attention. These different figures are shaped by the surrounding discourse of "deservingness" (Ravn et al. 2020) and capability: Who deserves to enter into Swiss society? Who is capable of living on his or her own, without receiving state-funded assistance? As I have observed in my various fieldwork studies, these discourses not only influence the rationale of the policy put in place by the Confederation for the integration of people in the asylum field, but also underpin the daily practices of reception officers in this field.

Overall, the management of subjects indicates the omnipresence of a sedentarist lens, based on the conviction that migrants will stay (forever) in their country of resettlement (Schrooten & Meeus 2019: 7). In a Foucauldian reading, it reveals a perception of residents as persons to be disciplined, as "others" who need intervention to bring them in line with "the rest of society". Accordingly, the time-space of waiting becomes an important wheel in the fabric of newcomers (here, persons seeking refuge) and in the (normative) production of their future becoming. By the very rationalities of the reception policy, asylum seekers are subject to specific codes and lifestyles. Although they have not yet fully "set foot" on Swiss territory due to the very ambiguity of asylum seeker status, residents of reception centers are expected to respect and reproduce the "Swiss way of life". In this sense, they are expected to demonstrate their independence and willingness to integrate before they have received a decision on their asylum application, or even sometimes before they have the right to work.

5.3.4. The departure, the transfer

As soon as the transfer to the second reception phase is announced, asylum seekers are suddenly led to experience a fleeting, accelerated time. The transfer to an individual apartment is indeed a decision that is made quickly and is announced by post to the residents shortly before the move. As previously mentioned, the frequency of transfers is irregular and rather unexpected. Time suddenly accelerates, and residents usually have little time to prepare their belongings. This sequence of the *longue-durée* of arrival also marks the passage from the category of "resident of a reception center" to that of an individual deemed autonomous. As several reception agents explained to me, the passage to the second phase of reception is synonymous with a change in temporality, also linked to the different logics that structure this

new phase. Unlike the care provided in collective accommodation centers, the notion of integration is much more present and guides the personal support provided to individuals.

The transfer can also mean moving from one reception center to another, for family or logistical reasons (e.g., lack of space), but also because of bad behavior (therefore in the form of punishment) or disagreements with other residents:

> Next week, two residents will be transferred to apartments in [name of city]. Murat explains to me that they are going to make an exchange with a Sri Lankan who was previously in the center but who behaved badly in the second phase (alcohol, noise, etc.). The social assistants have therefore decided to put him back in the first phase at [name of the center]. "He will then have to sign three times a week," he says. (Fieldnotes, Chamfors, autumn 2016)

Therefore, the transfer to another center can also be a concern, or even be perceived as a punishment by the residents who, as I have observed, exclaim in a frightened manner "transfer?!" when the agents explain to them what is written on the letter they have just received and tell them where to meet for their appointment (Fieldnotes, Chamfors, autumn 2016). But the transfer is also a moment of joy for many residents who are looking forward to a personal living space that will allow them to live more independently. In this sense, the transfer is perceived by the residents as a success, a further step toward settlement in Switzerland. On this occasion, the residents often come to congratulate those "on the way out" for the news of their transfer to an apartment, as I have observed on several occasions:

> The Eritrean residents who already stopped by the office this morning invite us [Andrea and I] to have coffee. They have placed carpets on the floor in front of their apartment, on the "balcony", and serve the coffee outside. At the same time, a man is roasting corn and handing us pieces. Grapes are also placed on a plate. Several people are already seated, but they are not all from the same family. We spend some time with them. Several residents of the center (of other nationalities) pass by to congratulate Ruun, a Somali woman, on her upcoming departure. Yesterday, she learned that she and her two children will be able to move into an apartment. (Edited fieldnotes, Tirossa, summer 2018)

As mentioned above, if the transfer or departure to an apartment implies a break in the monotonous daily life of the asylum seekers, it is also synonymous with stress for the reception officers who are in charge of preparing the necessary documents for departure.

On the day of departure, a vehicle is provided to transport the transferred persons and their personal belongings. As with paper files, personal belongings multiply with the time spent in the center. While some have only one or two suitcases, other residents (mostly families) have accumulated numerous objects, furniture and clothing that require the use of a van. As a rule, the social workers in the second phase are responsible for picking up the transferred persons and bringing them to their new apartment. The moment of departure is sometimes

emotionally charged for both the residents and the reception staff, who have created a bond, sometimes intimate, with these people:

> Today is the departure of Ashna, her husband, and her three children. Several residents help the family get their belongings downstairs to be loaded into the van. I see a lot of emotion in everyone, residents and staff alike. "A pillar of the center is leaving," Luigi tells me. They all hug each other; many of them are crying. All those who have to leave for groceries postpone the departure as much as possible to be able to say goodbye to Ashna. Once everyone has left, a boy bursts out sobbing in the courtyard; Chiara tries to console him. (Fieldnotes, Tirossa, summer 2018)

For practical and logistical reasons related in particular to transport and the agents available for it, the transfer from the first to the second phase often also corresponds to the restarting of an arrival-waiting-departure cycle; as if they were time sequences that never stopped. The departure of a resident is, in fact, often combined with the arrival of a new asylum seeker.

5.4. Conclusion

As Groisman's quotation in the introduction to this chapter expressed, the reception center is a space situated between home and prison. It is both a space of care and recomposition of the self, and a space of semi-confinement.

Beyond the profoundly antagonistic character of the reception center widely discussed in the literature (Campesi 2015; Kobelinsky 2012b; Makaremi & Kobelinski 2009; Szczepanikova 2013), it is interesting to break down the rationalities that run through this space. There is a logic of control and surveillance, to always keep an eye on asylum seekers and ensure their presence during the asylum procedure. It is a logic of assistance, on the one hand, material, to ensure basic needs, but also personal, both from the point of view of managing the personal files of the residents and of listening, advising and accompanying them. It is also a logic of occupation, to prevent residents from becoming bored and falling into idleness. And further, it is an educational, if not disciplinary, logic, to provide the necessary tools and knowledge for entering Swiss society. This latter logic is embodied both in language and general culture courses and in the imposition of a highly structured and regulated daily life.

The articulation of these multiple, often contradictory rationalities participates in the construction of a paradoxical space. This paradox is also discussed in the prison environment to demonstrate its contradictory nature as both a space of deprivation of liberty and a space of (re)socialization (Cabanel 2002; Milhaud 2017). However, the infrastructure of asylum reception operates less as incarceration and more as a "decelerated circulation of mobility" (Tsianos & Karakayali 2010: 384). The everyday life and movements of individuals seeking asylum are slowed down, as if suspended. In this sense, as suggested by Thorsaug (2019: 211-

212), reception centers materialize the transnational politics of mobility governance, where people are kept "on hold" due to a dual normativity of arrival, where people are supposed to prepare simultaneously for two entirely different, alternative outcomes: settlement or return.

For these reasons, by way of conclusion, I propose to overcome the paradoxical nature of the reception center by reflecting on its seemingly suspended character. As I have shown in this chapter, this suspension may be characterized in several ways. First, from a legal (and territorial) perspective: It represents the struggles of asylum seekers to access protection, and, more specifically, the threshold between sovereign and non-sovereign territory. Second, the suspension is also spatial and social. Reception centers not only produce territorial limits (borders), but also (re)produce social categories (boundaries), such as the one of the "asylum seeker population" (Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2013: 185; Thorsaug 2019: 209). By placing asylum seekers in collective accommodation centers, sometimes completely outlying, they are kept away from the local web of social, economic and political interactions (Agier 2016: 19). Third, asylum centers are locations within which asylum seekers are subject to multiple temporal dimensions, including the systematic primacy of waiting. Thus, the "suspended time", which Griffiths (2014: 1996-1998) identifies as one of the four temporal uncertainties of refused asylum seekers, also characterizes the daily life of asylum seekers in procedure. As highlighted by Coutin (2005), the very term "asylum seeker" indeed implies a transitory and temporary condition, between illegality, refugee status, and deportability. Finally, as I show in the next chapter, the structural (and organizational) conditions that shape the reception of asylum seekers may also be perceived as contributing to its suspended nature, particularly through the political, economic and thus material and professional uncertainty that prevails in these places.

Yet, while being spatially, temporally, and legally suspended, these spaces are as much incorporated in wider transnational dynamics of mobilities, of belongings, of flows of information, and other cross-border relations (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Levitt & Jaworsky 2007). Thus, as Agier (2008) and Horst (2006) point out in the context of refugee camps, residents may transcend the suspended character of these spaces by (re)situating them within transnational webs of exchanges, migratory paths, but also coping strategies. Showing how specific and situated forms of political membership can be produced in and by the camp, Sigona's (2015) analysis is illuminating in this respect and also reveals one of the main limitations of this research, namely the absence of a resident's perspective. Getting closer to the "benign aspects of camps" (ibid.: 12), that is, strategies and techniques adopted on a daily basis by those who inhabit these spaces to claim rights and membership, is indeed crucial in order to "de-exceptionalize" the infrastructure of reception. As such, as I was able to observe and participate in Tirossa, the organization of common meals following the initiative of some residents may be read as a strategy of adaptation to the structuring environment of the

infrastructure; as a kind of reappropriation of the everyday and (semi-)confined life of the center. Similarly, intracommunity support, such as providing carpentry or tailoring services, or the organization of informal "markets" (e.g., sale of basic goods), can be seen as ways of coping with the limited resources available to them and protracted conditions of insecure legal status.

The problematization of the "passive life" of asylum seekers in reception centers, as well as the programs that are put in place to address them, therefore raises questions, particularly in relation to the agency and subjective perception of the individuals in question. What are the possibilities of individual agency on the part of the residents within this system? More broadly, what does the attempt to transform asylum seekers into active, responsible, and self-reliant individuals indicate in terms of politics and rationality of government? Accordingly, following Kohl (2020a), I would like to end this reflection by putting forward that the forms of intervention on asylum seekers currently implemented by public authorities might indeed have a "suspensive" effect by not fully recognizing the skills of these people and not developing their competences. To put it differently, although often not consciously constructed so nor being uni-rational, the current integration policy, as a neoliberal technology of power, might have a depoliticizing effect by individualizing the responsibility for integration, while overshadowing the (social and spatial) marginalization to which asylum seekers are subjected. Thus, the time-space of reception can certainly be perceived as "suspended" as soon as it is detached from the transnational and social networks, political and (inter)personal dynamics in which it is deeply rooted.

6. The contracting state and the politics of (un)certainty

> We always have to adapt. We must adapt to the [migratory] flows, because sometimes we have a lot of flows, sometimes we have less. We must always be ready. And we have to accept that we can never take it for granted. We have to be flexible anyway, and we have to adapt; we can't plan and design for the long term. We have basic structures, and then we have to evolve. (Interview, cantonal officer, Fribourg, spring 2017)

> Cost Primacy – All expenditures in the field of asylum and refugees are strictly controlled to keep them as low as possible. (POM & SAP 2017: 15)

> They are partners who are used to working with us, so they know we are short on funds [*la coperta è corta*]. We try to manage the [financial] resources at our best, considering that the resources are always insufficient. That's part of the game. (Interview, cantonal officer, Ticino, summer 2018)

The unpredictability of the future is not only a feature of the daily lives of asylum seekers, but also of the public authorities and their contracted partners. Ironically, uncertainty is indeed one of the few certainties that they can rely on in the governance of asylum reception. The incessant changes in migratory patterns not only force them to constantly adapt to unstable times, but also to manage reception situations according to changing contexts. The opening (and closing) of accommodation facilities and the provision of all the equipment and the staff that goes with them clearly represents an important challenge. Following Oesch's (2017) understanding of refugee spaces and mobilities, as determined by "multiple ambiguities", as well as by considering uncertainty as the organizational principle of bureaucratic administrations (Power 2007; Weber 2013 (1978)), the politics of asylum reception may thus be understood as constituted by multiple uncertainties.

This chapter[80] investigates how cantonal governments remodel the uncertainty inherent in the reception of asylum seekers by implementing this policy through private intermediaries, namely actors, instruments, and rationalities from the private sphere. It is intended as a complementary analysis to that of the day-to-day provision and negotiation of reception services on the ground presented in Chapters 7 to 9. The present chapter argues that processes

[80] This chapter is an expanded and revised version of an article entitled "Remodeling (un)certainty: outsourcing and auditing refugee reception in Switzerland" to be published in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* as part of a special issue on the politics of uncertainty in local refugee reception.

of privatization and delegation, in which states outsource their tasks from governmental administrative agencies to private and other non-state organizations, play a pivotal role in the fabrication of strategies of government aimed at dealing with uncertainty. Uncertainty is defined here as both high levels of unpredictability and a lack of control over constantly changing circumstances.

To conceptualize and enlighten my argument, I mobilize the notion of the interface of distance mentioned earlier, which, in this chapter, makes particular sense. I show that actors, instruments, and rationalities from the private sphere constitute an interface of distance, which acts as a shock absorber by increasing the distance and the layers of intermediaries between decision-makers and the ground level (i.e., the actual practices of asylum reception). I suggest that the use of private intermediaries becomes a technology of government, allowing the state to redeploy. It enables the state to "navigate within" unpredictable temporalities and realities, but also to "govern through" uncertainty as it is transferred and (re)produced in the implementation work carried out by the mandated organizations. Uncertainty is thus apprehended as a *structural and organizational condition* and a *mechanism* that together shape how different governmental actors engage with the reception of asylum seekers. By doing so, I argue that the politics of (un)certainty are a way of managing and even shifting uncertainty, but in no way eradicating it. By bringing together policy design and policy implementation, I wish to highlight a reality that is often overlooked in the analysis of outsourcing processes, and more broadly in the use of private intermediaries: their significant role in the production of (un)certainties in the daily implementation process.

The purpose of this analysis is not to consider the use of neoliberal formalities as emerging solely and only from private contractors. Nor is it to start from the assumption that these instruments are systematically validated and mobilized by public authorities in a homogeneous manner. Instead, it is a question of apprehending the different spheres and actors involved in the governance of asylum reception simultaneously and reflecting on the way in which managerial instruments navigate between them, while facilitating or constraining their actions. Moreover, this analysis is informed by a broader context, which has seen the tools and precepts of NPM invade public administrations since the 2000s in Switzerland (see Chapter 2.4.1). In this sense, the dynamics observed in this chapter extend well beyond the field of reception. However, they are generalized logics and tools to which the actors involved in governing asylum reception attach specific meanings and objectives, thus having specific effects on the field of reception.

6.1. The construction of calculable spaces of governance

In this section, I show that private intermediaries enable local authorities to increase certainty in unstable times, such as the ones that characterize asylum reception. Certainty is interpreted here as a (theoretical) condition where decision-makers encounter as few risks as possible in governing a specific task, or, put differently, where risks and insecurities are considered to be calculable (see A. M. Williams & Baláž 2012: 175). The risks considered here are mainly related to financial risks and accountability. More specifically, I argue that the creation of public-private partnerships regulated by neoliberal formalities produces certainty for public authorities in three interconnected ways. First, by shifting the burden of uncertainty from the public sphere to the private sphere. Second, by increasing their managerial (and therefore economic) capacities, particularly in terms of flexibility, adaptability, and cost-efficiency. Third, by creating an "aura of clarity and control" (Boswell 2018) through the setting of calculable norms.

This chapter is based on the analysis of the few interviews I was able to conduct with the cantonal officials in charge of the asylum field as a complement to those carried out with the mandated organizations and their employees, as well as official documents related to the local management of asylum reception (directives, service mandates, specifications, media releases, and parliamentary debates). This corpus of data allows me to grasp the meaning given and the reasons invoked by public authorities in the use of neoliberal instruments in the specific field of reception.

6.1.1. Shifting the burden of uncertainty

The discourse of uncertainty is recurrent among the local authorities I have met in the cantons of Fribourg, Bern, and Ticino:

> [Asylum reception] is a sector that changes a lot, that evolves … that is unpredictable, that does not allow you to plan, that even does not allow you to predict because, either for the numbers or for the type of asylum seekers that arrive, it is a continuous challenge. (Interview, summer 2018)

With these words, the cantonal head of asylum reception in the canton of Ticino stresses the fluctuating but everlasting uncertainty inherent in forced migration. Indeed, in 2016 (when I started my research), cantons were still facing important arrivals of refugees and were concerned about the availability of places to accommodate them. In 2018, in turn, they were more concerned about underpopulated reception centers and the need to close several of these facilities. As explained by the person responsible for asylum reception in the canton of Fribourg, adaptation and flexibility are therefore necessary in this field:

> You have to be flexible, and you always have to adapt; you can't plan and think in the long term. This is a sector that is constantly evolving and where nothing is ever taken for granted. (Interview, spring 2017)

In this context, as suggested below by the cantonal official in Ticino, the outsourcing of asylum seeker housing and support appears foremost as a strategy mobilized by cantonal authorities to distance and discharge themselves from the chaos of asylum reception implementation. This tendency is akin to that which characterizes NPM-related reforms more broadly, namely the separation of strategic decision-making from operational management:

> Without the Red Cross, I don't know how we could have dealt with refugee flows. (She reflects two seconds.) Actually, we could have faced the opening of asylum centers but then managing them is complicated. … the tendency is that we [the canton] stay behind, as supervision, but then they [i.e., contractual partners] are in the field. (Interview, summer 2018)

By adopting a "meta-position" (Gill 2016: 37) focused on steering and conducting, the canton relieves itself of an operational responsibility considered particularly difficult from a logistical point of view. Apart from the choice of accommodation structures and the allocation of a global budget for their operation, the management of reception facilities and its residents is thus the responsibility of the mandated organizations. The latter are basically responsible for the "messy business of implementation" (ibid.). This is reminiscent of what Brodkin (2020: 67) observes in her analysis of welfare politics, namely that it is indeed a highly strategic decision for public authorities to disengage from the "devilish details that ultimately determine how policies will be operationalized in practice". In Switzerland, this is accompanied with the lack of regulation with respect to the content of reception services, as highlighted in Chapter 2. Thus, one consequence of "legislative indeterminacy" (ibid.) is that it tacitly shifts the political task of operationalizing the conflicting goals of the policy of reception, as it will be thoroughly discussed in Chapters 7 to 9.

In the case of Ticino, the "meta-position" adopted by the cantonal authorities in the management of reception is the result of a long, voluntary process that has seen the authorities gradually detach themselves from the "grey zone" of implementation, that is, the operational tasks for which they were previously responsible. Indeed, until recently, the cantonal authorities managed the numerous pensions, dispersed throughout the canton, in which asylum seekers were housed. The decision to delegate these tasks, which, moreover, went hand in hand with the centralization of accommodation in collective centers, is emphasized by the head of the asylum sector:

> In the past, we were a bit in the grey zone because we also dealt directly with the realities of the field [i.e., operational]. What we are trying to recover now is to return to having a

> decision-making and institutional role, and more operational instead is left to the partners on the territory. (Interview, summer 2018)

In doing so, the canton introduces "a more distant, more highly abstracted, more adiaphorised view through which to set the parameters of negotiation and exchange" (Gill 2016: 38). Yet, the desire to remain rooted in the field, or at least not to stray too far from it, is underlined by this same interlocutor, who adds that this transfer of competence must be carried out "without creating too much distance, because the reality [of the field] must be known, because otherwise you can't take decisions that are appropriate to the context" (Interview, summer 2018).

Moreover, the outsourcing of reception policy allows the cantonal authorities to discharge their responsibility for any criticism of the accommodation conditions of asylum seekers. Not being on the "political front" – which in this context differs from what might be called a political backstage, i.e., decision-making – appears to be an evident interest of the delegation, as explained by the reception officer in the canton of Fribourg:

> At the political level, I think that it is much better for [cantonal authorities] not to be on the front lines. There is an agent who is there at the front and who has to deal with all the logistical issues on a daily basis, who has very precise specifications. But for the [canton], I think it's better not to be at the front. (Interview, spring 2017)

During my fieldwork in the canton of Ticino, a demonstration led by a left-wing association movement to protest against the use of an underground bunker to house asylum seekers crystallized the tension between decision-making and operational responsibility. On the one hand, as explained by Nicola, a reception agent, CRS wanted to make it clear that they were acting in a "neutral manner" under the mandate of the canton (on this topic, see Chapter 7) and that they were therefore not responsible for choosing housing facilities. On the other hand, cantonal authorities, by drawing on the work done by CRS and charging them with producing "justifying documents", wanted to show that they were not doing anything wrong and that they were only indirectly responsible for the asylum seekers' living conditions (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). By confining themselves to their decision-making role, cantonal authorities are thus able to relieve themselves of the responsibility of humane and respectful care for the residents of the bunker. This is left to CRS, which is responsible for demonstrating that bunker residents are not left to their own devices, thanks, in particular, to the organization of occupational programs and language training. To get back to the interface of distance, it is thus as much the identity of the organization, through its humanitarian tradition, as its status as an implementer that allows the cantonal authorities to relieve themselves of responsibility. To be more precise, the involvement of CRS in the implementation of reception policy acts as a kind of shield behind which the cantonal authorities can protect themselves from criticism of the reception conditions of asylum seekers.

6.1.2. Increasing managerial capacities

While the effect of "political shock absorbers" can be endorsed by any third party – whether public or private – the choice to delegate the implementation of reception to private organizations is a political and strategic choice from a managerial perspective.

As the person responsible for the asylum sector in the canton of Ticino points out, implementation actors feel a financial pressure linked to the constraining time frame that determines asylum reception:

> The asylum sector is financed by the Confederation, but only for a limited time: each asylum seeker is allocated to a canton, and the Confederation provides you, more or less, with 1,400 [Swiss] francs per month to cover everything: health insurance costs, housing costs, subsistence, etc. However, the Confederation does this only for seven years after entering Switzerland for F permits, and only for five years for B permits. On the side is also granted a lump sum for integration, and then a lump sum for emergency aid. … Obviously, this is difficult. The Confederation tends to pass the financial responsibility on to the cantons. They argue that these timescales are dictated by the fact that if a canton works well, in five years for B permits and seven years for F permits, [refugees] are all financially independent. (Interview, summer 2018)

In this context, for the cantons, the use of private intermediaries therefore represents a means of navigating the financial framework imposed by the Confederation, but also the chaotic temporality of asylum, in a more fluid manner. More specifically, as my interlocutor in the canton of Fribourg points out, the involvement of private actors allows them to achieve greater flexibility in managing asylum reception:

> At the practical level, we see that, for asylum, it is necessary to be able to act and react very quickly. And mandating organizations that are not state [public] organizations… to hire staff, or to lay off personnel when it is suddenly no longer needed … it is easier with [private] organizations like ORS than under a State Personnel Act [to which public services are subject]. (Interview, spring 2017)

The modalities of recruitment and dismissal of reception staff thus appear to be the cornerstone of an elastic and malleable policy capable of adapting to fluctuations in the asylum context. This is also underlined by the person in charge of reception in Ticino, who notes that the canton thereby avoids the cumbersomeness and inertia induced by public service statutes:

> The cantonal administration itself has very strict rules: if you hire a certain type of person, with that training, you have to pay him or her that salary, he or she is given a contract that will last at least a year, or even for life. And in a sector like this, which still requires flexibility, the risk is that in the medium- and long-term internal management will cost you much more. (Interview, summer 2018)

As Pasquier (2016: 26) points out, the choice of a legal and organizational form is indeed not neutral in terms of management and execution of tasks. The rules on personnel management are not the same depending on whether the public service is in charge of the execution of the task or whether this task is entrusted to a private company. The latter has its own rules and staff regulations, can manage its resources, or organize itself with much greater management flexibility.

Moreover, the abstention from imposing standards on the professional profile of reception agents is also highly indicative of a desire on the part of the cantonal authorities to reduce costs. Indeed, when the mandate for reception in the canton of Fribourg was assigned in 2007, the public authorities justified the choice to assign the mandate to ORS by explaining that the offer submitted by the company was CHF 800,000, lower than that of its competitors, specifying in the press release that "only salary costs [had been] compared, material assistance, infrastructure and accommodation costs being covered by the state for all tenderers on the basis of imposed standards" (DSAS 2007a). In this sense, the staff's employment conditions appear to be an essential tool for dealing with uncertainty and absorbing the resulting economic fluctuations. While it is not the mandated organization that sets the salaries, it is its responsibility to hire the staff and establish the profiles required. As the person in charge of the asylum sector in the canton of Fribourg suggests, the hiring of young, low-trained staff at the beginning of their professional life would reduce the budget for reception. "Obviously, if you hire young people, it is always cheaper than hiring older people," (Interview, spring 2017) she says, adding that the budget allocated by the canton is nevertheless based on the salary scale set by the canton. Thus, by hiring staff with low pay scales, particularly because of their young age and lack of experience, a company like ORS indirectly enables the canton to save money. It would be, however, a simplified reading to stop at the simple question of salary: As I show in Chapter 8.2, this logic is also embodied in the "organizational culture"[81] of ORS itself, in particular through the implementation of standardized work procedures that can be applied more flexibly and quickly, and which therefore require fewer human resources.

On an interesting side note, as already mentioned in Chapter 5, the ethos of business also seems to be reproduced by the cantonal authorities in the way they shape the cantonal reception system and the different phases of accommodation, as in the case of the head of the asylum sector in the canton of Ticino, who legitimizes the choice to quickly transfer asylum seekers to individual accommodation in order to reduce reception costs:

> In my opinion, to leave a person who is more expensive in a center than in an apartment, because of the social support, the structure, etc., (she reflects) [...] it costs us much more to

[81] Following Emery & Giauque (2005), I approach "organizational culture" – which I will use interchangeably with the notion of "organizational environment" – in a constructivist way, by simultaneously including objective and subjective dimensions, and by placing it in a particular societal context, which an organization also helps to influence. I consider organizational culture as the way in which actors try to give meaning to their collective actions, while negotiating it.

> leave the person here [in a reception center]. Therefore, I suggested that these people go out to the apartment. Then, is that the right solution? No, I don't know. But leaving them here to take up space... it's better that they go out to the apartment and make their own lives. (Interview, summer 2018)

In this sense, reception centers also become calculable spaces of governance, in which asylum seekers are perceived as individuals, or rather financial burdens, occupying space and requiring a lot of resources.

Yet, increasing managerial capacities is not only a question of the workforce or "tangible" costs. It is also a question of the tools or the organizational culture specifically arising from belonging to the private sphere. In fact, the choice to mandate a private company is also explained by the managerial instruments and norms that the organization deploys daily in the reception work. This does not mean, of course, that an organization of public status would not use such instruments in its day-to-day operations and would therefore differ from private organizations in this respect. On the contrary, as discussed previously, the primacy of private enterprise as a model of organizational "normality" translates into the use of managerial instruments in all spheres of society, including in the management of public administrations and organizations. Rather, the specificity of outsourcing to the private sphere lies in the way in which neoliberal instruments resonate with the values prioritized by the mandated organization. To put it differently, it may be assumed that a contractual partner operating as a company seeking commercial benefits in its field of activity will see more meaning in the deployment of managerial instruments that enable it to pursue its objectives. Consequently, despite their similarities and therefore blurred boundary (Chapter 7), the distinction between profit-making and non-profit organizations in the implementation of a public policy takes on its full meaning here (see also Chapters 8-9).

In the case of ORS in the canton of Fribourg, its certification by the ISO 9001 standard, developed by the International Organization for Standardization to define the criteria for quality-based management and production, is an element that is particularly valued by the cantonal reception manager, particularly regarding the opening of new reception facilities:

> [The ISO 9001 standard] certifies a quality, and then it means that they have to work according to procedures. And that's extremely important. [...] It means that the staff is versatile, you work the same thing in center [X] as in center [Y] and that each employee can go and help in another home. They will find the same concepts. He or she will know that it is the same thing. This flexibility is a great advantage, a great difference. And the staff mobility also. If we open a new center, we have no difficulty to build a new team in the three following weeks. [...] And here, certifications have helped a lot. (Interview, spring 2017)

By choosing ORS as a contractual partner, the cantonal authorities not only save significant sums of money, but also legitimize their choice by selecting an organization certified by an internationally recognized "quality standard" (Hibou 2015: 33). As this interlocutor points out, "if there is a visible and important change for us [compared to the organization mandated before ORS, i.e., the Red Cross], it was in this sense: this versatility, this flexibility, which also leads to a speed of reaction" (Interview, spring 2017). In the canton of Fribourg, any criticism of the reception policy is thus quickly stifled by the demonstration of compliance with certified and objective standards, rather than by demonstrating "good" supervision of asylum seekers or a "good" daily structure within a reception center. In a different register, this echoes the example of Ticino presented above, where cantonal authorities legitimize themselves largely through the "humanitarian tradition" of CRS.

6.1.3. Creating an aura of clarity and control

The creation of an "aura of clarity and control" (Boswell 2018: 4) around the governance of asylum reception continues with the construction of reception as a quantifiable and measurable policy field, allowing cantonal authorities to withdraw from the frontline of reception policy while continuing to supervise and structure its implementation. As Boswell (2018) and Power (1994, 1997) point out, however, the function of performance measurement is primarily symbolic. Indeed, by playing a "remote assurance role" (Power 1994: 5), it creates a feeling of "comfort, tranquility and protection" (Hibou 2015: 37) that reassures political leaders that they are able to monitor and steer the behavior of services providers, even if this control is often unrelated to the agents' actual performance and the messy reality of reception.

As mentioned in Chapter 2 with regard to the NPM reforms undertaken in Switzerland, the canton of Bern is particularly emblematic of public governance at a distance. In the field of asylum reception, it takes the form of particularly substantial "quality control, financial supervision and effectiveness evaluation" measures (POM, 2018, pp. 63-68). These were introduced by the public authorities to supervise the services provided by their partners and their ability to produce results.

This bureaucratic machinery of control is manifested in three interconnected ways. This is accomplished first through an annual total compensation system (*système d'indemnisation global*). While allowing the canton to set the budgetary limits for reception, this system "gives greater flexibility to the [contractual partners] and encourages them to act in a sustainable and cost-conscious economic perspective", as highlighted in the cantonal social assistance directive (POM 2018: 63). The person in charge of reception in the canton of Ticino also shares this advantage with me:

> Performance mandates have enabled the cantons to save money. Because, indeed, by establishing an [annual] budget and giving the possibility to the entity to which you entrust

> the task [of reception] of making small reserves … but also of making small profits in quotation marks, you are clearly pushing to maximize the use of resources. (Interview, summer 2018)

In the canton of Fribourg, for example, the annual budget is divided into three specific packages, as explained by the person in charge of the asylum field:

> We work with two packages, for housing and social assistance, and there is also an envelope for staff. And then, for special expenses, it is on request for advance guarantees. [...] All this is fixed annually, according to an amendment, depending on the number of people to be taken care of. It is adapted each year according to the results of the previous year. (Interview, spring 2017)

Thus, by framing the daily activities of their contractual partners in terms of costs, savings and benefits, the cantons encourage their contractual partners to organize their work as if they were small businesses (Rose 1999: 151-152). By doing so, they impose financial rationality on these organizations, enabling them not only to structure their actions, but also to ensure efficient use of public resources.

Second, the machinery of control requires the definition of (quantitative) indicators and objectives. In the canton of Bern, these mainly concern expenditure and revenue relating to the accommodation and support of asylum seekers. The Cantonal Directive explicitly states that "qualitative or socio-political objectives concerning the relative effectiveness [of the implementation of the reception mandate]" (POM, 2018, p. 66) have not been defined. While indicator-based government is particularly marked in the canton of Bern and has a strong impact on the daily work of the implementation actors, as illustrated in Chapter 8, indicators are also used in other cantons. "[We] check that standards are applied, that the work is done, that the money we give is used for what it is given, etc.," states the person in charge of asylum in the canton of Fribourg, adding that "as far as possible, the agents must also be accountable and we must control" (Interview, spring 2017). Similarly, her colleague in the canton of Ticino explains that indicators were defined when the contract was drawn up, but that these serve rather to ensure a certain "order" in the contractual relationship:

> We have indicators in the contracts, which we verify. I don't know, for example, I'll give you an example that is perhaps quite explanatory: [the partner] must ensure that we get requests for welfare benefits by the 10th of the month. Well, that is an indicator that we check. Or [the partner] … has to arrange for the school placement of the children, and we have the card, we have the report, etc. We have indicators on specific targets. [...] But these indicators also contribute to give a certain order in the administrative-bureaucratic management of the issue of asylum, but then the last level that is what we said before, of independence, integration, the functioning of the migrant, that is difficult to measure. [...] We have controls, yes, punctual, on objectives shared with the partner, at the time of

> contracting, then for the rest... we adjust if necessary, during the year. (Interview, summer 2018)

Third, the monitoring of services is ensured by the responsible cantonal service, which carries out regular checks of the documents (e.g., activity reports) and accounts produced by the mandated organizations. Meetings between the cantonal authorities and the management of the organizations also take place at least once every quarter in the form of round tables, for which protocols are drawn up. In the canton of Bern, through the private survey institute LINK, a Swiss specialist in opinion polling commissioned by the canton, audits are also carried out within reception centers on a regular basis (about twice a year). Thus, as stipulated by the Cantonal Directive, "any failure by [the organization] is identified during the [audit]" (POM 2018: 65). Here, the "risk" in question mainly concerns the quality and flow of data between the public authorities and its agents — for example, the recording of financial data (late, incorrect, or even non-existent data entry) and invoicing (excessive or insufficient amounts), which have a direct impact on the increase or decrease in the amount allocated annually by the canton. At the end of the assessment, the canton makes recommendations to the organization concerned with a view to implementing the necessary measures. In particular, the "profitability" of the services, namely, "the ratio between the effects achieved [the measures implemented] and the resources invested" (POM 2018: 66), is assessed.

By transforming organizations "into a complex of incessant calculations" (Miller 1992: 76), cantonal authorities therefore require their contractual partners to translate their daily activities into financial terms and accounting values. By doing so, they not only manufacture asylum reception as a calculable space, but also transform the mandated organizations and their employees into "calculating selves" (Miller 2014). Public authorities create a space of certainty that allows them not only to navigate more flexibly in the uncertain and fluctuating context of migration, but, above all, to distance themselves from it and even to alleviate the inevitable economic, managerial, and political challenges. The use of private intermediaries in the governance of reception thus offers a form of comfort to public authorities grappling with the complexity and uncertainty of migratory flows; a strategy that reveals yet also relieves the governmental anxiety arising from the unpredictability of asylum.

6.2. Shifting uncertainty while (re)producing it

> We're going to disappear. We're going to disappear and, right now, we have no idea what's going to happen to us. Maybe an opportunity will be given, maybe not. This is the field of asylum. Really. (Interview, summer 2017)

The words used by Gabriel, the manager of Bürgistadt in the canton of Bern, clearly reflect the prevailing uncertainty that shapes the implementation of the reception policy. While

uncertainty is, in this case, specifically related to the closure of a reception facility following the sale of the building to real estate developers for the construction of a shopping center, this example is emblematic of the manifold uncertainties constantly faced by state-mandated organizations and their staff.

Indeed, while the interface of distance allows political leaders to overcome the uncertainty inherent in the reception of asylum seekers, the daily life of the contracted organizations and their employees reflects a different reality. While producing trust and certainty in the decision-making sphere, the interface of distance acts simultaneously as a catalyst for increasing uncertainty in the implementation sphere, both in the daily work carried out and in the structural conditions in which the agents operate. In what follows, I show that, beyond the fact that uncertainty is inherent in both the migration context and in policy implementation, the uncertainty faced by those involved "on the ground" is also the direct consequence of the government mechanisms put in place by the public authorities.

6.2.1. Competition and politics of austerity

Although structural uncertainties concern all the cantons studied, it appears particularly pronounced in the canton of Bern. After launching a call for tenders in 2018 for the five "lots" of reception (i.e., five regions), cantonal authorities reallocated the mandates in spring 2019. As early as 2017, the year in which I carried out my fieldwork in the canton, the premises of this major upheaval in the cantonal asylum landscape were strongly felt by the organizations then involved in the implementation of the reception policy. Many discussions, both formal and informal, touched on this aspect, and several of my interlocutors, both at the level of the organization's management and reception officers, expressed their concerns to me. For this reason, this section focuses mainly on this canton while being complemented by examples from Fribourg and Ticino.

As highlighted by a member of the management of ABR, the organization's working conditions were made particularly difficult by the uncertainty linked to their future and the financial strangling with which some of them would be confronted:

> Within two years, institutions will most likely disappear. There are inevitably institutions, which will not necessarily disappear but will shrink. [...] there is a lot of competition between institutions, and the Bernese public authorities encourage it very, very strongly – it is a political will. And this competition, certainly – that's, of course, my feeling – will be felt in the coming years, because everyone will defend their jobs and their areas of influence. (Interview, summer 2017)

The political agenda to increase competition in the reception sector dates to the 2010s. A parliamentary motion launched in 2012 by four Bernese deputies from (center-)right-wing political parties clearly called for greater competition in the reception of asylum seekers. This

motion, finally adopted in January 2013, stipulated that it was necessary to "oppose any attempt to reserve this highly sensitive task solely for public utility organizations" (Grand Conseil du canton de Berne 2013: 1). In its response, the Executive Council further stressed that in addition to the requirements necessary to guarantee security, cost-effectiveness, and the instruments for monitoring [*instruments de contrôle*] were crucial elements in the call for tenders (ibid.: 2). Hence, as Gabriel suggests, the competition between institutions, as well as the control of their actions would be a means of lowering the prices of the reception policy, but also of ensuring implementation in line with the expectations of the cantonal authorities by selecting the most "compliant", or least "dangerous" organizations:

> [The contractualization of reception] allows competition to be brought into play, prices to be lowered, and the actor who is the cheapest or most servile to be chosen. It depends on what the priority is – it doesn't always have to be money, by the way. (Interview, autumn 2017)

Acknowledging that this might just as well be observed outside the outsourcing dynamics at the heart of this work and that resource constraints are not unique to the private sector, the transformation of asylum reception into a competitive market has had an important impact on the development of street-level organizations and the daily lives of their staff. In addition to a highly uncertain migration context, they are subject to increasing (political and financial) pressures and precarious working conditions. As also argued by Darling (2016a) in the context of the UK asylum dispersal system, neoliberal frames of productivity, competition, and fiscal constraints increasingly underpin asylum reception as both a policy of accommodating and regulating asylum seekers and as an economic site of profit-making and efficiency savings. Within asylum centers, uncertainty is therefore not only materialized in the fluidity and diversity of the refugee population, but also in the significant turnover of reception agents (Darling 2016a: 16) and, more broadly, in the (scarcity of) financial and material resources, leading in particular to a low ratio of staff to resident. This is felt in the canton of Bern, where shortage of material and human resources produces uncertainties as to how to deal daily with this structural framework, both on a personal level (stress, anxiety, overworking) and in terms of the actual measures implemented:

> [Good reception work] is very difficult to achieve with the financial resources that the public authorities give us. We have service contracts with the canton and, here, to officially support 76 people – sometimes much more, sometimes less, too – we are a team of four people. Including my management position. We have … three [full-time jobs] spread over four people. And we also have a night shift, we use voluntary service conscripts, sometimes trainees, too. It's very little. Three full-time jobs to support 76 people, if you look at the institutions that are not in the asylum field, any institution, it is a figure that makes you smile. And now, well, with these means, we do what we can. (Interview with Gabriel, summer 2017)

The same applies to the cantons of Bern and Fribourg. As Simon, center manager at Chamfors, also points out, overtime is part of their daily lives: "overtime: it's a time clock which goes up and down... which goes up especially! It never comes down" (Interview, autumn 2016). The same was true in the canton of Ticino, where I was able to observe that the absence of one or two staff members considerably altered the course of the working day:

> It is a complex and intense week for the center's team. There are only four of them working for the whole week – Andrea has taken time off for her bachelor's work and Claudia is on sick leave – so it is a busy week in terms of arrivals and departures. Several families are transferred to apartments [second reception phase]. It is therefore necessary to prepare all the appropriate documents for this, such as the departure announcement, money, skills assessment, etc. At the same time, three new residents will arrive at the center. They need to be placed in a room, and the team need to think about where they would best fit, prepare things for their room (sheets, kitchen, etc.), prepare the documents for the entrance interview, etc. The reception agents give me the impression that they have a lot ("too much!") to do, and they repeat several times that they must also transport the residents to their appointments and activities daily in addition to all of this work. (Fieldnotes, Tirossa, summer 2018)

With a reduced number of staff, reception agents are thus forced to combine a multitude of tasks that are often very diverse and have varying levels of importance. The lack of staff often forces them to focus on "urgent" tasks (i.e., medical appointments, one-off problems, etc.), administrative tasks (management of asylum seekers' files, mail, various appointments, renewal of permits, authorizations allowing them to participate in professional or occupational activities, etc.) and logistics (organization of rooms and apartments, distribution of basic equipment to residents, management, and supervision of workfare, management of keys for laundry or access to other parts of the center, transports, etc.), to the detriment of the more "social" tasks linked to the care of asylum seekers (on this topic see Chapters 8 and 9).

Beyond the lack of staff working in the centers and the generalized overload of work, organizations also encounter difficulties in finding competent staff, especially when it comes to opening reception centers in very limited times, as pointed out by Gabriel:

> We're going to have other problems. In other words, competent and trained staff will still have to be found. And pay them. Because often the problem in this area is wages, working conditions, etc., which make it not always so easy to find truly qualified personnel. Especially when you have to open a center, because everything is done in the short term. You are told "you have to open [a center] by August to accommodate two hundred people", so you can imagine that you have to hire staff and then within a month or two you don't necessarily find all the qualified staff that would be required. (Interview, summer 2017)

It seems to be a constant in asylum centers, namely that the lack of financial resources and permanent emergency work directly determine the type of person willing to work in such a context. "The problem we have in this field of activity is that we still have quite a few employees who do not have specific training in social work," says Gabriel (Interview, autumn 2017). On this subject, Marc, another center manager, recalls that when he started at ABR "out of 65 employees, there were 37 different backgrounds", adding that "there was no one who was a social worker. Social workers are always very, very few" (Interview, autumn 2017). Beyond the fact that social workers who, by virtue of their training, have socio-pedagogical core competencies in assistance and counseling, are a minority in the field of asylum, these excerpts reflect an extreme heterogeneity of professional profiles in the reception centers, as already mentioned above. As outlined in Chapter 9, these disparate profiles, in turn, indicate some uncertainty in terms of support, particularly regarding the nature and content of the services to which the centers' residents are entitled.

6.2.2. A climate of control and suspicion

The daily routine of reception work is part of a climate of control and suspicion in which street-level organizations and their agents are constantly required to demonstrate and justify to the cantonal authorities their slightest action and decision. The uncertainty in question here is therefore twofold: a contractual relationship full of mutual mistrust, but also a potential loss of ideological and moral references on the part of field workers.

In particular, organizations and reception officers are subject to a "disciplinary" constraint (Infantino 2016: 74); a banal but ubiquitous form of domination, which acts in a diffuse and distant way, and not by direct physical coercion (Hibou 2013: 13-14). In a logic of accountability, government by indicators is thus a coercive mode of governance (Wright & Shore 2000) that conditions the everyday work of street-level actors by bureaucratic means. More precisely, indicators become (preventive) tools enabling the cantonal authorities to regulate and discipline the behavior of the organizations mandated to implement the reception policy (Boswell 2015; Brodkin 2011a).

Instruments of control used by the canton are the subject of numerous misunderstandings and frustrations within the teams working in reception facilities, as Gabriel, reports:

> We are bombarded with indicators, each one more absurd than the next, which give us an enormous administrative workload, which take us further and further away from the ground, because the canton wants a certain number of lists, documents, and we have the impression that we spend more time filling out the lists for the canton than talking with the people we are hosting and accompanying. And that created a lot of difficulties for the teams. It was also linked to the fact that most of the agents had the impression that the canton did not have confidence in them, i.e., that the canton was introducing many tools

> to control the work of the field actors […]. There is a lot of mutual mistrust. (Interview, summer 2017)

This mistrust echoes Darling's (2016a) analysis of the consequences of the transition of responsibility for asylum accommodation from local authorities and support organizations to private providers. He argues that this process led to a tension between a service-driven and a profit-driven approach to asylum. As a result, forms of care and compassion were often hampered by the need to provide only those services accounted for in contracts, thus creating many frustrations among staff. This "distinction of ethos" (ibid.: 10) is also observed in the case of ABR and its employees, who, faced with the control instruments put in place by the cantonal authorities, are subjected to a "real cultural shock" (Interview, summer 2017).

This may, however, considerably vary from one organization to another, as highlighted in Chapter 8. Through its very organizational functioning, focused on performance and efficiency, ORS, in effect, values neoliberal logic(s) and instruments by deploying these internally.

Government through standards and figures is a paradigm of the "audit culture" that Shore (2008: 279) describes as the extension of financial audit techniques and principles to contexts far removed from the world of financial accounting. In a logic of accountability (Lemke 2004: 21-23), the quantitative indicators favored by the Bernese political authorities therefore have a structuring power over the daily environment in which human services organizations and agents operate. As illustrated in Chapter 9, the daily structure of the centers, formal and informal interactions, and the time spent with the residents are impacted and transformed under the weight of the neoliberal bureaucratization of practices and the obligation to respect the standards required by public authorities. This causes a lot of discontent among the officers, as Gabriel points out:

> The new public management has really, almost everywhere, done its job, and everyone has to be accountable. Which is not a bad thing – I repeat, we have to be accountable! We work with public money, and I have nothing against that. But it is true that we are not succeeding, the field cannot make itself heard at the administrative level and at the level of the public authorities. The field is unable to say, "but be careful, if you want to judge the effectiveness and not the efficiency of our work, you must have other criteria which are qualitative criteria", and we cannot be heard. The people who produce the reports and send us the forms we have to use are 80% (he corrects himself), 90% in efficiency criteria. (Interview, autumn 2017)

As explained by Gabriel, the audits carried out twice a year by the private institute LINK aim above all to check the evidence produced daily by employees to "collect the cantonal budget envelope" (Interview, autumn 2017). This is part of the daily "administrative routine", observes Selim, another agent at Bürgistadt, who adds sarcastically that "according to the

indicators that are favored – and these are often financial indicators – it is not the quality [i.e., the content] of the services that is brought to light" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). This exacerbates the feeling of frustration among reception agents, who, in addition to facing constant structural uncertainty, feel a "cultural gap" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017) between them and the cantonal authorities.

In such a context, as argued by Power (1994: 15), performance measurement becomes the "control of control", where what is being assured is the quality of control systems rather than the quality of first-order operations. The culture of evidence evaluation becomes, in this sense, a recursive and self-reproductive mechanism, whereby what is measured is ultimately not the content of services and the results originally expected, but rather the respect of the terms and conditions of this "culture" itself.

As Gabriel clarifies, this mode of governance contributes to the strengthening of a reception market in which implementation actors find themselves in competition with each other and hampered by the need to comply with the quantitative indicators required by the public authorities or risk losing their mandate. Referring to the difficulty of introducing qualitative indicators, he believes that this is made even more difficult by the fact that there is no united front among the actors involved in implementation, which would ultimately benefit the public authorities:

> For that to happen, all [the contractual partners] would have to be in agreement, which is not the case in a canton such as the canton of Bern, where we have several institutions that share the asylum cake, that do not have the same philosophy, that do not have the same values, clearly, that do not have the same objectives either, to make profits or to use the profits, and that makes dialogue between [them] almost impossible. And therefore, it allows the public authorities to do what they want because there will never be … a united front of all the actors of asylum in the canton of Bern to propose something to the public authorities. I don't know if it is possible, I doubt it. It is perhaps the advantage of the canton to have several partners, to be able to bring competition into play and to prevent a big front, or in any case, a too-big proposal front. (Interview, autumn 2017)

"The [financial] survival of the institution is at stake," he sums up, adding that "unfortunately, we are still in this little game where, to receive the cantonal budget envelope, we have to prove that we have done what the canton expects of us" (Interview, autumn 2017). Hence, the cultivation of an ethos of business allows public authorities to impose disciplinary constraints on their subcontractors while also limiting opportunities for contestation (Graeber 2015: 80). This dynamic of enclosure (Darling 2016a: 5, see also Chapter 9 and Conclusion) has certainly contributed to the fact that ABR, known to be an organization sometimes at odds with the political authorities, lost its (only) mandate in spring 2019 as part of the reorganization of the reception sector in the canton of Bern.

6.3. Conclusion

As I have shown in this chapter, outsourcing contributes to the redeployment of the boundaries of the state by establishing a physical and symbolic distance between its decisional and operational spheres, "as if implementation and policymaking were truly distinctive enterprises" (Brodkin 2020: 67). ORS, ABR and CRS, as service providers, thus provide a buffer between state policy and service delivery (S. R. Smith & Lipsky 1993: 3).

Far from being empty and insignificant, this distance takes the concrete form of an interface of distance, which enables public authorities to deal with the many uncertainties of asylum reception. This interface is materialized, on the one hand, in official documents, in particular mandates, regulating the contractual norms that condition the implementation of the reception policy, as well as in control instruments from the market and entrepreneurial world, such as auditing. On the other hand, it is embodied in the multitude of standards, certifications, and evidence that street-level actors are required to respect and (re)produce daily. These elements form a multi-layer buffer zone that dilutes and absorbs the uncertainty related to the governance of asylum reception by thickening the interface between public authorities and the ground. Private intermediaries constitute the "calculable space" and thus the "comforting device" through which cantonal authorities can cope with and navigate structural, political, and economic uncertainties. Again, it should be made clear that the use of neoliberal instruments does not derive solely and directly from outsourcing, nor from the involvement of private contractors in the implementation of the reception policy. Yet, I suggest that the processes of subcontracting and contractualization that see these tasks outsourced to third party actors do contribute greatly to their use, and even to their intensification, as emphasized in Chapter 8.

At the same time, I showed that the interface of distance also acts as a catalyst for uncertainty. While producing certainty in the decisional sphere, uncertainty is spreading in the implementation sphere, which is transformed into a (competitive) market for the reception of asylum seekers. The latter is subject to market laws and "economic fluctuations", embodied here by refugees, whose arrival in Switzerland constantly fluctuates and determines the financial resources allocated to the mandated organizations. Uncertainty is all the greater as some of these are subject to regular controls, in particular in the form of techniques of auditing and certification, carried out by the authorities and/or independent agencies in order to supervise and monitor the proper performance of the reception policy. Thus, the mechanisms put in place by public authorities to deal with uncertainty have the effect of creating precarious working conditions, as well as establishing a climate of pressure, suspicion, and frustration on the ground. The uncertainties that characterize the everyday work of street-level organizations are therefore as much structural as they can be moral.

Indeed, one of the main effects of the privatization of reception through the spread of private intermediaries is its saturation by technical and managerial norms, which, in turn, impoverish the moral, political, and social realities of this field. The privatization of reception indicates the prioritization of a neoliberal lens in the reading of the "problem" of asylum reception; a problem that is constructed as quantifiable and calculable, and therefore more easily manageable (Darling 2016b). In this sense, the transformation of reception into a mainly technocratic and managerial issue has the effect of "flattening" (Hiemstra & Conlon 2017) its inherent diversity, plurality and uncertainty – at least in the decisional sphere of the state.

This is what Hibou (2017) designates as one of the features of neoliberal bureaucracy, namely its participation in exacerbating the process of *abstraction* that guides life in society. As de Certeau (1988: xviii) suggests, this process of abstraction reduces the multiplicity, heterogeneity, tinkering, and interweaving of the different repertoires that make up society and everyday life. To be more precise, the specific nature of neoliberal bureaucracy as a process of abstraction is that the norms, categories, rules, and formal procedures it produces become a "self-evident, neutral, and objective representation of reality" (Hibou 2015: 30). In short, these bureaucratic abstractions are taken as reality themselves. For example, as I have shown in this chapter, it is compliance with performance indicators developed by public authorities, or alternatively conformity with certifications, that determines whether a reception service is of quality or not. This "compliance" is itself subject to a process of abstraction since it is the (generic and abstract) document of proof itself and not the effective content of the service that is assessed and constitutes the evidence of this alleged quality. Therefore, neoliberal abstractions become a fiction, an imaginary (ibid.: 32) that enable the fabrication of modes of government aimed at "pruning the future or managing uncertainty" (Boswell 2018: viii), while remodeling uncertainty into a calculable and more predictable object of government.

Summary Part II

In this part, I presented the *parameters* of the apparatus of reception: its material and spatio-temporal contours, but also the dynamics and assemblage of government that participate in its manufacturing. Thus, while bearing in mind the very local character of the reception of asylum seekers, which I have tried to highlight through specific examples drawn from my observations in the field, this section has focused on the crosscutting mechanics and logics that run through the reception field and shape it.

Following Kobelinsky (2010: 22), I showed how waiting (*l'attente*), as a fabrication, is a product and a construction of the apparatus of reception. Through the spatial, temporal, and material moorings of asylum reception, I have shown how waiting becomes visible (yet also invisible), manifests itself and is governed in what I referred to as a "suspended" time-space. However, this has also been nuanced in the light of the transnational and coping dynamics in which refugees are deeply embedded. I argued that infrastructure, as a technology of government, is also a means through which the apparatus of reception operates.

By considering the contractual arrangements that delineate asylum reception, I have also shown how the apparatus is framed by an economic and managerial rationality, aimed at making the process of governing reception more certain and efficient. Although this rationale is not the only one to define the contours of reception, the sets of norms and instruments derived from it seem to be currently particularly valued and privileged in the construction of a calculable space of government.

In particular, by drawing inspiration from Hibou, I have shown that it is embodied and materialized in the contractualization and outsourcing of the implementation of the reception policy, as well as in the neoliberal bureaucratization of reception spaces. I have shown that the use of private intermediaries participates in redefining the contours of the state in terms of decision-making and operational spheres, and therefore also in shifting and diluting accountability, but also in strengthening the capacities of governing at a distance.

Yet, focusing on the manufacturing of the apparatus of reception on a large scale hides a central, but no less subtle and often contradictory dimension of the process of governing: the construction of policy in everyday organizational life. It is in fact street-level practitioners who, through their informal and discretionary practices, are the actual makers of the reception policy (Brodkin 2013). Part III thus opens the field of analysis to explore the day-to-day discourses and practices of three state-mandated organizations. By engaging with a diversity of street-level organizations, the aim is to nuance and refine the analysis presented in Part II by showing that the marketization of reception does not stem solely from the involvement of private (for-profit) organizations, as a simplified reading of privatization processes would

suggest. The analysis also reveals that organizations tasked with implementing reception can act very differently from case to case, despite being bound by similar law and contractual frameworks (Brodkin 2011a). The following part shows that street-level organizations and their agents negotiate the structural, normative, ideological, and material framework in which they evolve: by taming it daily, but also by challenging, bypassing or reinforcing it.

PART III • Beyond privatization: the ethics and ethos of asylum reception

Introduction to Part III: conceptual notes on street-level work and morality

The starting point of Part III could be that of any day within a reception center for asylum seekers; a day punctuated by precise stages, such as, for example, the opening hours of the reception desk and (if existing) of the infirmary, and therefore the accessibility to and talks with the agents; the performance of small tasks of stewardship (workfare) within the infrastructure; the participation in language courses and other activities; the transfer to extra-mural activities or appointments; the attestation of one's presence within the center. Reversing the perspective, this same day can also be read through the eyes of the reception staff, whose day is punctuated by these same markers; one of the main differences being that these moments are, for the agents, usually accompanied by a lot of bureaucratic activity.

However, what this picture does not show is the very essence of these activities: the meaning that is given to them, the rationalities and sensitivities attached to them, and the way they are actually practiced by street-level workers. This includes, for example, the actual content of medical care, or the intensity and systematics of attendance control. What it also does not capture are all the informal and *a priori* insignificant moments that punctuate the day-to-day life of reception centers, such as the "corridor dynamics" mentioned in Chapter 5, but also the informal encounters between staff and residents. Therefore, the aim of Part III is to shed light on the way in which street-level organizations give substance to public policy by bringing into play normative considerations in its day-to-day implementation (see, e.g., Borrelli & Lindberg 2018; Darling 2011b; Fassin 2005; Fassin et al. 2013; Gill 2016; Kobelinsky 2012a; Morris 2017).

Indeed, as I will show in the following chapters, the actors implementing the reception policy hold diverse, sometimes conflicting interests, values, and rationales. They also mobilize different experiences and backgrounds in their daily work. This influences not only the way they engage with asylum seekers, but, more broadly, the way they position themselves vis-à-vis asylum reception, both in terms of its purpose, working procedures, and the content of the services provided in the accommodation facilities. The daily practices of street-level workers are therefore informed by a heterogeneous set of moral sensibilities, affective dispositions, and role conceptions through which they construct policy (Eckert 2020a; Zacka 2017). These act as filters that regulate how they understand their role(s) and responsibilities within a given system, but also how they make use of their discretionary power in interpreting and implementing public policy.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, two sets of values characterize the reception apparatus: the *ethics* associated with the state's substantive goal of fostering a "commonweal" and the *ethos* that underlies and legitimizes everyday practices.

As such, once an organization is assigned the public task of providing reception services, it acquires direct obligations to the substantive goal(s) the policy of reception is geared toward. The contracted entity commits itself to provide reception services in a manner that is – among other things – efficient and respectful. As we have seen, the criterion of efficiency embodies the technocratic ideal of good management, the efficient use of public resources. Similarly, the criterion of respect, or of "human manner", embodies the humanitarian ideal of fair and dignified treatment of everyone. The ethics of asylum reception thus echo those of migration administrative services in Switzerland which, according to the jurisprudence of the Federal Court, corresponds to a "restrictive migration policy", in addition to respecting the interests of the Swiss economy, constitutional principles, and human rights (Achermann 2018: 19).

But the moral dimension of street-level workers is also embodied in the values that underlie the daily practices of reception. It is reflected in the organizational environment, the practical categories, and codified procedures, as well as the social configurations or structures in which they are translated in reception centers. Therefore, different ethoses intertwine within the apparatus of reception and guide the actions of state-mandated organizations. The reception of asylum seekers is, for some entities, considered respectful when it involves the application of standardized, and therefore depersonalized, procedures – for others, when it involves individualized support. In the same way, a "good" reception agent is sometimes perceived as an impartial individual, like Weber's detached and impersonal bureaucrat, and sometimes as a human being full of empathy.

With these conceptual elements as a backdrop, the next chapters explore the implementation of the reception policy from the perspective of the contracted organizations and their employees. Following Brodkin (1997, 2015), I illuminate how street-level workers translate the rhetorical reception contract into a real one. To this end, Part III comprises three closely related, yet distinct chapters, each of which provides complementary insights into how street-level organizations mediate politics. Chapter 7 focuses on the identities and self-presentations of ORS, ABR, and CRS: how they think of themselves, how they understand their role within the apparatus of asylum reception, how they position themselves in relation to "the state". Chapters 8 examines how the three organizations studied adjust to their working conditions, namely, the arrangements for policy delivery. It looks at how they make sense, navigate, and position themselves towards the neoliberal bureaucratization of asylum reception. Chapter 9 examines more specifically the everyday conditions of reception and how they differ across street-level organizations yet operating under similar formal policies. It shows that the entanglement of mundane, informal, and discretionary practices leads to differentiated "routine patterns" (Brodkin 2011a) of asylum reception.

7. Organizational self-presentations: the moral worlds of service providers

> What they think they *should* do shapes what they actually do as much as other constraints, whether this concerns their efforts (successful or unsuccessful) to act in what they consider an ideal manner or the formation of rationales for diverging from ideal behaviour. (Eckert 2020b: 8; original emphasis)

As I showed before, the growing number of calls for tenders in the field of asylum reception contributes to the creation of an economy of reception, engendered by commodification and increased institutional competition. It is precisely in this context, that is, the outsourcing of state tasks to private actors, that ORS, ABR, and CRS, as organizations offering housing and reception services, are led to position or market themselves under one specific identity: a *partner of the state*.

It is often a veritable performance, even balancing act. This is played out first when obtaining a mandate, as there is a need to present and sell oneself in a convincing manner to the mandators. This implies the creation of a real character, an organizational identity that is scrupulously free of defects or weaknesses in the eyes of the public authorities. After this first step, a delicate ethical balancing act also comes into play when taking on the role of contractual partner and becoming part of the "moral community" (Eckert 2020b: 13) of migration administrative services.[82]

It is then a question of finding the right balance between maintaining and respecting one's own organizational values and observing the ones dictated and favored by the mandators (S. R. Smith & Lipsky 1993). There can be an alignment between the two, as in the case of ORS, which voluntarily follows the preferences of its "clients", namely, public authorities. The search for this stability sometimes proves to be more laborious, as in the cases of CRS and ABR, which are led to "identity tinkering" aimed at maintaining themselves in the asylum game and not being excluded from it, but also at finding meaning in their daily work.

Before delving into the daily practices of these three organizations, this chapter concentrates on the way they conceive their (contractual) role and legitimize their place within the apparatus of reception. Focusing on the ideals and principles that structure street-level

[82] As stressed by Eckert (2020b: 10) and Achermann (2018), while migration administrations are not specific in regard to the production and management of categories of difference, their peculiarity is that they are the ones producing the borders that delineate differential access to rights and goods. Thus, in contrast to other administrations, migration administrations define who can partake in the commonweal and who cannot.

organizations' actions, it follows Eckert's (2020b) questioning on "what they *think* they are doing". In particular, I propose an analysis of the omnipresent discourse of neutrality and the declared aim to work according to this ideal (Fyall 2017). Based on the official discourse conveyed by the management of these organizations[83], I show that it is not so much a question of (moral) neutrality, but of *prioritization* of moral imperatives. This has a direct influence on the way in which organizations define themselves as partners of the state, but also on their ways of perceiving the resulting role and the purpose(s) of this function. To be more precise, I show how organizational interpretations of the commonweal shape their understanding of the substantive goal(s) the apparatus of asylum reception is geared toward.

7.1. Being contractual partners

The guiding principles of ORS, ABR, and CRS and their institutional environments vary and are significantly different. As already outlined in Chapter 2, their history and identity diverge on many aspects. The most obvious one concerns their legal status and primary purpose: While ABR and CRS are non-profit organizations, ORS is a profit-oriented enterprise. The institutional tradition from which the different tasks they perform daily derive also varies considerably: While CRS dates back to the early 20th century, ABR and ORS are more recent institutions the creation of which have been specifically linked to the field of asylum in the 1990s.

These manifold backgrounds are reflected in different self-presentations and ideological frameworks, in particular in the ways they define themselves as partners of the state (see boxes). Perceptions of the services offered on a day-to-day basis, as well as of the population or entity benefiting from them, also vary.

Box 7.1 "We are the operational arm of the canton"

Since its creation in 1992, ORS, a for-profit company, has provided services that specifically meet the needs of public authorities seeking solutions for the housing and supervision of asylum seekers:

> ORS is a company specializing in the supervision [*encadrement*] and accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees. In this context, the company considers its main mission to be the reliable care [*prise en charge*] and respectful treatment [*traitement*] of these people. (ORS undated-a)

Through its "political and religious neutrality", as well as the experience it has acquired since the 1990s, ORS presents itself as a "competent and reliable" service provider for public authorities and

[83] The organization's management is understood here in the broadest sense. It includes the respective directors and co-directors, but also all the people responsible for the different sections within the organization (first and second phases of reception, integration, volunteering, training, etc.) and for the operational management of reception, as well as the managers of the reception facilities.

"the recognized partner of the Confederation, the cantons, and the communes" (ORS undated-a). Accordingly, the company argues that it "relieves the authorities of a task that they could not accomplish in an economic, professional, and sufficiently flexible manner" (ORS 2017). "The law", but also "the directives of its mandators" strictly dictate and guide its actions:

> We align the supervision and support [*accompagnement*] of asylum seekers with our mandate, human rights, the Asylum Act, the ordinances and directives of the Confederation, the cantons and the [municipalities], as well as our professional expertise. (ORS 2014, internal document)

Religious, ideological, and philosophical principles "are not an appropriate basis" (ORS 2017) for the work the company carries out in reception centers. Thus, by presenting itself as a neutral service provider and strictly aligning itself with the wishes of its "clients" (i.e., public authorities), the company serves as the implementation agency of the public authorities: "we are the operational arm of the canton and we don't think we are anything else", explains a member of ORS Fribourg management, adding "[the canton] is the brain and we act" (Interview, summer 2016).

Box 7.2 "We work on behalf of the canton of Bern"

"Our missions and competences are defined by service contracts with the cantonal authorities," states the ABR's Annual Report 2016 (internal document). The organization indeed presents itself as "a private non-profit association that fulfills public interest missions in the field of asylum." Its status has however changed over the years. After being originally attached to the Secretariat for Refugees of the city of Biel, a department attached to the social services of the city, in 2002 it became "a legal entity that could act freely" (Interview, ABR's management, autumn 2017). With a decentralized and low-hierarchical structure, its "asylum reception tradition" emerges from the daily practices of its employees who have gradually created "small kingdoms... with the positive and negative side that this can have", as observed by a member of ABR management (Interview, autumn 2017). The identity, or rather the multiple "local identities" (Interview, center manager, summer 2017) of ABR thus emerge from localized practices, i.e., from the various facilities managed by the organization. However, two rallying elements can be identified: on the one hand, a broad and inclusive understanding of ABR as a "social service" intended for the "daily accompaniment" of persons in the field of asylum whose "main mission" is to "encourage the development of the autonomy and skills of […] users [*usagers*]" (Annual Report 2016). On the other hand, ABR has a relationship with the cantonal authorities characterized by tension. One member of the management team even speaks of a "clash of culture" (Interview, summer 2017) between public authorities and field actors, who find themselves at odds with the prevailing security and managerial rationalities. A member of the management team observes somewhat bitterly that:

> Yes, we do obey, but we also make sure that our users are treated correctly by the authorities! [...] We are a little more involved than other organizations that are truly executors [*Ausführende*]." (Interview, autumn 2017)

Box 7.3 "[We] support the state in the performance of its humanitarian tasks"

A brochure on the history of the Swiss Red Cross presents the organization as follows:

> The [Swiss Red Cross] is the only humanitarian organization recognized as a national Red Cross society on Swiss territory under the Geneva Convention. This recognition implies a commitment on the part of the SRC to support the state in the performance of its humanitarian tasks. (SRC 2008: 33)

As "auxiliary" and "partner of the authorities", the Swiss Red Cross collaborates in the social and health sector with the Confederation and the 26 Swiss cantons "while maintaining its political independence" (SRC 2008: 55). "Humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntariness, unity, universality" are the seven fundamental principles that guide the action of the International Red Cross Movement. They represent the foundation on which all those who are committed and work under the Red Cross emblem are supposed to rely. "As a humanitarian organization, the Swiss Red Cross focuses its services – in Switzerland and abroad – on people whose life, health or dignity is threatened or violated (vulnerable persons)" (SRC 2008: 29). As also emphasized by a member of CRS management in Ticino: "we clearly work according to our seven principles. The objective – which is not always easy to achieve – is to be able to support the most vulnerable persons" (Interview, summer 2018). This is the common thread running through CRS' actions, even if it means challenging some of the state's decisions. "The canton is responsible anyway. But it is also true that I do not hide behind this, I carry on my speech," argues the same interlocutor (Interview, summer 2018).

As these excerpts illustrate, the ways in which ORS, ABR, and CRS make sense of their contractual relationship with the cantonal authorities, as well as their resulting role, vary considerably. Whereas ORS emphasizes its professionalism and being the *recognized* and *reliable* partner of the public authorities in providing *specific services* (hence its original name, literally meaning organization for direction and special assignments), ABR positions itself as a local institution working *on behalf* of the state in the provision of *social services*. For its part, CRS presents itself as the *historical auxiliary* of the Swiss authorities in the accomplishment of *humanitarian tasks*. Further, while "clients" are asylum seekers for ABR and CRS, perceived as *users* and *vulnerable persons,* respectively, for ORS, "clients" are their mandators, that is, the *public authorities*. In this sense, they appeal to different ideals, which, in turn, reflect discrepancies in their reading of the imperatives of nation state, which range between the national economy, the welfare of the community, and humanitarian ideals. These reflect significant variations in the *perceived* nature of the contractual relationship that links the mandated organizations to the state.

For ORS, it is a "classic" contractual relationship, namely, a (highly) formalized convention by which one or more entities or persons commit themselves to one or more others to give, to perform something. Thus, the contractual logic appears here as an extension of market rules and inscribes the public-private relationship into one-dimensional rational economic decisions and exchanges (Hiemstra & Conlon 2017). As discussed in Chapter 6, the service contract is seen through the prism of efficiency, i.e., the proper performance of an activity, and not through the prism of effectiveness, i.e., its purpose (Emery & Giauque 2005: 23). It is therefore the form of the services provided, not their content, that is prioritized.

As I will come back to this at greater length in Chapter 8, my observations indeed indicate that ORS pays particular attention to the fashion of the services it provides daily in the reception centers. This can be seen in practice, through the highly elaborate documentation system (see Chapter 5) that results from the company's ISO 9001 certification, but also in the organization's discourse. As such, several members of the management of ORS Fribourg have repeatedly praised the "restructuring" and "rationalization of work processes" that ORS has been working on for many years. "It limits the sources of error, it is simpler, it is rational, it is the obvious thing to do. And it works very well!", argues Claudia (Interview, autumn 2016). Referring to the handover of the reception mandate from the Red Cross to ORS in 2007, Pierre, another officer, explains that "we took over all [Red Cross] tasks and changed them in our own way" (Interview, autumn 2016). As these interlocutors explain to me, changes include, for example, operating on a "flat rate" basis (rather than by actual costs), a partnership with a single health insurance company (following the selection of the most economically interesting offer), decentralization of operational responsibilities within the organization and their transfer to a lower level (i.e., in the reception centers), the reduction of certain teams, but above all the standardization of work procedures. Overall, ORS believes that the ISO certification "objectively confirms the efficiency and quality of the company's processes. It enables internal knowledge management and assurance and thus offers ORS entrepreneurial added value" (ORS Service AG 2014).

Yet, the very identity of ORS – that is, the fact that it is a for-profit company – is the subject of divergent, sometimes paradoxical, arguments within the organization. Claudia explains to me that she has "no problem" with the negative image of ORS (especially in the media). According to her, this identity is not controversial as the organization provides services specifically requested by the public authorities:

> I don't feel like we are making a profit because we are giving less money to the applicants to pay for my vacation! And I don't think the people inside [ORS] feel that way, we don't talk about it at all. But it's not taboo! It doesn't even come to mind because we are doing a job, we are responding to a mission and that's it. It is a mandate that a canton decided to

> give to a company, that the canton could have chosen to carry out itself. [...] To me, we are not sharks looking for money... we offer services! (Interview, autumn 2016)

In the same vein, Pierre maintains that "despite what people believe, despite perhaps the status of limited company [*société anonyme*], our job is to make sure that the mandate is carried out well" (Interview, fall 2016). Referring to the criticisms made by several asylum organizations, he adds that:

> When you hear [the representative of an NGO in Switzerland] say that ORS is not doing its job well... I have never seen this person in my life, she has never come to see [us]. She can come tomorrow morning at 7:00 a.m. and then she will see if we are doing our work badly, if it's dirty [i.e., reception centers], if it is anything. There are people who by definition don't like us because we are a corporation. [...] In the minds of many, if an NGO, a non-profit organization carried out the same exercise, the eventual profit would not go to shareholders, but to social causes. Which is most of the time wrong! (Interview, autumn 2016)

Hence, Pierre does not seem to question here the fact that the potential profits of ORS are paid to shareholders (in this case, Equistone Partners Europe). Instead, he considers that non-profit organizations can simply not make profits (and thus reuse them for what he calls "social causes"), as they work on the basis of actual costs and not on a lump-sum basis. For lack of data in this respect, my research does not aim to deepen, or even validate this assertion, nor to untangle the ways these organizations make profits. Moreover, it would seem, as shown in Chapter 2, that the cantons outsourcing reception tasks to third parties generally do operate on a flat-rate basis, whether they are for-profit or not-for-profit organizations. Yet, what such argumentation illustrates is ORS's desire to legitimize itself (and thereby to distinguish itself from public administrations) by operating in a more rational and efficient way, thus reinforcing the economic rationale behind the contractual relationship.

It should be noted, however, that the deep embeddedness of ORS in the rules of the market arouses mistrust, even criticism among reception agents, as the following excerpt shows:

> [During an internal training day and informal discussions,] I sense a certain mistrust of ORS as a private company among several employees. Some do not understand how "you can make a profit on the backs of human beings." Others wonder about the fact that ORS is listed on the stock exchange and about its turnover, which is unknown. The phrase "it is a private company" comes up relatively often. It is generally used to explain why ORS is doing this or that in a specific way, particularly in terms of its functioning. [...] "They are still human beings!", says an agent to me, talking about asylum seekers. "It is not normal to make a profit on the backs of human beings." (Fieldnotes, summer 2016)

The existence of such tensions may generate moral conflicts among ORS agents, but these can just as easily occur within a non-profit organization, as observed by Borrelli & Lindberg (2018:

173). To this end, street-level workers use discretionary and informal practices to confront or reformulate dilemmas "of dirty hands" (ibid.). In the case of ORS officers, "decoupling" (Boswell 2018) action from belonging can be hypothesized as a way of managing one's membership in a private for-profit company, even though one's own values are opposed to it. Alternatively, while remaining constrained by highly standardized (and to a certain extent depersonalized) work procedures, another solution seems to be that of reintegrating the "self" into this bureaucratic system (Borrelli & Lindberg 2018: 173), for example by displaying all the "identity cards" of the residents who have lived in the center so that they can regularly remember their personal encounter with them, or by aligning work practices with their moral sensitivities (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). Conversely, the constant search for efficiency, and thus the supposedly rational and professional use of public money, is part of an "institutional habitus" (Affolter 2017) that may also be valued and/or reproduced by some reception staff, as highlighted in Chapter 8.

It is worth noting that since my research fieldwork in 2016, ORS has for the first time published its annual report in 2019 indicating a revenue of CHF 87 millions in 2019 and nearly CHF 100 millions in 2018 (ORS Service AG 2020). These figures relate solely to ORS's activities in Switzerland. There is, however, still a lack of transparency about how the company is profiting from its activities and where these potential profits are going, as my encounter with the organization and its employees also shows.

In the case of ABR, too, the perception of the contractual link that binds the organization to the cantonal authorities is part of an economic and managerial logic. It is, in fact, the cantonal authorities that provide the funds necessary for the operation of the organization, which in turn provides services to the canton. However, as I show in Chapters 6 and 8, this contractual relationship is perceived as constraining the daily actions of street-level workers. The principle of economicity, namely the rise of economic thinking and reasoning in the functioning of the state (Emery & Giauque 2012: 29), comes into tension with the second register referred to by ABR: that of the social or public service. The latter's function is defined by Gabriel, a member of ABR's management, as "meeting the needs of users, without having to make accounting calculations at every step" (Interview, summer 2017). This echoes Chevallier (2007: 14, personal translation) who defines public service as "the existence in any society of a set of activities considered to be of common interest and which must therefore be taken over by the community, i.e., a sphere of collective functions." In this sense, to return to the idea of the interface of distance developed earlier, the contractual relationship is not perceived as unilateral (principal to agent): ABR includes the beneficiaries of the reception policy in this equation by giving considerable weight to their degree of protection (Favre et al. 2016: 9), which the organization considers more prominent than the goals of security and economic welfare prioritized by the cantonal authorities. As such, Gabriel recognizes that he has "a lot

of difficulty with the fact of handing over a public mandate, of public interest, as important as that of [asylum reception], to private entities that have shareholders behind them", specifying that "we [ABR] are also a private institution, but any benefit we make must, by our statutes, be allocated to our users" (Interview, summer 2017). Taking the example of the "big machines" (i.e., large public administrations), which according to him do not necessarily provide quality services, he nevertheless seems to qualify his remarks by admitting that "a little efficiency is also a good thing." Thus, while acknowledging that "economicity" but also being "too ideological" in the field of asylum is "dangerous", he believes that "considering the costs and efficiency of services and methods" is also relevant when it comes to "providing a service to the population" – in other words, when it comes of being entrusted with a mandate of public interest.

Finally, the framework that structures the partnership between CRS and the cantonal authorities is that of humanitarianism (Barnett 2013; Fassin 2007). It stems from a cantonal and national tradition in which the Red Cross supports the state in the fulfillment of its humanitarian duty. According to Luciana, a member of CRS management, an organization such as the Red Cross would therefore allow public authorities to go more "to the heart of the malaise [*disaggio*]" (Interview, autumn 2018). In this regard, she adds that CRS' objective is "to support the most vulnerable"; a category of people that, as she points out, she does not apprehend only through a "merely financial discourse, but […] also [as] a person who perhaps has more means but is alone and isolated." Consequently, the contractual relationship seems to concern only one aspect of governing functions: that of the welfare state or, following Bourdieu (2012), the "left hand of the state". As seen previously in Chapter 5, this distinction is also found in the reception infrastructure itself, where the control tower in which the security officers work is completely separated from the workspaces of the reception officers. Furthermore, the security tasks themselves are outsourced to an external entity – in this case, a private security agency. In the terminology used by Valluy (2010), CRS thus distinguishes between asylum law (*droit de l'asile*), i.e., the body of law on asylum, and the right to asylum (*droit d'asile*), as the human right to seek refuge abroad. This does not mean that the asylum law only represents control and security, but rather that within the asylum law, the human rights framework is a minimum standard that serves to ensure the essential living needs of asylum seekers are met. CRS positions itself with regard to this "regime of differential humanity" (Mayblin 2017: 173) by seeking to guarantee fundamental rights to one and all.

Yet, what ORS, ABR, and CRS have in common is their conception of "the state" and its governing functions as an external, separate entity that they are affiliated with, but still retain a distance to. In the following, I analyze how the mandated organizations situate themselves within the "moral community" of migration administrations.

7.2. "We are not police, we are not Bern, we are neutral"

During my fieldwork in the various reception centers run by ORS, ABR, and CRS, a common feature was their proclaimed "neutrality" and "independence" from the state. As in the case of Giulia, a reception officer in the canton of Ticino, explaining to a new resident that "we are not police, we are not Bern, we are neutral" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018), this argument also allows the contracted organizations to legitimize themselves vis-à-vis their mandators by insisting that they have no (moral) bias in implementing the policy of reception. The principle of neutrality and independence is, on the ground, expressed in several ways: legal and religious neutrality, apoliticism, and institutional independence from the government bodies. It is worth noting that beyond discourses and self-presentation, the reliance on managerial and technical working procedures also contribute to the creation of an image of neutrality. This aspect will, however, be presented in Chapter 8 with the example of ORS.

7.2.1. Legal, judicial, political, and religious neutrality

The main demarcation that the mandated organizations wish to draw, or at least the one which has repeatedly emerged in my fieldwork, is that of their unrelatedness from the asylum procedure. As Maria, the head of the Voluntary Work Office, explains, CRS is "absolutely neutral" and has no impact on the decision that is taken "in Bern", i.e., the capital of Switzerland where the SEM is located. "[CRS] only provides shelter, food, and accompaniment to the migrant" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). The principle of neutrality is thus both a vector of trust and a demarcation from what a member of its executive refers to as the "repressive" sphere of the state:

> The [Red Cross] emblem has, in my opinion, its great value [...] (she reflects) the foreigner in general, the migrant, is more open to an entity like the Red Cross. The authorities for them, for their experiences, authority equals repression. So is the police, so is everything. [...] The Red Cross, however, the emblem leads to this openness, this greater trust. (Interview, summer 2018)

The same is true of ORS, which claims it provides a "clear separation of procedures relating to the provision of [legal] advice and guidance" (ORS undated-a). A member of the management of ORS Fribourg illustrates the reasons for this distinction between reception and procedure:

> I think we really need to separate our supervisory work [*travail d'encadrement*] from the [asylum] procedure. It is often difficult because for a lot of claimants who come from other cultures or other countries, the state... the civil servant is the state, the state is the police, the police is the army, and there are certain countries where the repression can also come from state agents. You never know how you are perceived. You have to imagine that the people don't necessarily know about the Swiss political system, the Swiss institutions, the ORS, what the role of the ORS is. […] We are therefore the representatives of Swiss

> institutions and politics. We are the first representative of an authority, even if we are not an authority! And we often have to make people understand that, behind us, there is a Parliament, there are decisions, there are laws, there is a National Council, a Federal Council, etc. All this is very difficult to explain. But that's why we [ORS] distance ourselves completely from everything that is decided, that doesn't belong to us, so that there is no confusion in people's minds. And that's why we really want people to trust us for our work and nothing else. (Interview, autumn 2016)

The argument of religious and political neutrality is usually added to the one of legal and judicial neutrality. This is an integral part of the public identity of each of the organizations: "ORS is neutral with regard to any political party and any confession" (ORS undated-a); "the employees of ABR are politically neutral" (Betreuugskonzept, internal document); "in order to maintain the confidence of all, the Movement [of the Red Cross] refrains from taking part in hostilities and, at all times, in controversies of a political, racial, religious, and ideological nature" (SRC 2008: 55).

However, this principle is expressed in different ways when considering its value and organizational use. It is through these subtle discrepancies that the prioritization of moral imperatives begins to become graspable. For ABR, political and religious neutrality is seen as important, but vis-à-vis the beneficiaries, i.e., the asylum seekers. This is a matter of "respect for the multicultural clientele" (Betreuugskonzept, internal document), as also stated by a member of the management:

> We don't have any religious connotations, which I personally find very important in this field because it seems difficult to me to have a religious connotation and then afterward to deal with this multitude of religions and philosophies of our clients. (Interview, autumn 2017)

More than being impartial toward its mandataries and their moral considerations, ABR thus promotes social cohesion by seeking to facilitate dialogue between individuals from different backgrounds and origins (here asylum seekers and reception officers).

Conversely, by remaining neutral and by not "taking a public position in debates on asylum policy" (ORS, Charter, internal document), ORS believes that it ensures "an efficient and smooth execution of its mandates" (ORS undated-a). In this sense, neutrality is seen as synonymous with non-intervention: on the one hand, because taking a position "is not part of our remit", and, on the other hand, because "this rule serves to strengthen our own security" (ORS, Supervision Guide, internal document). Neutrality, in this sense, appears as a shield against taking positions and assuming responsibilities. As a matter of fact, in the daily life of reception centers, neutrality is closely linked to the principles of objectivity and impersonality that structure the work of its reception officers, which are considered to make ORS credible and reliable in the eyes of the company's clients, i.e., the public authorities. In other words, its

function is that of institutional legitimization through the adoption of rational decision-making styles. In this sense, as further developed in the following chapters, neutrality entails, in practice, a very strong technical orientation, both in terms of language and methods.

As for CRS, it is a more nuanced neutrality. The expression "*refrain* from taking part […] in controversies" used in the above quote already testifies to this. The principle of neutrality thus seems to be valid as long as another fundamental principle of the Red Cross is not endangered, that of humanity:

> The principle of HUMANITY is the essential one, the raison d'être of the Movement, and is the basis of all its interventions. The other principles can only be interpreted in the light of this absolute value. For example, an inhuman act cannot be justified in the name of neutrality. It is therefore always the principle of humanity that prevails over others. The Swiss Red Cross takes a public stand when the principle of humanity is threatened. (SRC 2008: 53, original emphasis)

Hence, through its function as an auxiliary to the public authorities, the organization assumes the role of guardian of humanity; a moral commitment nevertheless undermined by the contractualization and normalization of reception.

7.2.2. The state: an external entity

Yet, as the previous examples show, while "the state", as a contractual partner, is seen as the provider of funds for the performance of tasks related to the reception of asylum seekers, and thus the guarantor of institutional survival, it is also seen as an external entity. This echoes Bierschenk (2014) and Lentz (2014), who show that when bureaucrats refer to the state, it is often as if it was an external entity about which they complain or seek to vindicate. Much like public bureaucrats, referring to "the state" (or "the law") is one card that the mandated organizations can draw in relation to asylum seekers, or in the construction of their external organizational identity. Indeed, as also observed by Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan (2019: 247), this link is rarely evoked in day-to-day intra-organizational practice and in internal interactions between reception agents.

The perceived entity of the state is both abstract and concrete. Abstract but legible (in the eyes of asylum seekers in particular), as it is defined by broad categories such as "police", "Bern" or even "Switzerland" when referring to the judicial and repressive bodies involved in the asylum system and from which the organizations wish to distinguish themselves. "We are subject to the decisions, we are not directly concerned by the procedure," stresses a member of the management of ORS Fribourg (Interview, autumn 2016), specifying that "it is between the person [the asylum seeker] and Switzerland." "The great danger is the mixing of genres," adds the same interviewee, "because the [asylum] decision is only federal. It's really a federal prerogative." The state is therefore perceived here as a unified and centralized entity, from

which the service providers are ideologically and morally detached. Somewhat paradoxically, organizations and their agents thus voluntarily distance themselves from the field of migration control: Reception organizations are not the ones deciding on asylum seekers' applications but are only "hosting" them until the end of the asylum procedure. Nevertheless, to take up Bourdieu's (2012) metaphor, they reduce the state to its "right hand" (regalian), as if its "left hand", the welfare state, did not exist, thus giving the impression that the reception tasks they are entrusted with are not part of the prerogatives of the state.

At the same time, the state is a concrete and situated reality – yet rather illegible – as it is embodied by the public administration and its civil servants, whose functioning is perceived as extremely cumbersome and complex. As shown in Chapter 6, this figure of the state appears more tangible to the mandated organizations, who are in direct and regular contact with it through the contractual link that connects them, and who suffer the consequences. The perception of a heavy bureaucracy in the public sphere is precisely one element that pushes street-level organizations to distinguish themselves from it, or at least to value the flexibility of the private sector. This echoes the arguments put forward by the cantonal authorities in the choice of mandating private rather than public organizations.

However, it is not always easy for private contractors to position themselves within the reception system and to make sense of their status vis-à-vis the state apparatus, as shown by this exchange between two members of the ABR management:

> Interlocutor 1: Do we [ABR] consider ourselves as private? (I1 asks I2)
>
> Interlocutor 2: Yes, I would say. Personally...
>
> I1: [Interrupting him] Well, we are called an authority.
>
> I2: Yes, we are an authority, we're not really in the private sector.
>
> I1: Exactly.
>
> I2: But still, I find we have much more freedom than if we were a service [*Abteilung*] of the cantonal administration, in this case... [mimics the gesture of shooting himself in the head] goodbye, thank you. We have a lot more freedom. Then, is this an advantage for the canton, for the authorities? Pff... [reflects] I'd say yes. I don't know how they would manage the migratory influxes and all that. It's much too cumbersome [*schwerfälling*], much too rigid. If you have an organization like us, compared with an organizational structure that depends on a city, for example, on the administration of the city in Bern or in the Oberland: They are much clumsier, much more rigid. It doesn't work like that, they can't just … decide in a few days, "oh yes, we're going to open this [facility]," and so on. They can't employ people as they want. [...] It's much more complicated than it is for us. We're doing tuc, tuc, tuc, tuc, tuc [to show that everything goes smoothly]. We're much more flexible, I think. (Interview, autumn 2017)

In an ambivalent way, ABR thus seems to be building its organizational identity by valuing both its private status and the internal workings that flow from it, and the values of public service.

The independence and institutional "freedom" of the private sphere is nevertheless a constant narrative. At ORS, the emphasis on a specific "corporate culture" (Interview, summer 2016) also points to a more rational and efficient organizational functioning than the public sector. Hence, as Rosset (2019b) shows in the analysis of an infrastructure of distantiation built around Country of Origin Information (COI) production sites, this work of detachment from the organizational culture of the state has a communicative dimension. The cultivation of the ethics of private management by ORS takes place internally, with respect to the organization's employees, but, above all, externally, with respect to the mandators who justify the use of public-private partnerships through economic rationality.

7.2.3. Cognitive detachment and accountability

Although being *de facto* contractually bound to the cantonal authorities, the interface of distance at the same time creates the (possible) space for mandated organizations to distance themselves physically, institutionally, or even morally from what I have previously referred to as the decision-making sphere of the state. As I have shown, in the eyes of ORS, ABR, and CRS, the latter can indeed be divided into several faces and functions, which are often intertwined, and which could be summarized as judicial, administrative/bureaucratic, repressive, and welfare spheres. Thus, these various "state figures" enable the implementing organizations to (counter-)position themselves within the state apparatus: at the institutional level, by distinguishing themselves from the organizational culture of the public service, but also by detaching themselves from the legal process on the other; at the moral level, by standing as the guarantors of a humanitarian rationality or of an assistance policy stifled by the repressive sphere of the state, as in the case of CRS and ABR, or by privileging a "business" (Rose 1999) and "legalistic ethos" (Miaz 2017b) in providing services to the state, as with ORS.

Following Eule et al. (2019a), the principle of neutrality and independence is therefore also a question of responsibility, of a "migration regime of many hands" in which various entities from different spheres seek to remove themselves from direct accountability. While the cantonal authorities are deferring responsibility for the day-to-day running of reception by delegating these tasks to third parties, the latter, by positioning themselves as contractual partners, are detaching themselves from what they consider to be the repressive, judicial, and bureaucratic spheres of the state – in other words, from the "brutal elements" (Gill 2016: 147) of asylum governance. Such cognitive detachment or "passing the buck" mentality (Eule et al. 2019a: 204-205) enables them to avoid being accountable for uncomfortable tasks while still performing state functions.

7.3. The added value

This alleged neutrality is furthermore associated with other values, or "added value" in the words of a CRS executive (Interview, summer 2018). These often translate into "ways of doing things" specific to each organization. In other words, organizational understandings of the substantive goal(s) that the policy of asylum reception is concerned with (*ethics*) are accompanied by procedures that the organizations deem proper to fulfill that promise (*ethos*). These combinations of values allow ORS, ABR, and CRS to legitimize themselves in the "business of implementation" (Gill 2016: 39), but also denote specific stances with regard to the imperatives of the nation state. As highlighted in Chapter 8, ethics and ethos are therefore inextricably linked, but can also conflict, especially with the introduction of new public management techniques that affect proper procedure.

7.3.1. "We are assistance professionals"

The following vignette is from a "Welcome to ORS" course for new employees. On the second day, an exchange with the company's CEO, who is traveling from Zurich for this purpose, is organized. In this veritable staging of ORS, the image of the company that he conveys to the new employees mirrors, point by point, that conveyed externally to his mandators and shareholders:

> The presentation is entitled "Exchange with the Director." We are all seated around some tables arranged in a U-shape. He stands in the middle of the room with his hands behind his back. He is not wearing a tie or a jacket. Before starting, he passes by each participant to shake hands and say hello. He begins the presentation by asking what we expect from this hour with him and points to people by name (we each have a name card in front of us) for an answer. He then takes the example of the [ORS internal] charter and asks the employees, on a scale of 1 to 10, how well it is applied in their everyday work. Everyone has to answer, including me. On average, people answer between 6 and 8. I don't get the impression that people are comfortable with this approach or that they really answer with sincerity. He explains that it is normal that no one answered 10 out of 10, but that it is important to keep trying to reach 10. He emphasizes the idea of "improvement." He then asks the room what we think he expects from the staff. After having once again designated people to answer, he explains that he has three main expectations:
>
> (1) "to be above average" [*überdurschnittlich*], "to be convinced that you are right for the job." In connection with this, he points out that ORS is a private business and, therefore, "it's like an exotic organization in the field of reception."
>
> (2) "Continually developing the organization, its ideas; always improving." He seems to particularly emphasize the "excellence" and "specificity" of ORS. He insists on the fact that the company, and therefore its employees, must constantly improve the procedures that exist for each task.

(3) "Doing a good job", i.e., "constant" and "fair" supervision; giving the same attention to everyone, giving the same time to everyone. (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

In doing so, he adopts the codes of the "ethos of business" discussed by Rose (1999) and, more specifically, those of the ISO 9001 standard. The latter, as a neutral external certification, becomes a legitimizing tool to perpetuate the myth of a certain "quality" that continues to develop (see Chapter 8.2). Although indirectly, this vignette also evokes two points particularly valued by ORS in the construction of its institutional identity: "more rational use of the funds made available to them" (ORS 2017) and "dignified, open, and respectful treatment of asylum seekers" (ORS undated-b). Through the ISO norm, ORS thus offers "fair", "just", and "professional" (ORS undated-b) support services through the development of certified and standardized work processes while acting "as an entrepreneur" and working "efficiently and cost-consciously" (ORS 2017), as also underlined by Claudia, a member of the management of ORS Fribourg :

> [H]ere we are closer to money, more sensitive to the money one gives. And we think in another way. We have the mandate of the canton [...] we can lose it in a certain way. There is a risk [...] if we work badly, etc. As a result, we are closer to the source [money], while the person who works for the state – without judging because everyone is in the same boat – will tend to be less careful about that and spend more. I think we are perhaps more careful in thinking about how we can – without cheating, following standards – how we can find adequate solutions. (Interview, autumn 2016)

As stressed by the organization, these requirements "coincide with those of its mandators" (ORS 2017) who, as I showed earlier, paid particular attention to the financial dimension when awarding the mandate to ORS. In this sense, acting as entrepreneurs and (impersonal) professionals represents added value in the eyes of the organization, which prides itself on offering quality services in a rational, accountable, and cost-conscious manner.

7.3.2. "My *benefit* is to be able to offer something more to the asylum seeker"

Although in a completely different vein, the concern for cost is also reflected in the speech of CRS management. However, it is not (only) formulated in terms of rationality and efficiency. Rather, it is about supplementing the limited financial means that the organization has at its disposal through its mandate to care for vulnerable people. Referring to the reception market and, more specifically, by comparing the charity to "limited companies" such as ORS, Luciana, one of the directors, emphasizes that this allows her to "give the extra sweetness" (*dare il dolce in più*), to offer an "added value" to asylum seekers (Interview, summer 2017). To do so, CRS proceeds in two ways.

The first path entails calling on an additional workforce: that of volunteers, who play a central role in the functioning of the organization. Interestingly, as also observed by Muehlebach

(2012) in the context of privatized care and health services in Italy, voluntarism thereby becomes an integral part of the realm of market exchange (despite many of those invested in it probably do not feel that way and are rather animated by compassionate feelings). In the canton of Ticino, although they are not in charge of the main tasks of assistance and supervision, volunteers are part of the reception system by filling the gaps that CRS, based on the annual amount it has available, cannot fill:

> We clearly have [a] very important principle: It is the volunteer part, because today we have over 380 volunteers working with us. We have some services that are managed only through volunteering, only on a voluntary basis. As I say, for me, volunteering is really a surplus value in everyday life and it also allows us to give many answers, many services to those in need, but also in a really diversified form. (Interview, CRS management, summer 2018)

As Maria, the head of the Volunteer Office, explains, the particularity of volunteering at CRS is that it is "structured" (Interview notes, summer 2018). Via a multi-stage socialization (several interviews, trial period, and training course), this structuration implies that volunteers are integrated into the organization's values and ways of doing and are not just "free agents" circulating randomly in the organization.

The "plus activities" (Interview notes, summer 2018) offered by the volunteers include Italian classes for different levels, homework support/help for school children, various types of activities (cooking, games, talking space, sewing, cultural or sports outings, etc.), babysitting for the children of residents who have to attend classes, personal accompaniment, and so forth. These activities are "ways of creating contours," Maria explains, describing them as ways to broaden and strengthen the activities proposed by reception staff and thus, indirectly, the policy put in place by the authorities. For the language course, for example, she says the aim is not only to learn a language, but also to "socialize" and gain a more general "cultural knowledge." The aim is also to "strengthen the integration modules" organized by CRS. As stressed by Luciana and Maria, this is particularly the case with unaccompanied minors or people in emergency aid, also housed in the reception centers, who do not have access to basic language courses and who, as Maria points out, "have no future in integration." For these people, the aim is therefore to "bring them closer to the culture, the language, the territory" (Interview notes, summer 2018). Therefore, for CRS, volunteers are a "resource" that must be taken advantage of. More specifically, their role is to create a link with the outside of the reception center, the walls of which become somewhat permeable. "Volunteerism is an intermediary with real life," Maria points out, "compared to [reception] officers, we are a third eye" (Interview notes, summer 2018).

The second way CRS proceeds is by supplementing the cantonal budget by seeking external funding from private foundations. According to Luciana, this makes it possible to offer "added value" to the residents of the reception centers, and, in particular, to the children:

> I think it gives that extra touch. […] The foundations allow me to give that extra touch. Because I'm thinking of the kids who are 10 weeks on vacation a year. We're talking about integration. What is integration? Being part of something, too. If a youth is already marginalized because he is a migrant, because of his skin color, because he or she doesn't have the means of others. […] Then he comes back to school after 10 weeks, he or she has done 10 weeks in a center and hasn't lived anything. The others, who went to the sea, who went to the camp site, who went to the mountains... he or she is marginalized, again. We therefore went out of our way to look for this extra dessert. This summer, for example, we were able to have everyone take part in a swimming course. […] And the fact that they were able to make contact with this reality and they were able to take a swimming course, well, I was very happy to be able to offer them this, because, in my opinion, it is that added value. The fact that we have a collaboration with the [sport] center in [name of the town], where they were able to get to know various sports activities, is an added value for me. Going on a three-day trek... you get to know something. It's something they can tell, it's something they've experienced. But it leaves traces, doesn't it? I think that's what integration is about. […] The aim of the search for funds for me was this: to be able to offer emotions, holidays, realities. (Interview, summer 2018)

As I show in Chapter 9, external funds (here, Swiss Solidarity) also finance the "listening desk" (*sportello di ascolto*) set up by CRS to offer psychological support to the residents of the reception centers. The very identity and legal status of the organizations in question is central in this respect. As a charity at the service of the common good, CRS is legitimate in the collection of funds from donors "out of solidarity." Unlike a for-profit company such as ORS or even a private institution such as ABR, it therefore possesses (the means to raise) personal funds that it invests for the causes it defends.

"This is something we do outside; it's not taxpayers' money," argues Luciana (Interview, summer 2018). Interestingly, the search for external funds is indeed also presented as a means of alleviating public spending, and thus, by extension, that of taxpayers:

> I could have asked the canton in some ways. I start from the philosophy that the canton is us taxpayers and thus, when there are projects everywhere where you can ask, I go and knock, I ask, because it is a form of collaboration also with the authority. Because it is not that if the canton pays, everything is due. Or it owes me. It's all of us. [...] As I've explained, I'm going to look for other funds, too, in order not to weigh too much on the till. Because in my opinion, it's also right that way. (Interview, summer 2018)

This is in line with ORS's argument on the efficient use of public resources, but the nuance is that it does not seek to reduce costs, but rather to increase them by finding financing alternatives.

7.3.3. "Sometimes we are a bit of a Don Quixote"

Finally, the case of ABR appears to be more complex to grasp. Indeed, contrary to CRS, which seeks first and foremost to legitimize itself among its mandators, one of the characteristics of the association is to build an identity in opposition to that of the public authorities. It is not so much a question of being in harmony with the latter by promoting the discourse of economicity, but rather of defending public service values in a context that puts them under pressure; a bit like Don Quixote fighting against the social structures of a Spanish society perceived as rigid and experienced as absurd, as felt by Gabriel, the head of Bürgistadt (Interview, autumn 2017).

Through a permanent "balancing act", the work of legitimation is mainly done internally, particularly vis-à-vis all employees (including management and agents) who are led to co-construct an organizational identity that makes sense to them while remaining anchored in a broader (and binding) framework:

> It is important to us to carry out the assigned tasks responsibly [*verantwortungsvoll*]. In doing so, we are confronted with a wide range of different expectations, whether those of our clients, the mandators or the public. Often, it is a balancing act to do full justice to all of them. Political developments in Switzerland and abroad, federal and cantonal decisions, and the attitude of society towards our field of activity all influence our work. (Reception concept, ABR, internal document, 2014)

As mentioned above, this identity is rooted in the local reality of each reception center managed by ABR, as recalled by a member of management: "for most ABR employees, before working for ABR, they work for the center [A], they work for the center [B] or they work for the center [C]" (Interview, autumn 2017). They therefore do not refer to a homogeneous identity, but rather to a multiple organizational identity. Nevertheless, all these identity spaces are linked to a common value, that of public service, which they believe is being called into question by the NPM reforms and the budget cuts undertaken by the canton of Bern. To maintain the motivation of the teams, a large margin of maneuver in the organization of each accommodation structure is therefore voluntarily left by the management:

> I2: We have internal guidelines, anyway, but we're not going to work out every detail. I couldn't work like that, ever! I don't want to impose this on anyone else, no. We have the canton's directives, we have internal directives, we have the manual that also tells us how to work, and that's enough. We need to have rules in every center. We have more and more

> rules that we have to implement, but at a certain point, it's enough. We need air, otherwise people's creativity dies after a while.
>
> I1: It creates motivation at work, too. I mean, the more people [employees] have their say, in general, the more motivated they are, that's for sure. (Interview, autumn 2017)

This same discourse is taken up and valued by Gabriel, who stresses the importance of finding meaning in the work done daily:

> I think that if we have a little more leeway, that's what also allows us to find meaning in our work. What we can do beyond what is expected of us, that's where we will find some pleasure and some meaning in what we do. (Interview, autumn 2017)

As Julie, a reception officer, suggests, one of the principles of ABR could therefore be translated as "you can (try to) do this and that", rather than "don't do this or that" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). In this organizational context, discretion is thus fully recognized and even valued. In particular, just as Borrelli & Lindberg (2018) observe in the analysis of migration control officers, it shows that beyond the often-cited coping strategies of blame avoidance and indifference, street-level organizations and agents confronted with morally uncomfortable work realities may also respond to these challenges with creativity. In this sense, discretionary action also entails positive aspects, especially when it enables street-level workers to adjust their attitudes and practices "to advance normative goals of social justice, equality or democracy" (Brodkin 2020: 64). In the case of ABR, discretion seems to be valued only if it is directed toward an added value, namely, toward services aimed at supplementing (and not hardening) those formulated by the cantonal reception mandate.

7.4. Conclusion

As I have shown, the apparatus of reception is part of a specific moral community, which includes the values and ideals that structure and guide the application of the tasks it is entrusted with. It is essentially about assuring public order, an efficient use of public resources, as well as human dignity and basic rights. The ethics of asylum reception, as part of the governance of asylum, are therefore closely linked to those of migration administrations in Switzerland, the missions of which are based on state sovereignty, and ultimately consist of defending national economy and security, as well as human rights.

ORS, ABR, and CRS become an integral part of this community by being paid to provide services that are interrelated with state administrative concerns. Volunteers – in other words, nonremunerated citizens – may, however, just as well become part of this same community, as exemplified by the case of CRS and its "additional workforce". Hence, these organizations embody the operational sphere of the reception apparatus, which is distinct from but complementary to the decision-making sphere represented by the public authorities. Their

status is nonetheless specific, since these mandated organizations are not staffed by civil servants employed by the state. Moreover, these organizations are, in turn, borrowed from specific ideological and normative environments; "reading glasses" that not only influence their understanding of the commonweal, but also shape their own perception of the role they assume within the reception apparatus. This multitude of interests, values, and expectations results in the dispersion and thus fragmentation of the perception of the commonweal. To be more precise, it results in a diversified prioritization of the goals the reception apparatus is concerned with.

Yet, institutional contradictions come to the fore when organizations are made to prioritize one or the other of the imperatives of the nation state. As the previous examples show, these tensions are resolved through strategies of cognitive detachment from the public authorities they work for; in other words, by dissociating the "organizational self" from morally and legally challenging tasks. These strategies are not necessarily visible – especially not for migrants. In particular, they occur when NGOs and humanitarian actors are involved in both care and control functions, thus performing a form of "compassionate repression" to use Fassin's (2010) words. This is particularly the case for ABR and CRS, which face a register of values with which they conflict: a professional culture oriented toward security and managerial concerns for the one, and a legal and political environment privileging national security issues rather than human rights for the other.

But these different readings of the commonweal are embodied above all in the implementation of work procedures that are considered appropriate in the accomplishment of the substantive goal(s) of the reception apparatus. Through the interposition of an additional filter (here, the mandated organizations), the normative environment of the apparatus of reception is manifold: Procedures are based on what street-level workers think is appropriate to do to pursue the commonweal, the latter fitting into different structuring institutional environments and, in turn, influencing the procedural behaviors deemed proper for fulfilling these purposes.

The fields of tension are therefore many (Eckert 2020b: 21). Procedural concerns may prevail over ethics, just as substantive goals and values may override procedural ethoses when these are perceived as hindering service to the commonweal. Moreover, street-level organizations do not necessarily share the same values of procedures, i.e., the same practical norms, nor the same conceptions of the commonweal. The areas of tension between ethics and ethos are thus multiplied according to the number of organizations mandated to implement the reception policy.

This is precisely what I will show in the next chapters through the analysis of the "informalities" (Hibou 2015) and "real world" (Brodkin 2015) of asylum reception. It is indeed in the constant negotiation and navigation of these imperatives that reception organizations –

successfully or unsuccessfully – seek to resolve the moral tensions they face in their daily work. The following chapters address these coping strategies: First, by showing how organizations negotiate the parameters that structure service delivery in the field of asylum reception, and second, by negotiating the actual content of reception services. These strategies reflect the balancing act that the state's contractual partners take part in daily. However, they also reveal considerable discretion in the actual interpretation and implementation of reception services.

8. Between formal conformity to negotiation: neoliberal bureaucratization "from below"

> [T]he formalities are often fuzzy, the rules fluctuating and random, and the patched-up improvisations (bricolages) between techniques, "good practices" and "little arrangements" inevitable, which leaves room for much more latitude than would at first appear, with many more interpretive possibilities and free play as well. This fuzziness opens the door to negotiations. (Hibou 2015: 128)

As I have shown, the apparatus of asylum reception is governed by contractual provisions used by public authorities to create, steer, and evaluate reception mandates. These arrangements of policy delivery are embodied in particular in the multiplication of neoliberal formalities that invade the everyday work of street-level workers.[84] They gravitate in particular around performance measurement and other managerial reforms, generally introduced in an attempt to improve efficiency, accountability, or coordination (Brodkin 2013: 24-25). This normative environment, however, not only acts in a unidirectional way, from public authorities to their contracted partners, but is also used daily by street-level organizations. The interface of distance presented in Chapter 4 acts as a porous mirror that reflects the respective – often divergent – practices of the decision-making and operational spheres of the state vis-à-vis the instruments that navigate between these two poles. By this, I mean that neoliberal bureaucratization not only structures the everyday work of asylum reception but is also manipulated in varying ways and with different purposes by the mandated organizations.

Adopting an approach "from below" (Bayart et al. 2008; Hibou & Samuel 2012), this chapter[85] aims at shedding light on the neoliberal (in)formalities that impact and are produced on a daily basis by a pole of the interface of distance: the organizations implementing the reception policy and their officers. Their everyday, informal, and discretionary practices in that regard reflect not only the obligation to comply with the normative framework imposed by the cantonal authorities, but also the desire to "find their way" in the course of their daily work. By "finding one's way", I mean the negotiation between the contractual imperatives imposed by the public authorities and the ideological and moral considerations of the institutional

[84] This chapter, and more broadly this research, is not intended to be a normative discussion of the managerial instruments used in the governance of reception – as if they were either negative or positive. Rather, it is the effects on the daily work of asylum reception that are the object of study.
[85] The arguments presented in this chapter are adapted from and draw on C. Alberti (2019).

environment; an exercise of balance which, in turn, entails compromises between practical and moral principles.

In what follows, I analyze the "adaptive" (Brodkin 2011a) and "coping strategies" (Borrelli & Lindberg 2018) that emerge on the ground around the *fashion* of service provision and the process of norm development. I highlight instances where ORS, ABR, and CRS and their officers adjust their discourses and practices to better meet their ethical preferences in the face of the neoliberal bureaucratization of their daily work. In other words, I explore how these organizations negotiate and position themselves with respect to the managerial architecture of the reception policy delivery. This analysis is critical to understand how this, in turn, influences the range of possibilities in the day-to-day provision of reception services, as discussed in Chapter 9.

I show that through these adaptive strategies the use of so-called "private" standards can be reinforced or even amplified, but it can also be challenged or circumvented by informal practices, which themselves produce new rules and procedures. These "games with the formalities of neoliberal bureaucracy" (Hibou 2015: 123) manifest themselves in three ways in the case of ORS, ABR, and CRS: in the daily (re)production of content and procedures deemed meaningless, but nevertheless necessary for institutional survival; in the very organizational culture of the subcontractors, and more precisely by a mechanism of "ISO(9001)-morphism", a particular type of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983); but also, in a low-formalized context such as that of Ticino, in a call for the use of managerial norms by reception agents. The accounts and instances that I will present in this chapter are thus not (only) those of successful and "victorious" strategies through which the moral tensions arising from neoliberal bureaucratization are resolved. Instead, they are mostly about daily tinkering.

8.1. Formal continuity (or the meaningless exercises of documentation)

"Formal continuity without any fundamental involvement" – in other words, what is usually called an "*application de façade*" in French (Hibou 2015: 134) – is a configuration that reflects the daily work of ABR and its employees particularly well. It is indeed about formal rules and procedures that are mostly not meaningful to ABR but are adopted (yet slightly adapted) for the sake of appearance to demonstrate that the organization is complying with them. Indeed, as also highlighted by B. D. Smith & Donovan (2003), street-level workers sometimes develop patterns of practice that favor investing in meaningless exercises of documentation. Neoliberal formalities are, in this sense, reportedly not adopted with the intention of breaking them, but rather "for peace and quiet" (Hibou 2015: 124); here to provide protection against loss of mandate in the face of the "dance of contract renewal" (S. R. Smith & Lipsky 1993: 157). Thus, I suggest that the daily (re)production of neoliberal formalities acts as a kind of facade behind

which ABR can implement reception practices that make sense to it and its employees. In what follows, I show how this "cloak of conformity" is constructed daily in Bürgistadt, yet also the way in which its production constrains reception practices that are deemed respectful and sensitive of the diversity that characterizes the center's residents.

What the following examples and accounts highlight is the absurdity (Vohnsen 2017) of bureaucratic "conformity" to managerial imperatives. Yet the point here is not to argue that all paperwork performances are absurd. As I show in the following, some formalities may indeed be meaningful in the daily work of reception. Instead, I suggest that it is the managerial control – in other words, a diffuse control mediated through figures, quantified indicators, and normed procedures – to which ABR is subjected that leads to exercises of documentation deemed meaningless on the ground, or at least that reduce the meaning of the day-to-day work of reception.

8.1.1. Documenting task compliance

As illustrated in Chapter 6, in the canton of Bern, indicator-based reception management takes the form of a series of "quality control, financial monitoring, and effectiveness evaluation" measures (POM 2018: 63-68) introduced by the cantonal authorities to supervise the services provided by their partners. These contractual requirements require ABR and its agents to acquire real bureaucratic know-how. It is not enough for them to know the field in which they work and to have specialized experience and knowledge; they must, above all, have the ability to comply with procedures and produce data of all kinds while at the same time integrating management criteria in terms of organization. These, in turn, need to be translated into operational arrangements that allow comparison, evaluation, and control.

The logbook of the ABR reception agents, an important artifact of bureaucratic work in reception centers, as mentioned in Chapter 5, symbolizes this bureaucratic formality. To be more precise, it symbolizes the subtle tension between its undeniable usefulness in the daily management of a reception center, on the one hand, and the often-tedious constraint to provide evidence, on the other hand. It is an A4 notebook with a quote by the artist Ben Vautier on the front cover: "You have to write everything down." As such, writing – or the production of evidence – is part of the agents' daily routine.

In describing his daily tasks, Selim explains that he writes notes for every task he does during the day: "For example, I have to mark in the [paper and computer] files of every resident when he or she comes to collect social assistance" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). As reflected in my observations, the filling of notes appears to be a kind of ritual during which the reception agents get acquainted, but above all record all the daily events in Bürgistadt: the money that was distributed and to whom; the residents who came to the office and the reasons why they

came; appointments that were made; mail received and distributed; notable behaviors, warnings, and sanctions; health issues; integration interviews that were carried out and the measures that were taken; different dates of entry to school, courses, and trainings; dates of employment, the employer, and his or her telephone number; pending issues concerning residents; and so on. As such, the writing of notes permeates the working days of the agents. Reception officers seem to be constantly self-disciplining themselves in note-taking – first, on notebooks, loose sheets, and post-it notes; then, in the logbook, in paper and computerized versions.

Of course, this bureaucratic work may be similar to any reception center (Kobelinsky 2010), migration administration (Spire 2008), and public service (Dujarier 2017). Yet, it is particularly meaningful when reading the protocols of the weekly team meetings:

> I flip through the binders in the [staff] office and pay particular attention to the collection of protocols that are written after each Tuesday morning team meeting. I note that the "file notes" are very important and that Gabriel constantly asks [the agents] to be rigorous with them. In writing, he reminds them, for example, to "take the time to make file notes. It is very important to be able to justify yourself to external people who are mandated to ask us questions." Gabriel seems to be constantly telling the officers to write these file notes after every phone call, interview, sanction, correspondence received or decision that is made. These remarks appear to be a consequence of the [external audit] that was conducted in April 2017. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

The "file notes" that staff members are urged to produce on a daily basis, on pain of not being able to justify themselves to the canton during the audits carried out twice a year by the private institute LINK (see Chapter 6), bear witness to the climate of suspicion in which organizations and their employees are led to demonstrate and prove their every action and decision to the cantonal authorities.

8.1.2. A reality-like fiction

Beyond the documentary practices that inform the everyday work of reception officers, formal continuity is also constructed and materialized around ABR's internal documentation system, a kind of handbook of internal procedures. If the latter presents several similarities with that of ORS (see below), for example its function as guarantor of "quality" procedures deemed as homogenized, structured, and codified, it differs however on a central aspect, the internal use desired by the organization. ABR is thereby confronted with paradoxical demands: the organization needs to prove the quality and efficiency, and thus the expected standardization of its services to its mandator, while at the same time giving space to the multiple facets of reception work. As such, the internal system of practice documentation reveals the tension between policy labels and practice realities (Brodkin 1997). I suggest that it builds a façade

behind which the mundane and discretionary practices of reception are somehow camouflaged.

One day around the beginning of my research field in the canton of Bern, on the way back to Bürgistadt after having gone to lunch in town, I take the opportunity to continue the discussion that Gabriel, Selim, Julie, and I had at noon about internal guidelines and procedures. I ask if it is possible for me to have access to these documents, which are all listed on an intranet interface. Gabriel, the head of the center, tells me that there is no problem, that he "just" has to find his password. Arriving at the center, they teamed up to give me that access and, after many connection problems, I finally access the "internal manual" (*manuel interne*) of ABR. This meant trying to log in with the accounts of three different people and, above all, remembering the exact codes to access it, which seemed to be a particularly challenging exercise (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). This episode – as anecdotal as it may be – tells me from the outset that ABR's internal manual does not seem to be used much by its agents. This may, however, also indicate that these procedures are now completely internalized by them.

The framing of this manual is of interest. The intranet system opens on the following homepage (of which I present here an extract), which is intended to guide agents in their search for and use of internal guidelines:

> Welcome to ABR's internal manual!
>
> This manual is intended to be a practical resource for staff to simplify, regulate, and facilitate the daily work at the various sites of the institution. The various elements are described in guidelines, checklists, and internal processes. They are supplemented by the legal bases in force and important addresses.
>
> However, this manual should not be regarded as an exhaustive document in terms of the topics covered; it will not provide answers or recipes for all the individual situations that may arise in day-to-day work.

Accordingly, ABR's internal manual is intended to be a toolbox from which agents can draw various pieces and utensils that they can use in their daily work. In other words, it is apparently not intended to provide procedures that define a fixed goal, but rather a variety of tools that can be adapted to different situations. Indeed, while browsing through it, I notice that it mainly offers "memos" (some in French, others in German) on various subjects and not ready-made procedures – a bit like a way of substituting the multitude of notes and loose sheets systematically hung up in the officers' offices, as highlighted in Chapter 5. The topics

cover, for example, furnishing fees, financing of lunch (in case of activities outside the center), health insurance, providers for language courses, homework help, bed bugs, swimming rules and behavior to adopt in rivers, discovery and training courses for asylum seekers, tuberculosis, as well as the asylum procedure and the various permits. Some guidelines are also specifically formulated for the staff, for example concerning the recording of working time, the referral between clients and agents, the management of file notes, overtime, or the regulation of vacations.

However, the boundary between work procedures considered potentially useful or, conversely, insignificant, or even burdensome is thin. "Integration case management" (*gestion des cas en matière d'intégration*), which is richly documented in the intranet system, is a telling example in this respect. This "standardized case management procedure" consists of four main steps, as Julie, explains to me on the basis of a form, she has in front of her:

> The first interview aims to gather general information on the person's personal and professional background (in Switzerland and in his or her country of origin); the second interview aims to analyze the situation (what the person wants, what he or she wants to do, where he or she sees himself or herself in a few years, what percentage he or she would like to work, health, social integration, family, etc.) – multiple-choice questions have to be filled in, Julie explains to me; the third interview aims to establish an "integration plan" and therefore to define the objectives to be achieved; the fourth and last interview consists of the evaluation of the established objectives. (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, this measure results from the recent introduction of a national integration policy concerning the asylum population, which cantons and by extension street-level actors are responsible for implementing. In this sense, contrary to the procedures concerning the center's internal functioning, essentially created for and/or by the agents, the integration procedure is part of a bureaucratic "machinery" introduced by the public authorities around the objective of a rapid and mandatory (professional) integration through predefined objectives and pathways.[86] The counterpart of this policy is the imposition of a whole set of constraining rules, indicators, and standardized procedures in the daily work of frontline actors. These aim at facilitating the monitoring of the use of financial resources allocated by the public authorities for this purpose, but also at verifying whether or not the objectives are being achieved.

This apparently seamless procedure is rather experienced as absurd by the reception staff. Selim, for instance, deplores the fact that the actual content of the integration programs is not

[86] A detailed analysis of the new integration policy is not the subject of this research. However, official documents and instruments, as well as press releases clearly indicate the prevalence of financial rationality in the framing of this policy. It is notably presented as a "profitable investment" for the Swiss Confederation, which should theoretically be able to save on average CHF 90'000 per refugee. See SEM. (2018). La Confédération et les cantons lancent un agenda commun en matière d'intégration. Accessed 13.11.2020 on https://www.sem.admin.ch/ejpd/fr/home/actualite/news/2018/2018-04-30.html.

given more importance in the (external) evaluation of these measures. Gabriel agrees with him and adds in this respect that, for the time being, it is mainly a matter of "putting little crosses in the right places", among other things to receive money from the canton, and thus ensuring the financial survival of the institution (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). Continuing the previously mentioned discussion, Julie also points out that the standardized procedure, as established by the public authorities, is difficult to transpose to the complex and contrasted reality of Bürgistadt:

> Julie tells me that they were never really explained how to implement the case management procedure and that she does it a little "as she pleases". According to her, the officers have a great influence on the residents' integration process: It largely depends on the personality, tools, and knowledge of the reception agent. "These are the limits of integration", Julie tells me. (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

While this obviously evokes the very nature of the discretionary work of street-level bureaucrats as analyzed by Lipsky (2010), I would like instead to consider here how this discourse, and the practices that flow from it, actually fit into a local and informal doctrine[87] that develops almost imperceptibly behind the façade of neoliberal formalities. Indeed, the perception of the "limits of integration" pointed out by Julie results from a set of beliefs, processes, and practical principles that are taught and produced by ABR reception staff in their everyday interactions. Their "local" character (or at least attached to a specific center and team) is of importance because of the fragmented nature of ABR's organizational environment. Thus, a reception staff working in another center might not work at the informal development of such attitudes and practices. Nevertheless, as mentioned in Chapter 7, the very philosophy of ABR means that spaces of negotiation are authorized by the management and even valued when judged as advancing social justice goals.

As such, my observations suggest that in Bürgistadt, it is ultimately during the numerous discussions between colleagues, and more intensively during the weekly colloquia, that all questions relating to the actual implementation of integration measures, and more broadly of the reception policy, are discussed. The following list, written after my first participation in one of these meetings, is an example among others:

> Diverse and varied subjects are discussed, but always centered on how to improve the "well-being" of the residents, sometimes also of the agents: Illnesses, operations planned and/or to be planned; a resident's feeling of stress in the face of (the uncertainty of) his asylum procedure; disappointments of some residents, e.g., with regard to courses or access to training; collective refusal to place a young Eritrean woman with an old Afghan woman in the same room – big risks of conflicts according to the staff; worries and

[87] Doctrine is similarly understood as the "secondary application norms" (*normes secondaires d'application*) analyzed by Lascoumes (1990), or Miaz (2017b) in the Swiss asylum context.

> frustrations on the part of the agents with regard to their daily work, and in particular the measures to be implemented; the attitudes adopted by officers towards residents; motivation problems encountered by some residents; and so forth. (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

Everyone's opinion is considered, as for example when discussing the case of Ms. Almedom, an elderly Eritrean woman, for whom "it is not easy to find adequate integration measures", especially because of her age. Indeed, the integration policy provides for few, if any, measures for refugees beyond the age of 50. For example, she would need a conversation workshop to simply chat with people in German, Selim suggests. Further, while some suggest finding her an apartment, thus making her more "autonomous", others point out the risk of isolating her situation by taking her out of the setting of the center. In doing so, they all seem to converge on a reflection on how to adapt the standardized integration management procedure that does not provide for such cases (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). Importance is given to the social and human dimensions of the reception work, as evidenced by an irritated comment from Gabriel who exclaims on another occasion "we're not going to discuss mattresses during the colloquium!" while the discussion revolves around mainly logistical aspects (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017).

In this sense, more than a written support of standardized and codified procedures to which agents can (or even must) refer, it is in the oral, and sometimes messy, exchange with their peers that reflections are initiated, and solutions formulated.[88] The attendance control in reception centers, elaborated in Chapter 9, is another noteworthy example: Despite the existence of an extensive formal procedure, which is moreover presented as being in conformity with the service contract, this obligation is negotiated on the ground, or even somehow bypassed. It is based on collective discussions, also taking into account the opinions of asylum seekers, that the Bürgistadt staff now implements a supposedly "more sensible" control policy that plays on *who* must provide a signature to attest to the presence of residents (resulting here in the shifting of this burden onto the officers' shoulders rather than to the asylum seekers).

Ultimately, what appears through these few examples is, in my opinion, the specific function of this set of procedures vis-à-vis the exterior. Within the framework of the contractual relationship between ABR and the Bernese cantonal authorities and acknowledging that such a documentation system is substantially also a legitimate way of facilitating the management of work, it is thus mostly a matter of reporting on (apparently) "good" practices, rather than primarily serving frontline actors. It consists of indicating to the mandators how the agents (must) work, which paths they take to do so, and according to which steps – even if these

[88] The exchange of practices, despite its often benevolent form, may, however, also indirectly be a means of keeping the actions of peers under (social) control and evaluating them.

processes are in reality "empty shells" to which no meaning and usefulness is attributed. Overall, the very object of the documentation system highlights the subtle negotiations to which this device may be subject. It crystallizes the narrow nexus between the (written and visible) formalities and the (rather oral and thus hardly controllable) informalities of asylum reception.

8.1.3. (Re)producing dilemmas

These spaces of negotiation need, however, to be nuanced in the light of the climate of suspicion and control in which ABR evolves in the provision of reception services. As already mentioned in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 6, government by indicators in effect strongly conditions ABR's everyday work by bureaucratic means, in particular through auditing. It is thus in the light of its possible effects on the ground that it is here analyzed.

Through its performative effect, that is, the need to comply with the obligation to be controlled *ex post* (Power 1994: 7), auditing structures the daily work in Bürgistadt and, in turn, generates specific forms of relationships, habits, and practices. In other words, auditing actively constructs the contexts in which ABR operates. Consequently, the time devoted to residents (and not so much the content of the practices themselves) is transformed under the weight of bureaucratic practices and the obligation to comply with the indicators required by the public authorities. Reception officers are eventually faced with a daily dilemma, namely, to produce evidence or to favor personal exchanges with asylum seekers, as Gabriel observes:

> To be able to produce these indicators, we are asked for figures. We have to carry out actions for which the field does not always see the meaning, but we do it because we have to, because we have to produce a document, because we have to produce a figure, because we have to produce proof. When we have an audit, we are asked, "how do you do that?" It is not enough to say, "that's how we do it." No. You have to have a document that proves that you're actually doing it. We thus produce this document because we are expected to do it and while we are writing this document, we are obviously not in conversation with our residents. (Interview, autumn 2017)

The sterile production of justifying documents is, in this sense, an integral part of reception agents' daily lives, at the expanse of time for the "human" dimension of the reception work they would like to foster. "These indicators are almost all in the efficiency range," notes Gabriel, who points out that "for the canton, obviously, it's easier to have an indicator where you can say 'acquired, acquired, acquired, or not acquired'" (Interview, autumn 2017). He believes that "for the canton, you have to be able to tick boxes and say 'here I did interview number 1, number 2, number 3, I distributed brochure XY, brochure WK' and that's how the canton will judge that we've done our job."

Through the "quiet power of indicators" (Merry et al. 2015), the culture of evidence evaluation, in this sense, becomes a recursive and self-replicating mechanism whereby what is ultimately measured is not the content of the services and the theoretically expected outcomes. Instead, what is measured is the compliance with the terms and conditions of that "culture" itself. Accordingly, Gabriel observes that reception agents end up preparing these documents in advance by modifying them slightly each time. The same goes for a member of ABR management who, mimicking the gesture of handing a document to someone and saying "here, here, look, it's written here," explains to me that "[ABR management] has developed a concept of quality control, according to the standards... EF... I don't know what it's called anymore. The EF thing [i.e., the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model]. But it exists, it's very good. We can take it out. It exists" (Interview, autumn 2017). The documentation device mentioned above is the direct result of this standardization process. In doing so, the organization not only participates in the construction of their image, that of a "good pupil", but also takes part, in spite of itself, in the reproduction of the culture of formalities which structures the reception of asylum seekers.

In short, the example of ABR reveals two important tensions around neoliberal bureaucratization. On the one hand, the overwhelming priority for quantitative models of control and accountability resulting from the "audit explosion" (Power 1994: 7), to the detriment of qualitative norms and models rather privileged by public service professions (Hibou 2015: 125-126). Second, the gap between the *form* of reception work and its *content*. Indeed, much like the interface of distance, the daily reproduction of neoliberal formalities by ABR acts as a shield: It reflects "proper procedural practices" to the cantonal authorities while at the same time hiding the actual practices of reception that (slightly) diverge from those expected by the canton of Bern. Despite binding contractual provisions, ABR indeed still manages to challenge reception standards by using the few avenues available to it, in particular, in relation to the interpretation of "reception" and the negotiation of its grey areas. As highlighted in Chapter 9, the organization attempts to do more than the minimum required by contract, though greatly constrained by the time required for bureaucratic documentation.

8.2. Corporate culture and ISO(9001)-morphism

Yet the embodiment of the neoliberal bureaucratization of asylum reception is illustrated, and sometimes also accentuated, through the very philosophy and functioning of the mandated organization. This is the case of ORS, which, in the words of a member of ORS Fribourg management, has built up a "corporate culture" (Interview, autumn 2016) strictly in accordance with the ISO 9001 standard, developed by the International Organization for Standardization to define the criteria for quality-based management and production, toward which the company converges through the integration of the resulting formal structures and

logics. Under the motto "ORS stands for quality in management services" (ORS, 2018), the organization is "neutrally and internationally recognized" and thus "provides high-quality management services in a timely manner, on time and at any location, using harmonized processes" (ORS, undated). As mentioned before, this stance provides the company with an opportunity to differentiate itself from the religious, ideological, and philosophical principles that (supposedly) guide the actions of its peers in the reception field.

If, in the case of ABR, I spoke of a cloak of conformity which concealed a discrepancy between the normative environment valued by the canton of Bern and that of the organization, then in the case of ORS, I observe a perfect alignment between the two poles. This is the very principle of ORS, which, as previously demonstrated, aligns itself with the ideological and normative environment of its mandators. This does not mean, however, that discretionary practices are non-existent in the day-to-day work of ORS reception officers, nor does it mean that the development of an informal and oral doctrine as in the case of ABR is impossible. Rather, I suggest that this intentional alignment means that the space for negotiation is much more restricted, notably by the existence of norms of conduct that internally frame the agents' activities.

This process of "ISO(9001)-morphism" is, in my view, a specific, neoliberal mechanism of institutional isomorphic change theorized by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) to refer to the process of homogenizing organizations in a given field in their structures, cultures, and practices. More specifically, it refers to a mechanism that is both prescriptive and coercive, and by which an organization forms and complies with external expectations (defined, for example, in a mandate) and develops this same mechanism into a highly sophisticated internal operating technology. ORS thus brings its organizational culture and practices into line with the neoliberal formalities imposed by the cantonal authorities — in particular, the need to "benefit from an internal quality assurance system" (DSAS, 2007) while deploying these same formalities in the management and day-to-day practices of the reception service. In this sense, the ISO 9001 standard becomes as much a means of standardizing ORS's internal operations as it is a legitimizing tool to perpetuate the idea of a certain "quality" that continues to develop. In what follows, I show that the ISO-morphism process materializes in three (interrelated) ways in the reception centers managed by ORS: through the development and documentation of certified and standardized work processes, through the deployment of an internal audit culture, and through the daily reproduction of an institutional habitus of "reception at the lowest cost."

8.2.1. "The bible of common procedures"

A bit like an initiation rite marking their entry into ORS, new agents are very quickly confronted with the organization's "quality concept" – the set of procedures by which the

company defines, implements, and improves its objectives and services – during the "Welcome to ORS!" course. On this occasion, the quality system manager summarizes it as follows:

> *What does "quality" mean to ORS? (slide title)*
>
> *Towards clients = standards, obligation, trust, loyalty.*
>
> *Towards the management = overview, (means of) control (i.e., whether the employees do their job well), improvement (checklist).*
>
> *Regarding procedures = efficiency, best practice, memory (the "knowledge" of the organization, experience).*
>
> To clarify matters, he asks the new employees who they believe are ORS' "clients." "The [asylum] seekers!" a member of staff quickly replies, who is corrected by the speaker, who explains to everyone that "no, our clients are the Confederation, the cantons, and the municipalities."
>
> He ends his speech by returning to the functioning of the quality system. He reminds staff that each task related to the "management" of asylum seekers has its own procedure, which is listed in the QMS, the quality management system; a keyword search is enough to bring up different documents. The instructions – or rather the "obligations" of the employees, as he repeats a few times – regarding the use of these procedures are *a) consistent application and introduction of all measures proposed by the quality management system; b) not to use any documents other than those proposed; c) to inform the superior immediately in case of possible improvements.* (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

As such, by developing and documenting standardized procedures, the company's objective is to develop external practical legitimacy, in the eyes of its principals and shareholders, yet also internally, with its employees who "always know what to do." Claudia, a member of ORS management in Fribourg, explains that the creation of a best-practices manual is a "vital and essential" project for the smooth running of the company:

> [This ongoing] project is really vital and essential to me: It is a bible of common procedures. It is a reference tool, actually. We currently have a lot of documents in the database, we have an intranet because we are in our ISO quality system, so we have to use the same documents, and then this bible is a document that lists all the decisions we make – either at the level of coordination, or management, or at the level of meetings with [employees], or with other sectors, or when I make a decision. And then there are the decisions that are listed, plus the documents, the procedures that are summarized on practical cases. (Interview, autumn 2016)

In concrete terms, this elaborated "frame of reference" is accessible by all employees via an intranet interface on which all the organization's work processes are listed. They include cantonal guidelines, regulations (e.g., center regulations), internal guidelines (e.g.,

management of file notes), job descriptions, internal procedures to be followed (e.g., on the arrival or departure of an asylum seeker), protocols to be followed in the event of fights in the homes (e.g., sanctions to be applied) or various checklists (e.g., material to be provided to asylum seekers). Procedures are usually presented in the form of synthetic tables with several inputs (input, procedure flow, output, etc.) under which the tasks to be performed are indicated and listed.

As such, the standards that structure the work of reception workers, just like those who oversee the activities of any public and private organization, have the peculiarity of automating part of the productive work and fixing the way in which the agents must proceed to do the rest. They order single tasks in a supposedly rational manner and impose a way of performing them. In particular, it can be assumed that in the eyes of ORS, since they apparently cannot be the subject of "contradiction regarding the work of care [*prise en charge*]" (ORS, 2014), standards represent an "all-risk insurance" (Hibou 2012: 147), that is, a means of reassuring officers by offering them the possibility of relieving themselves of their responsibilities by applying procedures that define what is proper or not proper. Such typical procedures and responses may indeed avoid having to (re)invent purposes, processes, and meanings for each case that arises. At the same time, standards are also presented by the company as an instrument for ensuring equal, yet also faster and more efficient services, particularly when opening or closing an accommodation structure.

Fairly predictably, however, my observations indicate that the internal procedures are not used as systematically as ORS management expects. I observe an uneven modus operandi in which the agents sometimes mobilize the procedures prescribed by the organization and implement them to the letter, sometimes apply them in a clumsy way or adapt them slightly, or even ignore these prescriptions (at least apparently). This is coupled with varying discourses among reception agents: While Yannick suggests that these standards are of secondary importance, yet mainly because they are somehow "internalized" by the agents (Interview, autumn 2016), Kemal believes that the agents "must" work with the procedures daily and therefore systematically refer to them. Accordingly, he explains that: "It's not 'we work', we *must* work with them, we are obliged to work with them! […] There are always the procedures on how to act, how to do something" (Interview, autumn 2016). It could also be assumed that procedures are ultimately difficult to apply to the thickness and complexity of reception centers, as Laurent, a member of ORS Fribourg management, seems to acknowledge: "We always laugh with Isabelle [a colleague] because [procedures are] beautifully written, but [they are] just inapplicable, actually" (Interview, autumn 2016). This is obviously in line with the multiple tensions raised in the literature on street-level bureaucracy, in particular the divergence between the situation as foreseen by a norm and that which the agent actually encounters.

It is yet in the understanding of "inapplicable" that Laurent's sentence is particularly eloquent. Indeed, it does not seem to refer in this case to the complexity and diversity of reception work, as previously seen with ABR. Rather, this term refers to the fact that these procedures are sometimes deemed too complicated and need to be simplified to facilitate their understanding and automatized application in the field. As such, Laurent explains that his job is to modify and simplify procedures to avoid divergent interpretations as much as possible: "Depending on what you understand in these standards, you can just do as you like! And that is annoying! I am picky, I am really picky, but that [leeway] irritates me!" (Interview, autumn 2016).[89]

Hence, despite many apparent similarities with ABR, the framing and internal use of the work procedures intended by the organization diverge considerably. More than a device of façade, the ORS practice documentation system is instead reminiscent of those designated as "process devices" (*dispositifs de procédés*) by Dujarier (2017: 20-21): a set of prescriptions that guide decisions and ways of conducting activities, namely, that are intended to impact both the decision-making autonomy of agents and their procedural autonomy. As such, although prescriptions are usually officially developed to harmonize, standardize, and produce equitable treatment, they may also aim to reduce officers' autonomy to conform their practices to decisions taken at different hierarchical levels, from the organization's management to cantonal and national policies.

Yet, what this chapter also emphasizes is the inadequacy and thus difficult applicability of these procedures. To put it differently, if the latter do indeed have a strong impact on the work of agents by imposing neoliberal guidelines, their impact is just as moderate because disconnected from a certain reality of daily work. Thus, in the case of ORS, this device does not in fact so much appear as a means of direct and all-powerful influence. Rather, this device (however abstract it may be) diffusely and indirectly conveys norms of conduct and professional behavior that remotely oversee the agents' activities, i.e., the social, subjective, and thus potentially divergent informal rules and norms that go along the daily exercise of reception. (This brings us back to the figure of the interface of distance mentioned throughout this work.) As such, it may be assumed that beyond its actual substance, this asserted cornerstone in the organization's functioning participates in delimiting the parameters of everyday action and somehow flattening the everyday work of ORS reception officers by the existence of formal procedures aiming to provide "appropriate" (i.e., standardized and auditable) services to their clients. Likewise, it also suggests that a space for discussion around both formal and informal reception practices is rather hampered in an organizational

[89] The preceding example also indicates that the continuous optimization of procedures targeted by ORS is a flawed process (or at least more complex than it seems): Employees do not seem to report their malfunctions to their superiors as expected by the management, but rather simply criticize them.

environment bringing agents to focus on the form of these services rather than their practical content.

8.2.2. The audit culture

The ISO-morphism process is also embodied in the internal deployment of the audit technology (Shore 2008). In addition to being regularly subject to external audits to renew its ISO certification[90], ORS uses this technique to verify the day-to-day work carried out in the reception centers. Alessandro, a member of the management of ORS Fribourg, explains that he carries out "surprise audits" every month in a different reception center. "It's not supervision, but we're looking at how the facility works, […] that we all do the same thing. We must not let everyone go their own way" (Interview, autumn 2016), he says. I myself was present at one of these audits – announced a few days in advance by a member of the management of ORS Fribourg – during which the objective was to verify the "standards" of reception, to use the company's jargon:

> Around 4:30 p.m., Alessandro arrives at the center. He comes into the office and asks Murat to give him a tour of the building and the apartments. The agents are happy to show the paint they have recently redone with the help of the residents, but Alessandro seems to notice the dirt and the dilapidated state of the apartments, especially the kitchens. "That way, it doesn't meet ORS standards!" he exclaims. At the end of the tour of the facility, Alessandro gives some quick feedback. According to him, he can see that the agents are doing positive things for the center (he talks about the paint) and that this is very good, but that it is now quite urgent to find a solution for the kitchens and the toilets/showers, which are in very bad condition. "You have to know whether you're tinkering with your own resources or whether you're bringing in someone from outside," he says. At the end of the audit, Murat laughs (a bit sarcastically): "After what you [Alessandro] have seen, you're going to take points away from us! It's like refrigerators: there's [the] AAA [label] and we get AA." (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

The main objective of the internal audits organized by ORS does not seem primarily that to verify the content of the services that are provided to residents daily. Instead, it is to check the work procedures developed by the organization to meet the requirements of the ISO standard. This is in line with Claudia's explanation of the three main functions of the (broadly defined) system of measurement implemented by ORS, namely prevention, training, and control of the "right" and "wrong" in reception work:

> The idea is to prevent [errors] and to train people [i.e., agents]. And one of the tasks that comes after that is control – the police part in quotation marks. And controlling a file, a practice, for me, is to say the person is doing the right thing and we value his or her work.

[90] In contrast to ABR's audits, these audits are not mandated by the canton and related to the funding. Instead, they are carried out by another external entity with the goal of keeping the certification, which only indirectly relates to the canton's mandate.

> If it is then wrong, we take the points that are wrong and we can organize training, coaching. The final goal is for the person to be autonomous, competent, and above all, equal treatment. (Interview, autumn 2016)

As such, the audit technology, broadly used here to refer to all audit practices undertaken by ORS, coupled with the system of practice documentation mentioned above, carry prescriptions. These devices frame and trace the daily work of reception staff who somehow experience a standardization of their tasks at the same time as the control of the latter.

Overall, the previous examples indicate the slippages, expansively discussed in the social and political science literature (e.g., Hibou 2015; Power 1994; Shore & Wright 2015; Strathern 2000), that can occur with this widely used system of evaluation. On the one hand, it echoes the phenomenon of the "audit culture" analyzed by Shore & Wright (2015: 24), namely the process by which "the principles and techniques of accountancy and financial management are applied to the governance of people and organizations – and, more importantly, the social consequences of that translation". It highlights how auditing is institutionalized within ORS, thus transforming the environment into which it is used. This largely resonates with the performative effect of the audit technology mentioned above. On the other hand, it shows that auditing may become the "control of control" (Power 1994: 15), a system in which accountability is met by demonstrating compliance with standards, rather than by demonstrating "good" supervision of asylum seekers or "good" day-to-day structure within a reception center.

The scene I witnessed following the announcement of the audit mentioned above testifies to the absurd environment that this instrument can generate. Indeed, the first reflex of the agents was to refer to the minutes of the previous audit to identify the "priority objectives" that, four months earlier, should (a) be dealt with immediately and (b) as soon as possible. For instance, they urgently needed to improve the visibility of the list of medications, to differentiate the residents' cleaning equipment by color, and to file all the minutes of the team meetings on the server. Within three months, they also had to plan a general cleaning of the apartments, to ensure that each employee knows how to use video surveillance, and to organize discussions with the residents in the different apartments of the center (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). Yet this example indicates that no measures had been taken between the two audits – and perhaps more importantly, that if measures were taken it was to comply with the audit exercise (rather than responding to specific and urgent needs on the part of center residents) – but also that the objectives deemed a priority by ORS management mostly concerned the "aesthetic" of reception services. This does not mean, of course, that auditing may not have beneficial effects on the daily life of the center and its residents: The regular verification of the state of infrastructure is undoubtedly also a way to ensure proper housing conditions for residents.

Auditing, however, creates a professional environment that somehow fetishizes "proper" organizational behavior to the detriment of the intricated essence of reception work.

8.2.3. Reception at the lowest cost: an institutional habitus

Finally, it is interesting to observe that the process of ISO-morphism, in turn, leads to the development of an institutional habitus (Affolter 2017) of "reception at the lowest cost", which structures the daily work of agents through specific patterns of thought and action arising from their belonging to ORS. Following the internal audit mentioned above, Kemal, a reception agent, explains to me that he worked for several days on developing a plan to install low-cost kitchens (CHF 300 each instead of the CHF 2,700 offered by an external company specializing in kitchen design and renovation) (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). Similarly, an informal discussion with Simon, the center manager of Chamfors, about the opening of a new underground shelter shows how financial rationality is part of the daily life of the facilities managed by ORS:

> Simon explains to me that the new center will be able to accommodate 70 asylum seekers. The big question now is how to manage the residents' meals: Do they cook for themselves or does ORS need to use a caterer? He says that having the residents cook would be a significant money saver. The problem, however, is that shopping centers are very remote and difficult to access. "About 45 minutes on foot," Simon tells me. He would like to propose [to ORS Fribourg management] to make three day passes per month available to asylum seekers for grocery shopping by public transport – even if this means making the journey several times during the day. "It would always be cheaper than the caterer," he tells me. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

For Claudia, the previous example shows that a private organization such as ORS is "closer and more sensitive to money" than a state entity:

> We [have] saved the canton hundreds of thousands of francs. Plus, it's a win-win situation because the [asylum seekers] are busy! We occupy people, we train people [through occupational activities] and that can lead to jobs afterward. It is good for everyone and it is economically cheaper. (Interview, autumn 2016)

Taking the example of the center mentioned by Simon, for which ORS finally decided to set up an internal occupancy program to deliver meals, Claudia shows me that the organization maximizes the benefits for everyone: the canton, the organization, and the asylum seekers. However, this statement would deserve further investigation: What are the actual benefits (or losses) for asylum seekers of these logics of maximization and how could they be measured?

Thus, through the mechanism of ISO-morphism, ORS conveys with it technocratic and managerial logics that shape the very understanding and practices of reception by transforming asylum seekers into market figures, perhaps even goods, to be housed, fed, and

occupied. More broadly, by fabricating an organizational system that is not questioned because it is certified and recognized internationally, the ISO norm constructs its own truth, namely that the *respect* of the standards and procedures it requires *is* quality (Hibou 2012: 99).

This ultimately leads to wonder about the main recipients of the agent's activities: residents, management of the organization, mandators? These indeed hold diverse demands, values, and expectations that may come into tension. Yet, in the case of ORS, as the excerpt mentioned at the beginning of this chapter about the "welcome course" shows, this plurality, or "political thickness" (Dujarier 2017: 35), seems to be flattened, even erased: There is no doubt that the main recipients are the company's "clients", namely, public authorities. In this sense, the assumption can be made that the documentation and control devices that oversee the work of the reception agents require them to direct their activities primarily towards the mandators, rather than towards the beneficiaries of the reception policy, the asylum seekers (although these certainly remain present in their minds). As such, the officers' attentions are indirectly focused on *only one* of these recipients, thus preventing potential debate or disagreement in the work. Probably, such tensions would, in turn, quickly be sidelined because not aligned with ORS' prescriptive organizational environment.

8.3. Bureaucratization in the making

> We are very much focused on pragmatic management and not formal management. The formal aspect is laid down in contracts, but in the world of asylum, where everything is so evolving, so sudden, so immediate, we pick up the phone. [...] We try to avoid letters, missives, things, unless there are punctual themes that are worth leaving as a trace on paper. (Interview, summer 2018)

With these words, an asylum cantonal representative sums up the bureaucratic and administrative functioning of the reception field in the canton of Ticino. However, this unstructured and unrestrictive normative framework is questioned on the ground. This section importantly shows us that, depending on the context, it may sometimes be the reception agents who seek to legitimize themselves "from below" by mobilizing bureaucratic and managerial logics. Indeed, as argued by Hibou (2015), the process of (neoliberal) bureaucratization also happens through individual expectations, particularly in terms of "transparency" and "quality". This is often not a uniform movement with clearly defined contours that is evident among all street-level workers in the canton of Ticino. Instead, it is a series of isolated and scattered words and deeds aimed at establishing greater clarity and certainty in the everyday work of the reception staff. Still, they contribute to a process of bureaucratization "in the making."

This analysis includes the point of view of the management of SOS Ticino, the organization mandated by the cantonal authorities to accompany refugees in the second reception phase, which operates within the same framework as CRS. The articulation of these different opinions — which are, in fact, convergent — demonstrates that a low-formalized context, such as that of Ticino, can also destabilize street-level practitioners. More specifically, as in the case of ABR, the claims of the agents presented below reflect the "expectations gap" (Power 1994: 6) which might often be observed in audit contexts: What is actually assessed and why, the procedures or their outputs and content?

8.3.1. Formalization, or the desire for transparency and clarity

On several occasions, some of the interlocutors in the canton of Ticino told me that they wanted to further formalize the framework within which the day-to-day work of reception is carried out, both within the organization itself (CRS and SOS) and in terms of the contractual relationship between them and the cantonal authorities. A member of CRS management explains to me that one of the main objectives of the organization is "to elaborate new internal rules of procedure", specifying that "it's a bit of a work in progress, it's underway, we're working on it" (Interview, autumn 2018). "I have to work on the work processes because we are a bit nowhere with the Red Cross in Ticino," Renato, another member of CRS management, underlines (Interview, summer 2018). He explains to me that this regulation, like ABR and ORS, aims to homogenize and frame "all the actions that take place daily within [asylum centers]." In the same way, this logic can be found at SOS Ticino, as Gianna, a member of the management explains to me, where officers felt the need to establish "a process of formalization" through the creation of "procedures, reference documents, templates" (Interview, autumn 2018).

Although there is no request from outside, as there was, for example, in the canton of Bern, formalization is due to a desire for transparency and clarity within the organization and toward the "external partners", that is, the cantonal authorities, but also vis-à-vis the various public and private institutions with which the CRS and SOS Ticino collaborate on the implementation of the reception mandate:

> [The formalization] we started is just to improve a little bit our relationships with external partners, so to clarify, to be clearer, more linear, I think to better show certain procedures. It was born a bit for this, with this objective, but then it turned out to be very useful also internally. [...] Having common, shared, formalized, and clear guidelines helps. (Gianna, interview, autumn 2018)

If the search for transparency, efficiency, and rationalization of activities in relation to standards and procedures is part of a larger bureaucratic phenomenon, it is interesting to look

at the reasons that lead these actors to mobilize logics and tools from the business world, in particular the audit.

8.3.2. Constraining, while improving asylum reception?

The "insipid" bureaucratic context (Gianna, interview, autumn 2018) in which the canton's contractual partners operate daily plays a central role here. In an ambivalent and sometimes paradoxical way, this context is both valued and contested by the implementation actors. As such, a member of CRS management acknowledges that Ticino is lagging behind a process of bureaucratization that is perceived as more advanced in other Swiss cantons, but that this "atypical" functioning is, at the same time, one of the canton's strong points:

> The canton of Ticino is not yet so far ahead. In Ticino, there is something very beautiful and, in my opinion, very atypical: We are very close [to each other's]. If there's a problem – this is Ticino – you pick up the phone and make a phone call, and you agree, you talk, then you send an email, but you are very dynamic, and you work very closely. I don't need to write a novel to explain the situation; I pick up the phone, I evaluate, I say, "okay, this is the law, you bring your [expertise], I bring mine, I know the reality, maybe you know the more strictly legislative part." It is assessed and confronted together. That is important, it's not one against the other. In my opinion, it's a matter of being a link in the chain, to achieve the goal. There is this relationship of trust, of mutual esteem, which is what helps to deal with the various situations. Then, each one clearly represents its own entity and it's right. But there is no will of mere control, it is not that one dictates law and the other must only obey. There's just this... well, we're both here. (Edited interview, autumn 2018)

If this context is perceived as an advantage from the point of view of street-level organizations who establish a relationship of trust with their mandators while having considerable room for maneuver in the management of the reception field, it is sometimes also interpreted as a superficial and disinterested presence of the canton with regard to the daily work of its partners. This is particularly felt by Luisa, a member of SOS Ticino management:

> The performance mandate rightfully requires us to report on our activities. To what extent the canton is interested in the real content of our activity? I have some doubts, frankly, I don't know how much, with what attention the canton reads the reports. […] Yes, the mandate includes objectives, even indicators, and it is obviously necessary to follow them up. However, I would say, […] that compared to other performance mandates that I have seen where the indicators are much more stringent, well, all in all, here they are quite bland. It doesn't seem to me that there is a form of control. There is a certain superficial approach, you know. (Interview, autumn 2018)

Thus, some practitioners feel the need to evolve in a more structured, even constraining, framework, in which external evaluations would be carried out — for example, to subject the asylum reception sector to a certain "pressure". The latter is not necessarily perceived as

negative and paralyzing, but as a (soft) constraint that pushes organizations and their employees to work as well as possible and to regularly question themselves, as Renato sees it:

> An audit, in the truest sense of the word, I have never heard that it has happened, nor that I have known for a year and a half that I am here that one is planned. There is trust. But I'll tell you: It wouldn't be bad to have one every now and then. Because at least they put a little pressure on you, and you're forced to put yourself back on the line. (Interview, summer 2018)

In a more radical and outraged way, Andrea, a reception officer, questions the fact that CRS does not produce any quality reports and that no audits are carried out: "How is it possible that [CRS] does not have a manual, a quality report? How is it possible that there is no control, no audit?" (Interview, summer 2018). She thus agrees with Renato's opinion that these measures would allow the organization to improve and enhance the services provided to asylum seekers:

> Control is not exclusively negative! Control is a "Stop! Let's watch what we're doing. Can we do better? Are we doing better?" […] Because it is always possible to improve, also because conditions improve, people change, the system changes, the rules keep changing. Are you always up to date? It's impossible. Sometimes, you thus need a moment to stop and say, "let's wait a moment, how are we doing?" (Interview, summer 2018)

For Andrea, the audits aimed at evaluating the *content* of reception practices would allow reception agents to take a step back from their everyday practices and to identify possible improvements. However, these would not be aimed at maximizing the provision of services in financial terms, but rather their relevance and utility within the scope of human and complex relationships.

8.4. Conclusion

The analysis of the adaptive strategies around the neoliberal bureaucratization of asylum reception raises several points. First, such an analysis does not mean looking at spectacular daily acts. Instead, it means engaging with the mundane and unremarkable, intentional and unintentional practices of negotiation that are played around formalities (Darling 2019). Despite their often-imperceptible character, it is these conflicts, tensions, and compromises that give substance to the phenomenon of neoliberal bureaucratization. As I have shown, spaces for negotiation are numerous: The evidence requested by the cantonal authorities can be (re)produced for the desired results, which in turn can also be negotiated; there are several ways of interpreting and appropriating the normative environment of NPM reforms according to the ethical considerations that are prioritized; the very nature of (neoliberal) bureaucratization is its abstraction, and thus normative simplification of plural realities, which is not fully compatible with the full concrete range of everyday life; the culture of results does

not necessarily specify the nature of the result to be evaluated. Precisely on this last point, the examples presented in this chapter indicate that it is often not the content of the practices that is targeted by the audits, but rather the "system" through which they are delivered. This, in turn, leads to a certain inconsistency between the deemed quality of the container (the system of practices) and that of the content (the practices themselves and the way in which they concretely impact on the daily lives of asylum seekers).

Second, although this is an ongoing and completely incomplete process of formalization, the example of Ticino allows nuance in the analysis of neoliberal bureaucratization by reflecting on its potential benefits. As Andrea argues, the use of audits aimed at evaluating the content of reception practices would be a way to improve reception services. However, these benefits are to be balanced since it implies the delicate predefinition of norms (or indicators) anchored in the practical and lived realities of the reception centers, again involving an important work of normative production and therefore abstraction. In this sense, bureaucratization is a self-reproductive phenomenon: The production of norms requires abstraction, abstractions that are, in turn, difficult to grasp and evaluate in their initial context, thus requiring the production of new formal and informal norms to clarify them, and so on.

Third, the examples presented in this chapter show that at the heart of neoliberal bureaucratization lies the question of legitimacy, both from the point of view of mandators, as shown in Chapter 6, and from the point of view of the mandated. For example, if CRS and SOS Ticino are calling for more formalization, it is also to justify "good" practices, which moreover are transparent to all their partners, whether contractual or not. But the specific example of Ticino also shows that legitimacy is closely linked to the question of trust. The fact that reception staff call upon control techniques also signals a rupture in the informal relationship of trust which has long seemed to prevail in this canton in the field of asylum. More specifically, it shows that accountability can no longer be sustained by an informal relationship and must be subject to independent validation. Yet, as I have shown with the example of ABR in the canton of Bern, the very introduction of such management models has precisely provoked the distrust it is meant to address. The reversal of means to ends (basically "proper" performance becoming a goal in itself), as well as the rigidity of standards and indicators in the face of the complex and changing reality of asylum reception contributed to a loss of meaning in daily work and thus of trust towards the initiators of managerial reforms. Following Power (1994: 11), what this vicious cycle reveals is that rather than solving a problem of trust, these models of accountability, co-produced by principals and their agents, simply displace it. In the examples presented, this "elsewhere" is embodied in the production of documentary evidence, certifications, and quality standards, as well as external agencies.

Finally, what these instances tell us is that the neoliberal bureaucratization of asylum reception is not only a technology of government allowing the state to redeploy but is also a consequence

of its continuous reorganization. The example of ORS is particularly striking here: By actively supporting the values and procedures stemming from neoliberal bureaucratization, the organization replicates and even strengthens this normative environment by seeking to institutionalize it in its daily practices.

9. Negotiating the everyday realities of asylum reception

> The objectives of the managers, the mentality of the employees, the daily activities in the center, the place of asylum seekers, and human relations make up, from one organization to another, social worlds that are hardly similar. (Valluy 2009: 245; personal translation)

> We are an intermediate stage between the arrival of asylum seekers in Switzerland [and their settlement] in a canton. [...] [Here] is the arrival stage, and the departure stage will be the decision that will be made on their asylum application, or the non-decision, or in any case, the continuation of their life in Swiss society. We [the reception organizations] are in an intermediate stage, and this intermediate stage requires a daily routine, a place where we can accommodate people, a place where we give them money, a place where we take care of their health, where we show them how to make an appointment with a doctor, or... (he thinks) to show them a little bit of the functioning system [of Switzerland]. And then, once we think that these people are autonomous, that they can follow a completely normal life, knowing the language as well, then they will move on to a later stage, which would be the integration of a more independent structure, an apartment, looking for a job, financial independence to start building something. (Henri, ABR, autumn 2017)

As Henri, a center manager in the canton of Bern, illustrates, the intermediate stage of "reception" – between arrival in Switzerland and settling into a private dwelling – requires the fabrication of a daily routine (*un quotidien*) within reception centers. This task falls within the remit of the organizations in charge of implementing the reception policy, which are responsible for providing specific services to the residents of the housing facilities. As policy mediators (Brodkin 2013, 2020), their role is therefore central, particularly in view of the informal and discretionary micro-practices that take place within them, and which, in turn, define *de facto* reception services. This chapter is the second part of the analysis of reception informalities. After looking at the spaces of negotiation around the arrangements that circumscribe the provision of services, I now turn to the actual *content* of reception services. As reflected in the title of this chapter, I am interested in the everyday realities of asylum reception as negotiated, shaped, and enacted on the ground by ORS, ABR, and CRS.

Following Zill et al. (2018), this chapter investigates how street-level organizations contribute to varying degrees of "institutional openness" and "closedness". It approaches asylum centers as "both situated within broader frameworks of formal rules and informal constraints, as well as a 'social establishment' with different sets of rules governing its inhabitants" (ibid.: 8). This means that street-level organizations, while being themselves part of a broader framework of rules, constitute (differentiated) practices of everyday bordering by structuring asylum seekers' social rights, such as access to work, education, or health services. In particular, this chapter explores how different characteristics of organizations create a divergence in a supposedly homogeneous policy – or, put differently, how they determine "who gets what, when and how" (Lasswell 1936). As emphasized by Zacka (2017: 9), "*how* one is treated is indeed just as crucial as *what* one gets".

By doing so, I show that the reception policy is, on the ground, completely fragmented. I illustrate that "asylum reception" is a portmanteau word that does not mean much of anything, or rather it means a great many different things. Indeed, it translates into a multitude of informal languages, conceptions, and practices, which navigate between the substantive principle of an efficient use of public resources and the protection of migrants' well-being according to the organization's understanding of the commonweal. I show how asylum reception is part of a continuum between supervision, in the sense of framing (*encadrer*) the daily life of asylum seekers to ensure their (minimal) well-being, and psychosocial assistance, including the treatment of traumas and psychological disorders. By examining (the possibility for) alternative imaginings and practices of asylum reception, I also aim to shed light on the spaces for critique or resistance vis-à-vis the standards of service delivery.

9.1. The language(s) and conception(s) of asylum reception

Just as neoliberal bureaucratization implies a constraining language that street-level organizations are led, willingly or unwillingly, to adopt and reproduce daily, so the language of "asylum reception" is, in substance, almost non-existent and requires a great deal of interpretation. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, reception standards and guidelines are indeed particularly vague. Switzerland and its cantons do not have any directives on the minimum conditions for the reception of asylum seekers and are not obliged to comply with those laid down in the European's directive on reception conditions. Moreover, reception norms are, in turn, formulated in an imprecise manner by the cantonal authorities in the mandates. Thus, reception practices – some examples of which I will present below – are based on and derived from a specific language developed by each of the implementing organizations to give meaning to their daily tasks. This is what I refer to here as the different conceptions of reception, namely "supervision", "care", and "assistance", in the case of ORS, ABR, and CRS. They are closely related to the organizational understandings of the substantive goal of asylum

reception. Accordingly, this section shows that when a social policy is "unclear, open to interpretation or requires judgement in the course of its implementation, it creates the space for politics to continue in the discretionary work of street-level organizations" (Brodkin 2020: 68).

9.1.1. Supervision

As continuously repeated by ORS, the "well-being" (*bien-être*) (ORS undated-a) of asylum seekers is its priority. As seen previously, the company believes that its primary missions are to provide "trustworthy care" (*prise en charge fiable*) and "respectful treatment" (*traitement respectueux*) (ibid.) to these persons, as well as to develop effective concepts of reception that can be rapidly implemented and allow a rational use of public funds.

To this end, as highlighted in Chapter 8, ORS works with instruments that make it possible to standardize its employees' practices. Procedures are defined for each task to be performed, whether it is the opening of a new facility, the application of sanctions, the attendance register or the cleaning of rooms. In the eyes of the organization, this makes it possible to have interchangeable staff who can work anywhere at any time, but also to ensure rapid, equal, and identical services. Staff members have the status of "supervisory" or "facility worker" (*collaborateur-trice d'encadrement/de foyer*); a function whose objective is "to ensure the supervision [*encadrement*] of asylum seekers, the smooth running of the facility, and administrative tasks" (Job Description, internal document). They carry out administrative, assistance, stewardship, and security tasks without distinction. An exception is made for unaccompanied minors, for whom social educators are hired.

In this sense, ORS' guidelines for the policy to be applied are very clear: It is a question of supervising the residents of the centers, in the sense of framing their daily lives, and not of assisting or accompanying them. Alessandro, a member of ORS Fribourg management, details his conception of "supervision":

> [F]or me, what is important is that the person who is welcomed into a center understands where he or she is. [...] That the person is welcomed, that we explain where they are, where they can find shops for clothes, food, the post office, so they understand how the center works. That's the basis. After that, we give them money, we explain how to spend their money, and we pay attention to their well-being. [...] Then, of course, language is a barrier. That's also why we re-organized the teams of the new center, we tried to set up teams with several languages. I also try to combine [staff] skills: Someone who is more administrative, someone who is more in the social, who is more in handiwork. [...] The conta[ct]... looking for the contact also, not locking up in the office, but going out, look. That's enough, "Hello, how are you?" [in English in the discussion], it's alright. And then we set up the activities, notably the French courses they take. We pay attention that these take place regularly, that there is a follow-up in relation to that, that there are activities organized within the center.

> […] In my opinion, a good integration is already that [the supervision] is ensured. (Interview, autumn 2016)

This conception of reception is omnipresent in the discourse of ORS employees who constantly repeat that they do not work in "education centers" and are not "social workers" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). The notion of "social work" is deliberately banned from the daily life of the centers and that of reception agents. As Yannick, one of the agents, explained while referring to his daily work with asylum seekers: "Help is basic, we cannot accompany them, we are not educators" (Interview, autumn 2016). Speaking of the procedures and the concept of supervision developed by ORS, he adds that "priority is given to the applicants, not to ensure their [personal] follow-up, but quality, basic comfort, the relational, what is supposed to be given for their vital minimum". As also pointed out by a member of the management when referring to the care of unaccompanied minors and the hiring of special educators: "It is not the staffing of a specialized institution, which has more educators than youths. But this is not our mission either" (Interview, summer 2016).

The daily life and functioning of the center resemble (to a large extent) that of a hotel structure that accommodates individuals impersonally and interchangeably. As I show in more detail below, some agents indeed have the impression of working in a hotel (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). They refer, in this sense, to the fact that reception – or in this case supervision – as perceived by ORS, consists of providing basic needs to asylum seekers: mainly a bed, clothes, food, and basic medical care. The latter are provided by a service of nurses, internal to ORS, who move from center to center during the week:

> In the canton of Fribourg, a health network consisting of two nurses offers appropriate and professional care to asylum seekers while limiting costs. Its role is also to provide information, promote health, and prevent medical and social problems, as well as to supervise and accompany asylum seekers towards independent health care. (ORS 2017)

The daily work of reception officers is thus reduced to a presence at the reception desk, to respond to the many requests and concerns of residents (mail, documents, keys, appointments, cleaning and laundry, fights, workfare, transport tickets, and so forth). In addition to this, they are constantly involved in the stewardship of the accommodation structure, including repairing furniture or finding new ones, and ultimately have very little time for formal and informal encounters with asylum seekers. The latter do not receive any psychosocial support, unless explicitly requested by the medical service.

Hence, the infrastructure of reception, such as that manufactured and practiced daily by ORS, clearly appears as a place of waiting, as the political authorities would like it to be: An undefined and indefinite space where migrants in asylum procedures spend their days waiting to receive a decision on their asylum application. The role of ORS is to prevent them

from falling into boredom and idleness. "They are idle, and idleness kills," emphasizes Claudia (Interview, autumn 2016), a member of ORS Fribourg management, referring to the (legal) context in which asylum seekers live. To maintain them, to entertain them, and perhaps also to supervise them, accommodation facilities also offer entertainment activities. More specifically, to counter the lack of action (i.e., immobility), "activity and occupational programs" are proposed – or rather imposed – to the asylum seeker population, but also indirectly to officers who generally do not have the time to organize these activities and perceive them as an additional workload. Outings into nature or to the pool, visits to museums, cooking, organization of various games or sewing are thus all activities thought of by the agents as part of their work to contribute to the "management of waiting". The notion of "usefulness" is central, as emphasized by Kemal, a center manager:

> To me, supervision means ensuring that [our work] is useful. That's what most of our work is about. To organize activities so that they don't get too bored. [...] That we take them out, that we give everyone the opportunity to participate in the activities, to give them a structure during the day. [...] The cleaning work provides an activity, an occupation, and an everyday framework. [...] So I would say that the day can be divided into three parts: cleaning the premises, the language course, the activities or occupations. [...] We also sensitize people, we explain to them the customs and traditions of Switzerland, how they should behave. (Interview, autumn 2016)

Accordingly, the aim of reception, as practiced by ORS, is to give a "framework" to asylum seekers without psychosocial support perspective really being considered. It is a matter of "managing" a place in which people transit and settle for shorter or longer stays. More specifically, the objective is to keep asylum seekers healthy and active by ensuring their basic comfort and well-being. The rationality behind this is to manage and supervise asylum seekers to ensure their presence in Switzerland during the procedure, but also to occupy them so that their minds are not bored, they do not get sick and so they eventually cost less. As such, things that are considered "good" for asylum seekers (e.g., activity programs) eventually seem to be turned into "it is good for the institution" (and by extension the canton), which in part legitimize themselves by showing that they pay attention to the well-being of asylum seekers while indirectly reducing their expenses — in particular, those related to the (mental and physical) health of residents.

9.1.2. Care

Unlike ORS, whose reception work is standardized through the definition of work procedures applicable identically in all reception centers, the concept of reception and, above all, its implementation by ABR is more complex and multifaceted. As mentioned in Chapter 7, ABR's institutional identity is, in fact, made up of a multitude of local identities. As the members of the organization's management and their employees continuously repeat, each reception

center – and its team – has built its own identity over time. This is made possible by ABR's management, which voluntarily leaves this room for maneuver and interpretation to the agents so that they can "make meaning" of their daily work. This results in divergent discourses and working philosophies between the different facilities. These remain nonetheless in line with the institutional culture of ABR, namely an emphasis on the well-being of asylum seekers and their autonomy through the values of public service, defined by Gabriel as the "service to the population, in the interest of the population, for the population, and [which] must be a quality service. [...] It is to give the population, and therefore the users, the support and, above all, the services they need" (Interview, summer 2017).

As in most cases in the field of asylum, the professional body in charge of the daily reception of asylum seekers is extremely disparate. As Monika, a member of the ABR management remembers, when she started with the organization in the 1990s, "it ranged from the architect to the uncertified office worker, the polymechanic to the teacher, the psychologist, it was really... there was everything, everything, everything" (Interview, autumn 2017). "This is a field that has welcomed and gathered people from all walks of life," Gabriel also points out (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017), referring to the employees with extremely heterogeneous profiles with whom he has had and still has to deal. Thus, he adds, one of the problems that remains for some agents is a "certain lack of hindsight on the work carried out on a daily basis, as well as the theoretical tools to question it" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). According to him, this is largely because many employees do not have specific training in social work and have not acquired these tools and skills through their professional careers.

In the same vein as CRS, civil society – here embodied by voluntary civil conscripts – also makes it possible to offer residents services that the teams are unable to provide, particularly in the area of socio-cultural activities, due to a lack of time and staff. As highlighted in a center's annual report, civil conscripts allow "more intensive and personalized support for residents, [...] while the team is busy with administrative tasks" (Annual Report 2016, internal document).

Generally, the reception work is seen as a (local) work of construction and completion around the norms imposed by public authorities:

> Each institution [in the canton of Bern] has internal guidelines, pedagogical concepts that are different. We all have the cantonal directives, which are the basis, we are all supposed to respect them. But then, on the way we work, the Cantonal Directive tells us how much to give and tells us what it is not possible to do but does not tell us how we should work. (Interview with Gabriel, summer 2017)

The example of Bürgistadt illustrates the possibility left to ABR employees to create a "pedagogical concept" (Gabriel, interview, summer 2017) oriented toward the support and the (psycho)social care of asylum seekers. Gabriel describes the reception work to me as follows:

> The main service, mandatory, is accommodation. Then we have everything related to psychosocial support. For the past two or three years, we have had a lot of fragile people who have arrived, traumatized people, so it is really one of the pillars of our work. There is also the access to integration, i.e., access to language courses, access to health, to school, opening up to the Swiss world, familiarizing residents with the habits and customs of our country to enable them, once in an apartment, to be able to get by as independently as possible. Our goal is to make these people autonomous as quickly as possible and as well as possible. (Interview, summer 2017)

This follows the "concept of assistance" (*Betreuungskonzept*) formulated by the organization and common to all reception centers managed by ABR. Under the heading "teaching the basics of life in Switzerland" (*Vermittlung von Grundlagen zum Leben in der Schweiz*), it stipulates that each "referent" (*Bezugsperson*) deepen the following topics with his or her "clients" (*KlientInnen*): housing, environment, health, work and education, rights and duties in everyday life. Depending on their occupancy rate, each agent is personally responsible for a certain number of persons and "files" (one individual or one family = one file). Overall, residents are "prepared for independent living in a flat", in particular by setting up a "daily structure" (*Tagesstruktur*):

> The daily structure is particularly important in the first phase. Through the so-called Workfare System, which is based on the principle of "service for service", the [reception] centers are regularly cleaned, and their maintenance is ensured. There are no limits to the imagination of further activities. Depending on the composition of the team or the situation in the respective municipality, sport is played, exhibitions or music events are organized, animals are kept, or gardens are created. Sometimes there is an exchange with a school class or handicrafts are done. Occasionally, the centers are opened to the public or are visited by political parties. In reception centers, residents' meetings and "Info-Cafés" are also a welcome occasion for a change of scenery [*eine gern gesehene Abwechslung*]. (Betreuungskonzept, ABR, internal document)

However, it is in the ties that bind these various activities together, and, in particular, in the perception of the temporality in which the residents find themselves, that the concept of reception implemented in Bürgistadt breaks with the normative framework at work within the governance of asylum. During my fieldwork, many formal but also informal discussions took place daily concerning personal or familial issues, physical or mental health concerns, questions about a letter, looking for a job or occupation, looking for an apartment, problems related to the asylum procedure (e.g., family reunification). I also regularly observed that residents turned to their referent to express a personal discomfort or simply to have a

discussion. Whether in the offices or, less often, in the corridors of the center, these encounters were casual, even sometimes familiar.

Accordingly, Gabriel sees reception work as the creation and consolidation of a bond between reception agents and asylum seekers:

> [Reception work is] a work that allows us to create a relationship with our users, with our residents, to have time to talk to them, to have time to accompany and advise them, to have time to understand them, to be able to work with them, to be able to create a pedagogical project, a project for the months and years to come with these people. (Interview, summer 2017)

To this end, he explains to me that he tends to hire people who have a training in social work or a certificate as a migration specialist to ensure a certain "continuity" in the monitoring of residents (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). By doing so, the care of asylum seekers, as interpreted and practiced by his team, goes beyond the "basics" of everyday life in Switzerland. Based on the idea that these people will stay in Switzerland for a longer or shorter period, the agents go beyond the uncertain and indefinite "waiting time" and offer long-term-oriented support. "You know, it depends on the institution's support concept! We assume that people will stay here. We therefore take care of them from the beginning of their stay," stresses Selim, a reception agent (Interview, autumn 2017). In this sense, the conception of reception implemented in Bürgistadt is counter to the federal asylum policy, which perceives asylum seekers as persons *awaiting* a permit and, therefore, the rights that flow from it.

Through its intermediary position between public authorities and migrants, ABR therefore tries to attenuate the effect of the (restrictive) asylum policy on the daily life of asylum seekers by implementing an informal policy of care and assistance. The organization contests the asylum policy it is mandated to implement by using the few avenues available to it — in particular, in relation to the interpretation of the reception mandate and the negotiation of its "grey areas", such as the modalities for controlling the presence of asylum seekers, as illustrated below. Yet, the power distribution between the canton and the organization remains asymmetrical, the latter being subject to a real disciplinary constraint and a challenging of organizational values, as seen before.

9.1.3. Assistance

"Fundamentally, it is a mandate that consists of the social, health, and educational assistance," summarizes Luciana, one of the directors of CRS (Interview, autumn 2018) with regard to the mandate that the charity is responsible for implementing in the canton of Ticino. According to her, "[reception] shouldn't be a point of arrival, but a new departure point". By emphasizing a forward-looking and long-term concept of reception, she specifies that:

> Our mission is based on adequate socio-educational support for the realization of a viable future perspective that provides [asylum seekers] with the skills to achieve independence and to face life as adults, respecting and integrating the socio-economic structure of the host country. This considerable challenge is based on a relationship of trust and mutual respect that is built over time. (Interview, autumn 2018)

Operationally, the policy of reception, as conceptualized by CRS, involves very diverse, multi-professional teams. A distinction of tasks is made at the grassroots level and requires the presence of different professional bodies: social workers, social educators, psychologists, stewards, security officers, administrative staff, and nurses. Unlike ORS and ABR, asylum reception is thus, in a way, fragmented or specialized. The staff consists of several small teams: the social team, the stewards' team (intendance), the security team, the medical team, and the coordination (administrative) team (CRS, internal document, 2017). They all collaborate – with more or fewer difficulties, often related to different work conceptions, between social workers and security agents in particular – and each have well-defined roles. The agents in charge of personal and material assistance tasks are designated as "social collaborators". In most cases, these are young people (especially women) who have just completed their training as social workers at a university of applied sciences (Fieldnotes, summer 2018).

In everyday work, the mandate is interpreted as follows: The main mission is that of "reception" in the literal sense of the word. This word is the foundation of the work that is carried out in the centers, in particular by echoing the seven fundamental principles (mentioned earlier in Chapter 7) of the Red Cross: "humanity" for helping others, "impartiality" for helping all people in need, "universality" because humanitarian duty is universal, and so on (Luciana, interview, autumn 2018). This reading grid is very present and constitutes the basic framework of the services provided by the charity. I also note that the principles are displayed everywhere: on the walls of the main building of the organization, on visiting cards, and on notebooks or blocks of paper available in the offices of the agents (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). Indeed, as seen previously, the Red Cross emblem appears as a powerful sales instrument and one of legitimization mobilized to fill important gaps in the resources available for the reception of asylum seekers (e.g., psychological support; see below).

Social workers are thus responsible for the "well-being" of residents, in the broadest sense. Reception is based on the ethical foundations of social work, particularly with an emphasis on the empowerment of individuals (see IFSW 2020). Andrea, a social worker, explains that this aspect justifies her daily work: "I justify my presence if [it] increases capacity, increases empowerment, increases their state of well-being" (Interview, summer 2017). Giulia, another social officer, describes her role as being in charge of collecting asylum seekers' requests and problems and then referring them to the competent bodies:

> The social worker is this figure who receives the application from asylum seekers and then distributes them. Is there deep suffering? Okay, "What do you think, would it be helpful to see a psychologist?" Then I make contacts, I talk about it. "What do you need now, a lawyer? Okay, let's see." "How do you feel about that? Okay, let's see where we can direct you." It's this figure that directs requests and who tries to have a trustworthy contact with the guest. (Interview, summer 2017)

This means not only taking care of their physical and psychological well-being, by making appointments with specialists (doctors, psychologists, dentists, and others), but also managing all aspects of their procedures, children's schooling, family issues, out-of-center activities, etc. Accordingly, social workers appear as intermediaries whose role is to act as a link between migrants and the "outside world" (that is, the world outside the walls and fences of the center), to guide them to the right people. In addition to that, their function implies that they are there "to listen to" asylum seekers:

> Ayla, a resident, walks past the office window. Andrea reacts immediately and calls to her through the open window. She goes outside with the woman and accompanies her to the exit of the center, chatting a little with her and saying: "I'll see you soon, won't I? We need to talk a little bit, you and I." When she comes back to the office, she explains that this woman has been at the center for some time now but knows very few words of Italian. Andrea would therefore like to speak to her to find out how she is doing, what her activities are, how she sees her future, etc. More generally, broadening the reflection, she told me that "it's the people who don't shout when they suffer that we have to be careful of." According to her, people who complain of being unhappy or having pain are already "able to" and that is a good sign. She therefore wants to be particularly attentive to people who do not express their feelings; Ayla, for instance, with whom she has just spoken. (Edited fieldnotes, Tirossa, summer 2018)

As I have been told several times, their role is indeed to "create a relationship of trust" to be able to engage in dialogue with them, to be able to perceive discomfort or problems and, as far as possible, to find solutions. "Do you think this person needs more attention?" is a recurring question within the team (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). According to reception officers, creating these relationships of trust also makes it possible, in the end, to give them the necessary tools to understand their daily lives in a more serene way. During my observations, and as I also show below, it was not uncommon to see social workers sitting in a corner of the center (often outside, in the large central courtyard) talking quietly, one-on-one, with a resident of the center who needed special support. Coffee or cigarette breaks were also a privileged time to get out of the office and chat informally with residents (adults and children). In this sense, reception is described by Amelia as an accumulation of "small moments" and "small gestures" that allows asylum seekers to approach their future with serenity:

> Reception is not simply taking in, giving a room, and then letting the person be there all by himself or herself. […] Reception is something that, for very small reasons, makes you feel at home, even if you are 4000km away from your home, even if all your relatives are not here. Reception is knowing that you can trust someone when you have a problem, when you have a question — and maybe it is a silly question, but you need confirmation from someone. It is not just a reception act; it is a set of several acts that makes the person feel safe. (Interview, summer 2017)

Beyond assistance, the notion of "presence" (*presenza*) is therefore important in the eyes of CRS, as expressed by Giulia: "Presence is essential. Because where the laws are super-restrictive […] a whole dimension of presence is required. Finding alternative routes, since there are none in the territory, there are no prospects" (Interview, summer 2018). The meaning given to this presence is representative of the ambivalent posture of CRS: Between a depoliticized humanitarian posture, embodied in particular by the management of the charity, which relies on the legitimacy of humanitarian reason to "reduce the suffering of the world's most vulnerable populations" (Barnett 2013: 379), and a politicized posture of certain reception agents who are attached to the precepts of social work.

9.2. Routine discretion: practicing reception as a welfare time-space

In what follows, I show how the conceptions of reception materialize on the ground by answering the following questions: How do these conceptions affect and transform the infrastructure of reception? What is actually going on in the everyday life of accommodation centers? How is the reception policy produced in routine organizational practice and what do these practices produce as policy? In so doing, I highlight the development of "routine patterns of informal practice" (Brodkin 2011a: i260) in street-level practice.

As presented earlier in Chapter 2, the main components of reception, as stipulated in the cantonal mandates, are five in number: social, administrative, medical, logistical, and security. This section focuses on asylum reception as a welfare time-space (see also Kobelinsky 2012b) and shows that "social" is the aspect in which the mandated organizations have the most room for maneuver. It is, at this level, that the greatest differences in practice can be observed. I analyze three facets of the provision of welfare services to asylum seekers: material (the reception desk), structural (structuring of daily life and attendance control), and personal (management of discomfort situations). The way they are negotiated by ORS, ABR, and CRS directly influences the everyday life of the residents and the encounters between them and reception officers.

9.2.1. (En)counters and human relations

As I showed in Chapter 5 with the example of the counter, the reception infrastructure is shaped by street-level organizations according to their institutional identities and working philosophies. Sometimes a formal and binding place of interaction governing the interpersonal dynamics in the center, sometimes a space that is materially and symbolically open to the center's residents, or an institutionalized but superfluous space bypassed by the officers, the reception desk is on the ground the subject of numerous negotiations.

As pointed out by Dubois (1999: 105), the different spatial configurations of the reception desk can influence the conditions under which meetings are held. This is achieved by predefining what can be expected, by forging arrangements for it, and, in short, by providing a framework for interaction. In this sense, reception agents, just like asylum seekers, are led to a different understanding of the encounter. Thus, around the counter, the relationship between asylum seekers and agents is subject to various practices, in the sense that it is invested with various uses and functions. As observed by Dubois, the "users" do not only come there to seek what the organizations are officially supposed to provide; in addition to administrative aspects, they ask for advice, consideration, and express their suffering and resentment. As such, the figure of the reception desk is, to some extent, a material reflection of the conception of reception implemented by the mandated organizations. It embodies the material interface through which communication flows in the accommodation structures and how it is managed, mediated, and even limited.

In Bürgistadt, Gabriel looks back at the transformation of the building into an accommodation structure for asylum seekers, originally designed as a hotel. He reflects on the interpersonal dynamics that he wanted to create by modifying the internal organization of the facility, in particular by setting up a centralized office:

> I had quite a lot of leeway since this site, before, when it was first open [as a reception center], was run in a totally different way. It was single men who were hosted here. The offices were organized totally differently; there was a main office at the top, on the fourth floor – this is now transformed into rooms – and each assistant had his or her own office. There were thus two offices on the third floor, two offices on the second floor, and I didn't want to reuse that arrangement at all. The idea of centralized offices, with my office in the middle, with the door open, was the idea of saying "we have a team that communicates, that co-creates and collaborates" and to be able to do that, you have to be together, you need to have possible communication flows. If everyone is in their own office, there will be more... (he's looking for his words) more intimacy for discussions, but *how* [emphasis] does the exchange take place? (Interview, autumn 2017)

The organization and location of agents' offices reveal specific ways of conceiving the relationship with residents. Gabriel explains that the absence of a reception desk was a carefully considered choice that also considered the opinions of asylum seekers:

> The main consideration was to say, "we work in the residents' living space." We are not a social assistance office where a counter can make sense to sort things out. We are social workers who work *where residents live* [emphasis]. Then, if we create a counter, we may indeed facilitate our work, but we create a barrier. The counter is both an opening, but it is also a barrier. It institutionalizes a lot of things. When you arrive at a counter, you have a different behaviour than if you sit in a chair next to someone, or even if you have an informal discussion standing up, it's not the same thing. [...] Our idea was to show, through non-verbal communication to our residents, that when we have the offices open, we are open […]. That's it. It's a question of a desire of proximity and then... I think we avoid some conflicts because […] I have the impression that the more counters there are, the more likely it is that conflicts will increase, because the person will not feel heard. (Interview, autumn 2017)

The staff had thus started from the idea that it was they who would somehow interfere with the place where asylum seekers live, and not the other way around. According to them, the establishment of a counter would therefore have put a physical and symbolic barrier between them – and, ultimately, created a certain distrust – and potentially prevented a constructive dialogue from taking place. The central location of Gabriel's office – which, as he points out, rarely has its door closed – is no coincidence and is intended to show that it is a close-knit and responsive team.

In this sense, the daily structure of the center is organized around the opening hours of the office – from 10 a.m. to 11.30 a.m., and 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., every day of the week (except weekends) – which are dedicated to personal meetings with asylum seekers. It should also be noted that the entrance to the office (where the counter used to be) is entirely glazed, thus creating a kind of transparency and proximity between the residents' living space and the agents' working space while subtly marking the gap between agents and residents. This echoes the "double game", the "inherent duplicity" of counter interactions highlighted by Dubois (1999: 39-40). Inside the office, which consists of an entrance hall and three rooms, large "discussion tables" (often with candy bowls on them) are provided at the back of each room and many chairs are also available for people to sit next to the agents (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017).

In practice, however, this "flexibility of appearances or apparent flexibility" (*souplesse des apparences ou souplesse apparente*) (ibid.) does not seem to create an openness to two-way communication flows. The removal of this material obstacle does not mean a real rapprochement with the public (Chevallier 1983: 21). As already pointed out in Chapter 5, I

note that, despite the absence of a counter, the office is a small enclave to which the center's residents can have access if they need it, but not a space that the reception staff often seem to get out of to move around the building. It is therefore when residents come to the office that the agents take the opportunity to get in touch with them, as when Mr Mbacké comes to see Selim about a problem with his telephone bill: "Ah, Mr Mbacké! How are you doing? I've been wanting to talk to you for a while. How was the internship? Did it go well, are you happy?" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). Or when Julie, who has just come back from vacation, bumps into a resident: "So, everything's fine? The school, the internship?" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017).

Therefore, interactions between reception officers and residents mainly take place within the office. In the case of ABR, the role of relay between the office and the rest of the reception center is assumed by (voluntary) civil conscripts who, not being "monopolized by administrative tasks", become "the eyes and ears of the team in the corridors of the institution" (Annual Report 2016 of Bürgistadt, internal document). Although sometimes taking place in the form of pre-arranged appointments, interactions between staff and residents also take a more informal and spontaneous, at times very personal form. Sometimes these interactions give me the impression of an exchange between adults or acquaintances who discuss their respective difficulties, rather than an exchange between reception officer and asylum seeker. An asymmetry of power is nevertheless tangible, as residents are normally the ones who come to seek advice from agents and not the other way around, thus often giving a paternalistic character to these exchanges. These interactions echo the personal and familiar language of ordinary life (Dubois 1999: 158), as illustrated in this vignette:

> A young mother living in the center comes to the office to talk to Selim. Her son, who is about one year old, fell down the stairs this morning and she had to take him to the emergency service. To fill out her file and get all the necessary information (for insurance, in particular), Selim asks her for some details about how it happened. Changing the subject of discussion, the young woman then shows him a sheet of paper she received at her language course at the adult education center (*Volkshochschule*), where the teacher writes that it's "too bad she doesn't want to attend more classes". Both do not understand this remark. Selim asks the woman if she is still motivated and if she wishes to continue. She answers with: "yes, of course!" She adds that the problem is related to the custody of her child and that she often cannot go to school because of him. Selim tells her that he understands the situation, but that it is a pity; I have the impression that he had already realized the problem and had already thought about it. In confidence, he tells her that, in his opinion, if she has good relationships with other women in the facility, she could try to arrange with them to babysit him. The mother seems a bit desperate and says to Selim, "Yes, but he cries all the time when I leave him alone!" Calling on his experience as a father, Selim explains that even in such a case, she must not give in and must leave, "even if he

> cries". He tells her that it is important for the child to get used to his mother's absence and not be too close to her. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

This flexibility in access to the office – but always during opening hours – can, however, raise issues, such as intimacy during interactions, as mentioned in a PV note from one of the staff sessions: "Too many people come to the office at a time. You have to set limits and try to rearrange the office furniture to have a more intimate space for interviews. Reminder: people are waiting outside the office [i.e., in the waiting area]" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). At the same time, the office is also a place for informal meetings and sharing among center residents, who interact – sometimes simply with looks and smiles – while waiting for their respective appointments (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017).

Conversely, in Chamfors in the canton of Fribourg, informal interactions are strongly limited by the internal organization of the reception center itself. Indeed, the figure of the reception desk – the main place for exchanges between agents and asylum seekers within the facility – is emblematic of a distance, operating through a window that filters and considerably reduces interactions:

> The core of the office – and more generally, of the entire facility – is the reception desk where 80-90% of interactions between staff and residents take place. It is composed of a window (a counter with a glass pane, with a gap of about 15-20cm for exchanging documents) overlooking an airlock between the central corridor of the building and the agents' office. Residents access it one at a time by ringing the doorbell and enter only when an agent unlocks the door. Most interactions happen at the counter and are therefore mediated by a window. (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

Through their internal layout, reception centers thus sometimes deploy a real infrastructure of distance, a physical and material place of perpetuation and consolidation of distance (Rosset 2019b). In this sense, interactions are confined to the office space and the even smaller counter space, which separates the reception officers' workspace from the airlock that connects the residents' living areas to the office space. As a result, officers and residents are most often in physically separate and distinct spaces when they are in contact with each other. Murat, a reception officer, tells me that he asks for the residents' phone numbers so that he doesn't have to go looking for them in the rooms. "It's easier to call them and get them to come to the front desk," he says (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016).

This layout impacts the nature of the exchanges within the center, which take on a very formal and bureaucratic character. In this sense, the exchanges at the counter often only deal with administrative questions related to the asylum seekers' file or with details of daily life, as these fragments of observation illustrate:

> At 10 a.m., we start to hear music through the open windows. Residents start coming to the office at about 10:30 a.m. Before then, it's pretty quiet. A young man comes to ask for

> the key for the laundry as it is the assigned day for his apartment. Another youth comes to the counter to pay a bill for his transport pass. He gives a CHF 20 deposit to Julien and will give the rest when he gets his money next time. Julien quickly writes a receipt that both sign. A child comes to get a bandage for his mother who has burned herself. Later, a man (who has already obtained a B permit) arrives at the counter; he has just gotten married and wants to move to another town to live with his wife. He also adds that he has a problem with a dermatologist in [name of town]. A resident then comes in and brings back the keys he borrowed to use the fitness room. Another resident requests "the styling machine, please," referring to the hair trimmer. The residents always come to the counter one at a time while the others wait in the hallway. (Edited fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

When individual problems arise, they are generally dealt with within the strict limits of the legally defined reception benefits, or at least within the standards defined by ORS:

> When Julien arrives at around 9:15 a.m, he is immediately informed of the situation: There were some problems with the unaccompanied minors over the weekend (Friday evening) when no one was present (except the night watchman). "Some Eritreans hit an Afghan," Kemal explains to him. The young Afghan boy, Dariush, didn't go to school this morning. Julien goes to the room (apartment) to look for him and brings him to the office to talk. He offers him coffee or water, but the boy doesn't want anything. They discuss the situation. Julian tries to understand: "How did the fight start?" He tries to encourage him to go to school in the afternoon and tells him that he could possibly change rooms. After the discussion, Julien talks with Murat about possible sanctions. Murat will take 21 [Swiss] francs from the two Eritreans who slapped Dariush – "it's 21 francs for one slap," he says. It would also seem that the youths stole things, so there may be a bigger punishment. Julien also discusses the situation with the rooms with Murat: change Dariush or one of the Eritreans? "The risk is that they will feel strong if we change Dariush," says Murat. Julian tells Murat that it might be a good idea to go together to yell at them to "to have more authority." Simon, who joins the discussion, talks about "racketeering." (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

While, in this case, Dariush has been allowed to enter the "protected" office space to temporarily remove himself from the conflicting space of the apartment he shares with his roommates, the problems are, however, mostly dealt with at the counter in a rather expeditious and impersonal manner. The fact of being "interrupted" by the residents sometimes generates irritations among the agents, like Marc-André, who is preparing the apartment cleaning plans for the month of November and "goes crazy" (*pète les plombs*) at every ring (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016).

This does not mean that officers never leave the office. In effect, some officers are regularly required to circulate around the building to monitor the workfare performed by the residents daily. When there is only one officer in the center, as in the case of Murat, he locks the office and takes the phone with him to go upstairs (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). For the reception

officers, this is an opportunity to exchange a few words with the residents they pass in the corridors. These small, informal moments sometimes destabilize the agents, who seem surprised that the residents confide in them about their lives:

> Marc-André recounts that he spoke with a resident, Dawit, in the morning. "For the first time," he tells me, the man told him a little bit about his life, that he has lived in many countries in Africa, particularly in South Africa. There, he was in "business" but did not give more details about it. Marc-André and Simon laugh, wondering what he was really doing. Simon points out that it is quite rare for a resident to confide in someone about his or her life, "it often takes a long time to gain their trust so that they are not afraid that we will use information for their dossier." (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

Informal interactions indeed appear to be occasional and do not punctuate the daily life of Chamfors. They exceptionally intersect with the routine, highly bureaucratic exchanges between residents and staff. These interpersonal dynamics are ultimately in line with the managerial discourse that tends to assimilate the service relationship to a commercial exchange (Dubois 1999 : 50 referring to Demailly 1998) or, rather, indicate a priority to "the management of waiting" rather than to developing the personalization of exchanges and listening. It should also be noted, as mentioned above, that these tasks are not stated as an objective in the specifications of the "supervisory agent" (*collaborateur d'encadrement*). A lack of staffing and a heavy administrative workload also certainly contribute to these dynamics.

Yet, although the presence of a kind of internal compartmentalization supports the detachment between staff resident interactions, it can also generate irritations leading to practices of physical proximity between asylum seekers and reception staff. Some agents complain about the impact of the counter on their daily work: "it's like working in a hotel", "my work is increasingly being transformed into that of a doorman" (Fieldnotes, October 2016). The human contact that takes place outside the bureaucratic meeting at the counter is therefore valued by some agents who see it as "the real life of the facility":

> From the office, we can hear Julien in the corridor explaining to a young girl that the doorbell is not a game. He tells her that she must ring the bell once and wait for someone to open the door. The girl then tells him that this weekend, she went to see her daddy in "Altschwil[91]." "In French, we say Alt-ville," Julien tells her. She then repeats it several times to get it right. When Simon hears this, he says to me, "this is the real life of the center – I love it!" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016).

The fiction of the impersonal bureaucrat and the standardized user (Dubois 1999: 34-35) promoted by ORS in its internal directives is also rewritten by the agents' daily practices. These are never entirely constrained by bureaucratic conformism and allow themselves a few deviations, albeit episodically and sometimes futilely. Nevertheless, the presence of a

[91] Fictitious locality name.

reception counter does lead the individuals in the reception center to conform unwillingly to the institutionally prescribed roles of resident and agent, and to engage in primary forms of contact (Chevallier 1983: 21), corresponding to relatively uniform and standardized services.

The physical presence of a counter sometimes also leads to circumvention practices. This is the case in Tirossa, in the canton of Ticino, where interactions between reception officers and residents seem to take place everywhere in the center, except at the specific location of the reception desk. As illustrated in Chapter 5, this accommodation structure has a brand-new counter. This large, very classic counter, as described by Dubois (1999), is not systematically used and seems to disturb many agents. The counter is very often bypassed by both residents and employees:

> A resident comes to the counter to ask for a voucher for clothes. From the other side of the window, Andrea explains to him that he has to wait another two months before he is entitled to another voucher. She explains, again, that asylum seekers are only entitled to these vouchers every three months and goes to check the date he last applied for it. Faced with the man's insistence and incomprehension, and to talk to him face to face, she decides to go to the other side of the window. She gets angry and says: "this glass pane bothers me; we are always screaming!" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

Office windows overlooking the center's inner courtyard often seem to replace the counter and become the interface through which people talk to each other. The same goes for the internal courtyard, which becomes a place for discussion and sharing (but especially in spring and summer, I was told). Very frequently, I have seen residents come to the officers who were smoking or talking outside to share their problems or questions:

> Between about 9:45 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., Andrea and I leave the office for coffee. We spend a lot of time talking to the residents who pass by, including Zhila, a 17-year-old Afghan girl who comes to talk to us about her squinting problem and her concerns about it. She even brings pictures to show us that she didn't have this problem before. Andrea and I notice that in the picture, she was veiled and that now she is not. Andrea says to her: "you've become modern?!" Jean d'Amour, another resident, comes to talk with us; Nina smokes a cigarette with Andrea; the new Sri Lankan resident who has just had an operation on his jaw also comes to talk. Andrea asks him how he is doing, if he has managed to eat something. At the same time, the young Eritreans boys are playing outside. (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

The same thing occurs in the other direction: As almost all the floors of the center can be seen from the courtyard, the employees often take the opportunity to go outside to call or have someone called. Indeed, the system of relationships set up by the agents bypasses the confined space of the office and spreads into the many common areas of the building: the internal courtyard, the car park, the garden, the shared kitchens, or the external corridors and

balconies. For example, to discuss the rooms and bed allocation, Andrea organizes what she calls a "peaceful meeting" with a small group of Sri Lankans. I go with them and we all sit on the floor outside on the balcony on the third floor to talk. The numerous and frequent incursions (or excursions) by the reception staff into the residents' living spaces also create opportunities for informal exchanges with people who do not often come to the counter, such as Hana and her mother Shadia, who offer us a cup of tea when Andrea and I leave the discussion with the Sri Lankan residents (Fieldnotes, summer 2018).

However, I note that residents are only very rarely allowed to enter the office, as if it were a protected, exceptional space within the reception infrastructure itself. The counter thus also represents a "sorting" interface, allowing officers to filter asylum seekers' applications and problems, so that only those they consider to be in need of special attention are allowed to pass through, i.e., enter. For example, this is the case of Faduma, a woman in her fifties with psychiatric disorders, whom Daniele, the staff team leader, lets into the office after she comes to the counter to speak to her face-to-face (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). Or Leila, a 30-year-old woman, whom Andrea brings into the office for a quiet chat behind the closed door of one of the offices (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). This is an opportunity for the officers to deal with more intimate and personal matters with the residents. Many of them also approach the agents about individual or family problems, who do not hesitate to engage their personal experience or physical and gender characteristics in the interindividual relationship (Fieldnotes, summer 2018):

> A woman from the center comes to the office (i.e., to the windows) to talk with Chiara again; she is very concerned about her son who, according to her, has a bad attitude and bad acquaintances. She is very worried about him and would like the staff to help by talking to him. She even asks Chiara to lie to the boy by telling him, for example, that the police know something about it, but Chiara replies that she can't do that. Instead, she offers to talk to the boy, but she realizes that it's useless and that he wouldn't listen to her. She calls the psychologist who is treating the boy. The psychologist tells her that this young person has never had a male figure in his life and that talking with a man might be a better strategy. After that discussion, they decide that Daniele, the team leader, will take care of talking with him. (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

In brief, the previous instances illustrate that the uses of the counter interface are many and varied. The physical organization of the reception desk influences the conditions under which meetings are held while also giving rise to negotiation and circumvention strategies that make it possible to break with the counter interface. On this basis, the unwritten rules that govern the conditions of interaction between residents and agents have a considerable impact on the possibility of inter-individual meetings that can take place within the reception center's time-space.

9.2.2. Attendance control

The structuring of the daily life of asylum seekers through the control of their presence also illustrates the central role of street-level organizations in the fabrication of everyday reception. Through their respective understandings of reception work and the strategies put in place to shape the life of the centers in their image, despite a sometimes restrictive normative framework, the organizations negotiate the living conditions of the people in waiting.

In the three reception centers observed, the presence of residents is controlled through three different modalities, also involving different professional bodies. At CRS, the security staff – whose office is the surveillance tower in the center of the courtyard – is responsible for monitoring the comings and goings of all residents and producing a daily surveillance report. This is very much in line with the observation made by Fassin (2010: 220) within the Sangatte reception center in Calais – also managed by the Red Cross – in which he observed a "dual institutional presence", which can be seen in particular by the presence of overhead surveillance stations. In this way, in Tirossa, security officers can find out who has gone out and come back, or, if necessary, who has not returned to the center:

Example of a Surveillance Report (*Rapporto di sorveglianza*)

Security officer [name] / Service on [date] from 7.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. / Break from 10.45 a.m. to 11.15 a.m.

Observations:
07.00 --- Start of service in the presence of the officer [name]
07.45 --- Control of the yard and floor repair work
08.15 --- Internal patrol of the floors
. --- Bag check to person X [name, room no.]
. --- Arrive at the center [name] visiting [name of the resident, room number]
.
.
14.00 --- End of service in the presence of the security officer [name].

The report is completed by a "list of entries and exits" (*lista delle entrate e uscite*)
Name / Apartment / Exit (hour) / Entry (hour) / Remarks
Name / Apartment / Exit (hour) / Entry (hour) / Remarks
…

These reports are consulted by the social workers every morning. They collaborate with the security guards, to whom they transmit exit permits and all information concerning the possible absence of a resident. On the other hand, the actual presence of asylum seekers is checked through the social assistance distribution every Tuesday, on which occasion they are obliged to sign an attendance list. A surveillance round is also carried out by a supervisor at 9 p.m. every evening directly in the rooms and apartments. An officer specifies that the resident does not necessarily have to be present, but that he or she must notify someone of his or her

absence and that this must be agreed with one of the social officers. There are also no mandatory hours of attendance and every resident is entitled to seven days of absence per month with the agreement of an officer. Exceptions and special absences may be requested and should be discussed with the coordinator of the center (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). According to cantonal regulations, a person must be reported missing to the police after three days' absence.

During my fieldwork in Tirossa, the issue of attendance control was very topical among staff members and gave rise to many conflicts between the social and security offices:

> I am talking to Giulia about attendance control. I notice that she is reading yesterday's daily report from the surveillance team and that she is also looking at the attendance list. She explains to me that this is an issue, a very topical question, and that they are trying to think about the best way to proceed. Every evening, a member of the surveillance team goes around the apartments to carry out a check. They have a list of residents with small boxes to be ticked off. The supervisory staff only has to tick off the boxes for those who are present. She tells me that this way of doing things causes some problems for the social team. In her opinion, it is too systematic and does not take into account the reality of things. She gives me the example of a time when a baby who had just been born was noted as absent as its name was already on the list. She complains that having to tick boxes makes the attendants work like robots, with no thinking. But at the same time, she tells me that she does not want to systematically control and judge the work done by them and that it is therefore difficult to find the best solution to this. (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

In this sense, the very procedure of the control is questioned by the social workers, who would like to set up a more sensible and personalized functioning. However, they retain a considerable margin of maneuver in the surveillance system by having the final say on possible sanctions applied to asylum seekers in the event of unjustified absence. I note that the officers never speak of "sanction" but rather of "deduction of money" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). For example, this is the case of a young woman who was deducted one day's social assistance (daily money, i.e., CHF 16) from her weekly amount because she did not respect her leave and absence permits (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). "But we try to avoid it," Giulia told me (Fieldnotes, summer 2018), referring to the financial penalties for unjustified absences.

In the canton of Bern, the Cantonal Directive stipulates that each reception center must carry out a daily attendance check: "[Each organization] keeps a daily attendance list for residents of collective accommodation centers. The management of the center confirms the data with its signature" (POM 2018: 26). As outlined in an internal ABR procedure, the correct implementation of the attendance check can be verified by the responsible cantonal authorities. Accordingly, each center is required to produce a daily attendance list and to keep these documents to submit them to the canton if necessary.

However, the cantonal directives are subject to different interpretations by the implementing organizations and, above all, by the various reception centers. As in the case of the conflict between social workers and supervisors in Tirossa, there is some tension and divergent practices among ABR center directors regarding attendance control, as Marcel, a center manager explained to me:

> We have *that* [by throwing the cantonal guidelines on the table] and then... [shrugs his shoulders to say the rest is undefined]. If I take a funny, striking example: We talked about signatures earlier. Here, in the regulation from two years ago, it was written: "People must live in the center and present a signature every day." *Must* [emphasis]... and now I don't know how it's written, but it just says that getting people to sign is no longer mandatory, so it is left to free interpretation. Thus, within [ABR], there are four centers that have abolished signatures and three not, or the other way around. (Interview, autumn 2017)

Hence, in Bürgistadt, considering this practice too repressive from a psychological point of view, Gabriel – who states in this regard that "this is not a prison!" – ensured that residents no longer had to sign and that it was sufficient for the officers to do so. To this end, he and his team had previously decided to conduct a survey among the center's residents to find out "what do the residents prefer? It's a constraint, you *have to* [emphasis] control their presence; do they want it done by the staff or do they want it signed by them?" (Interview, autumn 2017) – the main finding being that residents preferred that the attendance control be carried out by officers. This change in practice is considered an improvement to living and working, allowing asylum seekers not only to be less repressed, but also allowing reception agents to find more meaning in their daily work, as stressed by him:

> We were able to explain to the [cantonal authorities] that several controls that were put in place were not effective and were not necessarily productive or meaningful. We are still under a contractual and legal obligation to control the presence of our residents, but it is no longer done in the same way. This means that we now have a list and we [the agents] are the ones who write down that we have seen Mr. or Ms. It's a little less repressive, psychologically speaking, I believe. There is no longer the obligation to sign. And above all, there is no immediate consequence: the famous consequence that said (he slaps his fist on the table) "three signatures missing, you're out." Basically, that is over... There are no more very serious consequences, so now we tell our residents "you're supposed to be here [in the center], but nothing will happen if you're not." Whereas before we had to tell them "you're supposed to be here, you have to come and sign, and if you don't sign, then there will be a consequence." It really changes everything. (Interview, summer 2017)

In this sense, attendance checks are carried out every day of the week, but in an informal manner. The list of all the residents of the center is always placed on one of the desks and the staff members put their signature next to the person or persons they have passed in the corridors of the center. Cédric explains to me, for example, that he looks at the list once at the

end of the morning and once at the end of the day. During the day, I notice that the other staff members also do more or less the same thing (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017).

The repressive dimension of the control is regularly discussed among the agents. During a colloquium with the night shift following an altercation that took place between a resident and a night watchman during the room control at 10 p.m., Gabriel reminds them that during the evening surveillance rounds, they must absolutely make residents understand that they do not control their presence. "We don't chase people to control their presence; we don't care where people sleep," Gabriel explains to them in this regard (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). By playing with the limits and vagueness of the cantonal mandate, the concept of reception, and more particularly, the structuring of asylum seekers' daily lives put in place by Gabriel and his team circumvents the regulatory principles imposed by the canton. More than a space of control and confinement, the center becomes a living space in which asylum seekers evolve in a free and unconstrained manner. It should nevertheless be noted that the burden of proof is shifted onto the shoulders of reception officers who, as I showed in Chapter 6, may in turn be reprimanded if they do not produce the proper documents to enable the cantonal authorities to monitor their practices.

Yet, presence checks can also be a real way of monitoring the daily life of asylum seekers. Certainly milder than the institutions of control (prisons) described by Goffman (1961), accommodation facilities for asylum seekers can still be considered as spaces of constraint. In the case of ORS, "the management of waiting" involves regular checks on reception center residents and a strict structuring of their daily life, thus reinforcing the feeling of "blocked time" (*temps bloqué*) (Kobelinsky 2012b: 161) which asylum seekers cannot use freely. This is the case of Chamfors, which has a very regular weekly rhythm: Residents are forced to prove their presence three times a week – on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays – by personally signing an attendance register. There is thus a precise framework, and every week is the same.

ORS' internal policy and the daily practices of its staff are strictly aligned with the cantonal directives and the obligation to control the presence of asylum seekers, as stressed by one member of the management board:

> The presence [of asylum seekers] is mandatory. [...] We are supposed to check that they sleep [in the centers], but since these are open shelters and the employees often change, we can't be sure we've seen everyone every day. We therefore control that they are... well, there is the attendance list made by the night watchers at ten o'clock in the evening, who look at who is there and who is not there, and then, at least we already monitor the presence based on this list. […] And then [the asylum seeker] has to sign three times a week, and if he doesn't, if we see that he's never there, we ask him to clarify his situation, why he doesn't sleep [in the center]. […] if he or she insists on not staying at the shelter, the [cantonal authority] is informed and the person is summoned to say where he or she is.

> […] If a signature is missing, there is a sanction. It generally works well. Then we have applicants who may have family, friends, so we're not strict, we don't tell the person: "you have to sleep here seven days a week." On weekends, they can all leave, the important thing is that we have the address, the phone number, that we know where they are in case there is a need to contact them. (Interview, summer 2016)

Despite the implementation of a more rigorous attendance scheme, the unease of forcing individuals to "be there" remains. As such, restrictive rules can be transformed, exceptions are created (those with family would not need to sleep in the shelter seven days a week) and proxy-control mechanisms are developed (receive the address and information of a contact person).

Attendance checks are also part of a disciplinary approach with regard to the sanctions applied in case of forgotten signatures. The daily temporality of waiting is, in this sense, imposed and normalized. As Murat tells me, referring to an internal procedure established by ORS management, one omission = reprimanding, two omissions = a written sanction, three omissions = a financial sanction (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016). He points out that a forgotten signature or an absence corresponds to a sanction of 5 Swiss francs. The application of a financial penalty appears to be a relatively common practice, although this is subject to different understandings and practices among officers, thus leading to discretion and unequal ways of doing. For example, Barzan tells me that if a resident was seen in the center during the day but did not come to sign, the sanction is usually not applied (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016).

Ironically, this system not only obliges asylum seekers to be regularly present in the reception center and to organize their days or weeks according to the obligation to sign the attendance register. It also constrains reception officers (at least one), who are obliged to be present at the counter to open the door to those who come to sign. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning – it is often before noon that residents come to sign – it is therefore the same scene that repeats itself: A mandatory presence at the counter for an agent and a continuous coming and going of people who ring the bell and go to the counter to sign, before leaving for their respective activities (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016).

9.2.3. Coping with psychological discomfort

The existence of psychological traces left by events responsible for a person's exile and requiring the intervention of specialists in the host country is now widely recognized. As demonstrated by Fassin & d'Halluin (2007), for more than thirty years, the question of trauma has contributed to structuring the field of assistance to asylum seekers, in the framework of what Pupavac (2001) has called "therapeutic governance." At the same time, it has also been integrated into the "system of proof wherein the body and mind are made to attest to violence endured. To establish the well-foundedness of the claims of seekers to refugee status, both

physical scars (Fassin and d'Halluin 2005) and also psychic traces are to be sought" (Fassin & d'Halluin 2007: 302).

Thus, as analyzed by Kobelinsky (2012b) through the metaphor of the "healed body" (*corps soigné*), reception as a space of the social also assumes, sometimes, the function of a space of care and treatment of psychological suffering. As argued by Fassin (2010), it is interesting to observe how the reception center, conceived as a disciplinary space (i.e., need to sleep in the center in order to receive social assistance) is also transformed into a space related to care. These two dimensions are inextricably linked and reflect the very nature of refugee reception centers, between compassion and repression, security and humanitarian concerns.

Reception structures are indeed confronted with psychological suffering and react in different ways to it. However, I do not wish to focus here on the basic medical care provided to asylum seekers, the standards of which are defined in the reception mandates and cantonal directives, nor on the way in which the recognition of the existence of psychological traces influences the asylum procedure. Instead, I examine the *possibilities of access* to mental health care. As this service is not included in the cantonal mandates, the focus of this section is the institutionalized forms of presence and listening proposed by the mandated organizations.

My first fieldwork at ORS took place in 2016, just after many arrivals of refugees in Switzerland. In particular, the arrival of many unaccompanied minors was disrupting the reception practices implemented until then and highlighted the gaps in the normative framework of reception. In this sense, the psychological care of these persons was at that time not institutionalized. Thus, in the canton of Fribourg, some attempts at change were then specifically aimed at this population, as the following observation shows:

> Julien, the social educator involved in the care of unaccompanied minors in [Chamfors], explains to me that a psychiatrist will come next week (accompanied by Linda, the nurse) to speak to the youths. He tells me that this is important for them and that they need to be able to talk about their travel, their journey, and the problems they encounter daily. But he adds that "it should be possible for everyone!" He thinks of Kibreab [a man of Eritrean origin in his fifties] who, in his opinion, should really have more structure and better supervision. (Fieldnotes, autumn 2016)

Although this practice was still in its early stages of development and has since been reinforced, notably through the opening of a reception center specifically dedicated to the care of unaccompanied minors, my observations suggest that ORS conception of reception does not consider residents' specific needs, or at least does not give them special consideration. Residents can only access mental health care through the infirmary service, which is present two half-days a week in the reception center, and which, if it deems it necessary, redirects the person to a specialized service.

Similarly, at ABR, the psychological care of asylum seekers is provided through the reception officers, whose role is to redirect them to their doctor so that the latter can decide whether to call in a psychologist. Accordingly, Selim explains that the listening dimension is important in his daily work. It goes without saying that this is facilitated by a certain physical and relational proximity between the resident and the agent, as mentioned above:

> If a person comes up to you and says, "Well, I haven't been sleeping for a while, I'm having problems, I need help", you ask, "How long has it been? Have you been sleeping well? Are you eating well? Or are you having problems? What's your problem?" Then, what you can do is to make an appointment with his or her doctor. Because since the person has a doctor, the person goes to his or her doctor. What we can do is just call the doctor to explain what we *heard* [underline the word] and what we think about what we saw and then the doctor makes the referral. If it's a person who needs a psychologist, he does the delegation, and the person is treated psychologically. (Interview, autumn 2017)

Therefore, reception officers at ABR are not responsible for making decisions about whether specific care is required; this is the responsibility of the family doctor who takes over. Yet, the agents are still indirectly involved in the decision, since if they consider that a problem expressed by a resident is not important and does not require a visit to the doctor, the person concerned will probably not go to the doctor. However, the two professions work closely together and communicate regularly. This is illustrated when a psychologist calls the center to talk to Julie about the case of Zeeba, a young Iraqi woman who is causing a lot of concern and is clearly "not well" according to him. "Of course, she's not well!" Julie exclaims, "she's just putting one piece of crap after another!" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017). Residents' mental health is also frequently discussed among the agents at weekly team meetings, an important part of which is dedicated to reviewing the list of residents and saying what happened during the previous week. Each one takes "his" or "her" residents one after the other and briefly explains the situation or changes (appointments, letters, requests, problems, and so on):

> Every officer seems to be well prepared for the meeting. They brought several documents and annotations with them. They each have a list of the center's residents (including "their" residents) and use it as a basis for providing information and news. "*Von meinen Bewohnern* ..." (Amina, regarding "her" residents). In particular, she talks about some problems she is experiencing with a young person who no longer seems motivated. She asked him: "What's your problem? [...] You're not motivated anymore!" After that, she called his teacher to talk about the situation. Selim, on the other hand, explains to the rest of the team: "Mrs. Almedom is not doing well." Julie intervenes in the discussion and asks him: "Is she sick [...] or is she sick in some other way [psychologically]?" (Fieldnotes, autumn 2017)

Hence, although the "alarm signal" does not come explicitly from the person concerned, as in the case of Mrs. Almedom, the team sometimes chooses, together, to intervene and make an appointment for the resident.

However, the presence of a psychologist and the psychological support services sometimes slip into the reception infrastructure itself. This is the case in the canton of Ticino, where CRS has negotiated directly with the cantonal authorities to supplement the basic social assistance and medical services stipulated in the mandate. As mentioned in Chapter 7, the charity does indeed pay "special attention to the management of post-traumatic stress", as one member of the management team pointed out (Fieldnotes, spring 2018). Post-trauma management is one of the organization's visiting cards, used by Luciana to "sell" herself (Interview, autumn 2018) to potential external donors. Therefore, thanks to additional funds raised from foundations and third-party private organizations, CRS is funding a psychotherapist to provide targeted care for "particularly vulnerable" people living in the reception centers run by the organization. More specifically, the psychotherapeutic method EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing[92]) developed for the treatment of traumatized patients is used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder.

Hence, within CRS, one of the tasks of the social workers is to report cases that are sensitive in their view, so that they can be taken care of by psychologists. As illustrated previously through the analysis of the different uses of the counter, this reporting work is made possible by a certain physical and relational proximity between the agents and the residents. In the case of Tirossa, despite the imposing physical presence of a reception desk, it is the moments of informal exchanges – which ultimately take a formal turn, since they deal with the same issues that could be dealt with at the desk – that enable the agents to perceive situations of discomfort among the residents.

"Vulnerability" comes up again and again in the discourse of the management and reception agents, who sort residents based on this criterion. Interestingly, among the three organizations studied, this category is specific to CRS. ABR and ORS never seemed to make use of it, except possibly to designate unaccompanied minors (for ORS). Instead, in Tirossa, I observe on several occasions that the officers regularly update a (handwritten) list of "fragile persons" so that they can redirect them to Noémie, the psychotherapist:

> While rummaging through the documents scattered on her desk, Andrea finds the sheet on which she had started to note the "people who need attention", the "vulnerable" people. The woman I passed before in the courtyard and the young Sri Lankan man are just such people. If I understand well, the idea of this list is to transmit it to Sara (listening desk) and/or Noémie (EMDR) who can offer support and psychological care. She explains to me that it was mainly set up for the unaccompanied minors (subsidies from the canton) but that they are trying to extend the offer to adults who need it. "EMDR appointments" are

[92] The EMDR therapy focuses on helping patients to access and process previously forgotten memories that are painful and traumatic. In other words, it transforms a traumatic emotional experience into a rational understanding of the events that occurred. It involves making side-to-side eye movements, usually by following the movement of the therapist's finger while recalling the traumatic incident by following a strict protocol.

> therefore organized, for example, tomorrow. Andrea is responsible for informing these people that they have an appointment with Noémie. These appointments take place in [another facility] with an interpreter present. The asylum seekers can express themselves as they wish, in their own language. (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

Noémie's office is indeed in another reception center, the one for unaccompanied minors. For this purpose, a shuttle service is provided by the employees responsible for the stewardship in Tirossa, who transport the persons concerned to their appointments. During my fieldwork, the accumulation of daily transportation needs (particularly for medical appointments and school children) due to the remote location of the facility, as well as the lack of available vehicles, prompted the officers to "sound the alarm" and worry that residents would no longer be able to get to "EMDR appointments" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018).

As mentioned in the previous vignette, in parallel to the EMDR sessions offered to the "most vulnerable", a psychoeducator runs a "listening desk" (*sportello di ascolto*) which all residents of Tirossa can go to when they feel the need. This is physically detached from the center and is located in a neighboring building (i.e., the old shelter, used before the new one was built). The room occupied by Sara, the psychologist, has been furnished with little money, as the operational manager of the center explains to me, but they have "tried to make this place pleasant" (Fieldnotes, summer 2018). There is a sofa, a carpet, a round table with chairs and some pictures and drawings hanging on the wall. The listening desk, which does not materialize as a real separating interface, is open several mornings a week. Residents can go there independently, on foot.

In a more punctual and diffuse manner, the attention paid to the psychological well-being of asylum seekers is also observed when social agents decide to interfere in the asylum procedure, even though this is not part of their terms of reference and breaks with the neutral stance of the organization for which they work. This is, for example, the case of Lorenza, Giulia, and Claudia who, faced with the psychological fragility of an Iraqi family, decide to call the State Secretariat of Migration, for fear that the planned hearing with the family would be carried out in conditions that could be prejudicial to them:

> A few days ago, the officers called the SEM so that they could postpone a family's hearing. The family is considered too fragile, stressed, and anxious to attend. Today, Lorenza received a call from the SEM accepting their request. They will therefore receive a new convocation in a few months. The SEM says that the family should, however, not worry too much because if they do not receive a B permit, they will receive a provisional admission anyway. Giulia and Claudia say right away that this information should not be given to the family or even written down anywhere. (Fieldnotes, summer 2018)

As Andrea observes, therefore, it is through a form of discreet and sensitive but concrete and attentive listening to asylum seekers that her daily work becomes effective: "It is an analysis,

so to speak, that is constant and, therefore, when I observe [situations], I also begin with time to see, to know people, habits, glances" (Interview, summer 2018). To do this, she uses the image of a person knocking on a door and asking permission to enter: "To enter [a relationship], I knock, I say 'knock-knock, how's it going?' [...] Then I look to see if the person answers me, welcomes me. When the person welcomes me, I stop everything and try to listen carefully." In the case of CRS, this form of reciprocal, consensual welcoming between the officer and the resident makes it possible to go beyond the minimum material conditions that allow asylum seekers to recover. The reception center, as a form of "benevolent captivity" (*captivité bienveillante*) (Kobelinsky 2012b: 186), also becomes a time and a space for recomposition of the self.

9.3. Conclusion

As I have shown, depending on the respective identities and organizational environment of the mandated entities, the conceptions and actual practices of reception are part of a tension between supervision and psychosocial care, control and assistance of asylum seekers, perception of reception in the short and long term, managerial and humanitarian logic. By appealing to humanitarian ethics and to the code of ethics of social work, CRS and ABR are organizations advocating for an interpretation of reception oriented toward the care for migrants, their psychosocial well-being, and their empowerment. Conversely, a private for-profit enteprise, such as ORS, is more likely to propose a managerial reading of reception that is oriented toward the efficient use of public resources. It is content to apply to the letter the wishes of its "clients" (the public authorities) and thus to reproduce the restrictive normative framework of asylum.

A reading of reception practices in terms of managerial, humanitarian, and care logic would, however, be too simplistic. Based on the examples presented in this chapter, I would like to conclude by providing some additional keys for reading how street-level organizations become a key link in public policy (S. R. Smith & Lipsky 1993) — in this case, in reception policy. I suggest four (non-exhaustive) reading keys: (the perception of) temporality, presence, creativity, and advocacy.

As illustrated before, conceptions of reception are embedded in perceptions of its *temporality* between the short and medium-long term. This in turn echoes the question of who is part of the normative community of members (Anderson et al. 2011), or rather, to what extent asylum seekers are and will be part of the national community. In this sense, ORS offers specific services designed to supervise asylum seekers as non-citizens awaiting a status and rights that will allow them to stay in Switzerland, whose living space and time is circumscribed by the

walls of the reception center. The vision of reception is, in this case, narrow and limited, not only in terms of space but also in terms of temporality.

In some ways, there are similarities at CRS, which, through the principles of the "humanitarian government", tends to apprehend human life as "bare life" becoming object of protection (Agamben 1998: 145). The frame of "vulnerability" and of "universal humanity" is omnipresent in their concept and daily practices of reception, tending to exclude asylum seekers, as well as victim-refugees, from the political realm. Or rather, the framing locates them in the floating time-space of suffering, without any real citizen anchorage. Yet, as the examples presented show, asylum reception cannot be reduced to the negative power of "suspending law", but also has to be understood through the "biopower" of empowerment projects (see Turner 2014a, 2014b). As I have shown, humanitarian actors, such as CRS, indeed attempt to prepare asylum seekers to become what they frame as "autonomous" or "self-reliant" individuals. However, following Turner (2014b: 421), these individuals do not seem to be so much perceived as full-fledged "democratic citizens". Thus, like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the "universalistic norms" of CRS "posit the issue of a new beginning as ahistorical, non-violent and non-political" (ibid.: 431).

Finally, as argued by Selim, a reception agent at ABR: "We assume that people [asylum seekers] will stay here [in Switzerland]" (Interview, autumn 2017). In this sense, the organization situates and orientates its daily actions in a medium-long-term, future-oriented temporality. More than a place of arrival, the reception center is a point of departure that is supposed to provide the necessary tools for a stay in Switzerland of varying length. Unlike ORS and CRS, by projecting residents as citizens within and beyond the suspended time-space of asylum reception, ABR tries to break the marks of exceptionality that characterize the governance of asylum.

Secondly, the forms of *presence* practiced in the accommodation structures also reveal different conceptions of the work of reception. They are also closely linked to the perception of the asylum seeker as a *non-citizen*, *(refugee-)victim*, or *citizen*. By "forms of presence", I mean all the possibilities of encounters enabled or, conversely, hindered by, for example, the working procedures, but also the composition of the teams, the relationship with the reception infrastructure itself, as seen, for instance, with the example of the counter, as well as the interpersonal relationships between agents and residents. As has been shown above, in the field of reception, the structuring of the daily work of the mandated organizations varies, for example, between standardization and individualization of reception, between interchangeability and specialization of staff. Various forms of presence are also observed through the negotiation of the internal layout of the center, facilitating, in particular, the emergence of informal exchanges. These informalities, namely, what goes beyond or does not

fit into the formalities, thus express an appropriation of the reception system by street-level organizations and the trial and error of an order under construction (Hibou 2012: 182).

Thirdly, and directly related to the previous point, the place given to *creativity* in the everyday routine of reception marks important variations in the implementation of the reception policy. Creativity, in my opinion, differs slightly from discretion: It is the combination of discretion and originality, namely, the quality of thinking or acting in an unusual way, in the fabrication of the everyday reality of asylum reception. Hence, creativity gives way to the search for alternatives. It opens the door to mundane practices and ideas aimed at negotiating the policy of reception, at the structural, ideological, and material level. Creativity gives latitude and a possibility to play with the policy of reception's formalities and abstractions.

In this regard, the case of ORS differs significantly from that of ABR and CRS: The company manifestly leaves less room for nuance and creativity in the provision of reception services. As I have shown, it is characterized by its willingness to implement the reception policy *as defined* by the public authorities. Throughout my fieldwork, I have at no time observed any form of questioning of the formal policy on its part. Despite an obvious room for maneuver in the day-to-day running of reception centers, resulting in particular from a normative inconsistency in terms of the content of reception services, ORS does apparently not seek to appropriate this "malleable space".

Thus, and this is the fourth reading key, I suggest that reception services are also the result of a specific organizational posture in terms of *advocacy*, social mobilization, and political commitment. While it is only based on assumptions, this point emphasizes a central dynamic relating to contractual relations in the context of policy implementation: the way in which the mandated organizations may informally contribute to the transformation of public policy by affecting "policy possibilities" (Skocpol 1992). To put it differently, this fourth reading key to the routine patterns of asylum reception addresses how street-level organizations might challenge, or not challenge, the formal policy of reception through different forms of disagreement and contestation. It allows to ultimately situate ORS, ABR, and CRS into the wider dynamic of enclosure (to which I return in the conclusion of this thesis) that currently characterizes the reception field in Switzerland.

Indeed, as shown throughout this thesis, the contractualization and commodification, and thus uniformization of reception produces a political realm in which the lines of what are regarded to be legitimate actions are circumscribed. As such, any criticism of the reception policy emerging from "institutional actors" (Valluy 2009: 243) of social and humanitarian aid is potentially dangerous, particularly because of the risk of losing governmental funding streams. Therefore, by positioning themselves on the continuum between advocacy and service provision, I suggest that street-level organizations are making a political choice: To

engage, or not engage, in the breaking of the (indisputable) "fence" that currently encloses the scope of action in the field of asylum reception. Hence, far from being mere (seemingly) neutral and apolitical service providers, the contracted organizations may be fully integrated into the policy process by producing asylum reception through informal and discretionary practices. Yet there are also dangers in adopting such a posture. The example of ABR, which ceased its activities on 1 July 2020 following the loss of its mandate in 2019 and whose organization was deregistered, is most certainly the (revealing) epilogue to this thesis.

Summary Part III

In Part III, I highlighted the many (in)formalities taking place around the implementation of the policy of asylum reception. I focused on street-level organizations and the way they mediate the policy of reception. For this purpose, I proceeded in three stages: Firstly, by looking at how ORS, ABR, and CRS conceive their role within the apparatus of reception; secondly, by looking at how they negotiate the arrangements for policy delivery; and finally, by examining the way in which they shape the actual practices of asylum reception on the ground. I have shown that the presence of "many (organizational) hands" (Eule et al. 2019b; Thompson 1980) results in a multitude of discourses and practices, which are part of specific ethical registers, built in agreement or disagreement with the one conveyed by the federal and cantonal authorities. I showed that the role of street-level organizations is crucial to the implementation of public policy and to the services its beneficiaries (here, asylum seekers) eventually get.

Thus, after examining the different formal and informal dimensions that characterize the reception policy as implemented by ORS, ABR, and CRS, a distinction could be made between contrasting street-level patterns of asylum reception, namely *asylum seeker management, asylum seeker care,* and *humanitarian-social work*. Before summarizing their main characteristics (see Table 3), some analytical precautions should be expressed.

Each of these "routine patterns" (Brodkin 2011a) is composed of a multitude of dimensions, or "positionalities", each of which is situated on a continuum. For example, a continuum between a reflection in terms of costs and efficiency, and a reflection in terms of human relations; between supervision, care, and psychosocial assistance; between standardization and individualization; between a perception of temporality in the short and long term; and so forth. In this sense, a pattern of asylum reception not only refers to the extremes of these continuums, but each of its constituent dimensions refers to an intermediate value. Each organization displays features of more than one type of asylum reception.

Moreover, each "reception situation" may vary according to the "local migration regime" (Zill et al. 2018). As a "space of negotiating practices" (Tsianos & Karakayali 2010: 375), the apparatus of reception is indeed also influenced by the place-based characteristics in which it is embedded, as shown in Chapter 5.

Thus, following Weber (1992), these patterns are ideal-typical. They are abstract types, categories, that help certain phenomena to be understood or theorized, without claiming, however, that the characteristics of each type are always and perfectly found in the observed phenomena. Yet, much like Boswell (2009) states, I believe the distinction is a good heuristic device for distinguishing between three patterns of legitimation (here, within the apparatus of

reception), which correspond to different types of rationality. These rationalities are the ones that inform how street-level organizations use discretion to adjust their practices to the formal norms of asylum reception. To be more precise, they are those through which they transform the indeterminacy of the formal standards of reception into determinate action, and thus continue state politics on the ground. More importantly, they are those that ultimately give impetus, or conversely prevent, the transformation of reception policy.

Table 3: The routine patterns of asylum reception

ROUTINE PATTERNS OF ASYLUM RECEPTION	**Asylum seeker management**	**Asylum seeker care**	**Humanitarian-social work**
Principle	(Economic) efficiency, flexibility, neutrality, well-being, reliability	Well-being, humanity, neutrality, creativity (in work) & "meaning-making"	Humanity, impartiality, neutrality, universality
Ethic (idea of commonweal)	Efficient use of public resources, basic rights	Individual well-being, common interest	Human dignity, helping the most vulnerable
Ethos (values that underpin practices)	Private management	Social/public service	"Human manner"
Tasks & services provided	Specific services	Social services	Humanitarian tasks
Clients	Mandataries	Beneficiaries of the public policy	Vulnerable persons
Conception of asylum reception	Supervision (framing)	Personal care, support, assistance	Psychosocial assistance
Temporality	Short-term	Medium-long term	Atemporality; floating time(space) of suffering
Perception of the asylum seeker	Non-citizen (or citizen-in-waiting)	Citizen (of the world)	(Refugee-)victim
Presence	Non-specialized profiles, manifold socio-professional backgrounds	(Non-)specialized profiles, manifold socio-professional backgrounds	(Non-)specialized profiles, manifold socio-professional backgrounds
	Interchangeability of staff	Specialization of staff	Specialization of staff
	Standardization	Individualization	Individualization, yet "standardization", i.e., mainly oriented toward vulnerability
Creativity	Denigrated and discouraged	Encouraged and valued	Encouraged and valued
(Forms of) advocacy	Non-existent	Existent	Low-profile, but existent in relation to human issues
	Convergence toward the norms of reception	Divergence	Convergence
Positioning vis-à-vis the formal norms	Accepting or even strengthening	Criticizing (yet operating)	Operating
Strategies of negotiation	Non-existent (or doing rationally)	Dodging	Complementing

10. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to illuminate some aspects of the outsourcing of the sovereign function of asylum seekers' reception. More specifically, I have questioned its governing by and through what I have termed private intermediaries, namely, street-level organizations, instruments, and logics from the private sphere. I have shown that far from being a unilateral, homogenous, and insignificant process, the privatization of asylum reception is the result of the articulation of multiple and contrasting dynamics, both formal and informal, visible and invisible. In this concluding chapter, the main threads of my analysis are drawn together.

The outsourcing of asylum reception: resetting the scene

The question I wish to return to first is: What does the outsourcing of a state task to the private sphere mean? I have proposed three main keys to answer this question – that of the evolution of the relationship between public and private, that of the daily incarnation and negotiation of this configuration of government, and that of the understanding of state action through its intermediaries.

A distribution of competencies • Overall, I have shown that the process of outsourcing reception firstly concerns the delegation of a governmental activity. More specifically, it is the transfer of an activity falling within the remit of public authorities to the private sphere; in this case, the transfer of the accommodation, supervision, and day-to-day care of persons seeking protection. In this thesis, acknowledging its disparate yet in some respects equal character, the "private sphere" encompasses for-profit organizations, such as ORS, and non-profit ones, such as ABR and CRS. In other words, they are specialized and non-specialized reception service providers who are vested with a certain responsibility for reception policy. This is the case in several cantons in Switzerland, such as the ones of Fribourg, Bern, and Ticino, but also at the federal level in the federal asylum centers where public authorities transfer these tasks to private organizations under performance mandates.

To be more precise, I have shown that the transfer in question involves a distinction between decision-making and operational powers within the state itself. This peculiar, yet ubiquitous tendency is informed by a larger context, which overall sees the separation of strategic decision-making from operational management resulting from NPM-related reforms. Outsourcing thereby differs from privatization in the strict sense of the term, which implies the transfer of an entire task to the private sphere. Instead, the outsourcing of reception policy implies a configuration of government in which public authorities retain primary responsibility for the parameters of the task while transferring its execution to the private sphere. This is the already mentioned formula of the "decision-making and operational arms

of the state" that one of my interlocutors used to refer to the division of competencies between street-level organizations and public authorities.

A changing balance • Yet, the analysis of outsourcing that I have presented in this thesis is rooted in a specific period, i.e., 2015-2020. This is the period in which this research was carried out, from its beginnings to its completion. Considering the *temps-long* of the governing of reception – namely, its evolution over time – it indicates that the current situation actually stems from the continuous reorganization between the public and private spheres. I have shown that the involvement of private actors in the accommodation and reception of asylum seekers is a configuration of government that is banal in its principles and that has long prevailed in the Swiss reception landscape. But it is in these arrangements, that is, in the distribution and proportion of public and private, but also in the articulation of the rationalities that run through it, that such a configuration is specific.

It is precisely this balance and the arrangements that currently prevail in this field that I have taken an interest in for this thesis, while being aware that asylum reception has not always been a state task and that it has, over time, been implemented by a multitude of actors at different scales and from different spheres. Thus, the combination of long and short time has enabled me to grasp outsourced asylum reception in its contemporary situation, while considering it in the chronological development of history.

Situating and rethinking privatization • Accordingly, I have shown that since the early 2000s, the field of reception has been characterized by several dynamics that distinguish it from the arrangements that have hitherto prevailed. These are the dynamics of the institutionalization of reception, particularly through its contractualization; the diversification of private actors, especially (but not solely) for-profit ones; and the increased use of managerial instruments. These dynamics indicate a movement toward what I consider to be the commodification and managerialization of asylum reception – a field that is now saturated with financial and managerial rationalities.

Specifically, I approached these intertwined processes as part of the broader dynamics of the privatization of reception, namely, the process of diffusion of private intermediaries in the governance of reception. I proposed to unravel their threads through two main theoretical tools: first, Foucauldian notions of governmentality and apparatus that I have mobilized as tools to think and analytically link the disparate and sometimes disconnected elements that make up the mechanism of reception governance. In particular, the operationalization of the concept of apparatus in an analytical grid has enabled me to capture the network arrangements through which asylum reception is governed. Second, I adopted a meso-political perspective of state action, breaking with yet bringing together the micro and macro perspectives hitherto favored in social and political science research. I proposed to capture

these dynamics of government through three intermediate perspectives: an infrastructural perspective, a street-level implementation perspective, and the perspective of the rationalities and technologies of government. As such, I have both adopted an "interface posture", taking into account the spaces in which different norms and organizations meet, such as, for example, the reception center, and analyzed the "interface of distance" that separates the decision-making and operational spheres of the state in the governance of asylum reception.

In doing so, I aimed to depart from a centralized vision of the state and, more broadly, of the process of governing. I adopted a more fragmented and unstructured perspective, but nevertheless one linked by a multitude of threads participating in the assembly of the complex elements that make it up, enabling it to be understood both as a whole and in its specificity. This assemblage is precisely what forms the "apparatus of asylum reception" at the heart of my thesis.

The effects of outsourcing and privatization of asylum reception

The analysis of the apparatus of reception involves asking what happens when governing this field. In other words, it means examining the *effects* of historically constituted assemblages of actors, practices, infrastructures, values, norms, rationalities, and technologies. Here I present the two main ones: (i) contractualization and commodification, and (ii) neoliberal bureaucratization. They are completed by a third foreseeable effect, (iii) depoliticization, of which I propose an open-ended reflection. I do not, however, propose an order or hierarchy, as they are deeply interrelated and mutually constitutive.

As discussed in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, these processes are all part of the broader one of the neoliberalization of asylum reception, which I have chosen to mobilize not as an explanation for a phenomenon, but as an opportunity to explain the same phenomenon by deconstructing it. Specifically, what I aimed to do was questioning *how* the neoliberal tendencies of state action work, and how they are articulated with the social and political dimensions of asylum reception. It is therefore neither fundamentally a criticism nor a plea for outsourcing and privatization that I sought to propose, but rather the highlighting and questioning of their effects on the field of asylum reception.

Contractualization & commodification • As already mentioned, contractualization of asylum reception refers to the process by which the responsibility for implementing this public task is shifted to a wide range of street-level organizations while being formalized. In this sense, the outsourcing of the operational tasks of reception implies the increased institutionalization of this field, which is now carried out within the framework of service contracts that bind the federal and local authorities to their contractual partners. The growing number of tenders also

contributes to the creation of an economy of reception, which has been brought about by commodification and organizational competition in this field.

Hence, in this thesis, I have highlighted how contractualization requires and generates a precise normative framework that formalizes the distribution of decision-making and implementing responsibilities within the scope of the reception policy. This normative framework is generally built around the figure of the service contract that the cantonal authorities establish with their contractual partner(s) – in this case, private organizations. This agreement defines what I have called the "formal norms of reception", that is, the framework conditions and modalities for policy delivery, notably in terms of financing and instruments for controlling the actions of the mandated entities, as well as the reception standards and guidelines. Formulated differently, the service contract determines the *form* and *content* of asylum reception.

Yet one of the first, clear observations I have made about this normative environment is the marked asymmetry between these two dimensions. Indeed, I have observed both a veritable normative frenzy around the fashion of reception services – that is to say, all the financial and technical arrangements relating to this field – and a normative vagueness with regards to the content of these services. The meagerness of the legal framework governing asylum reception is particularly marked in Switzerland, which is not required to comply with the European legal bases in this area. The tension between managerial and legal norms can best be summarized by the notion of the "normative inconsistency" of asylum reception. Thus, in the context of contractualization of reception, managerial norms, and neoliberal management measures, accompanied by measured imperatives of efficiency, overall appear more powerful than legal standards for reception conditions as a constraint on the action of street-level organizations and their agents.

This normative inconsistency, along with the commodification of reception policy, generates a process in which asylum seekers are overall seen as a "burden" (Darling 2016b) that need to be managed as efficiently as possible. Accordingly, contractualization, as an extension of market rules, has the effect of inscribing the public-private relationship into one-dimensional, rational economic decisions and exchanges. Asylum reception is, in this sense, rather seen through the prism of efficiency, i.e., its proper performance, and not so much through the prism of effectiveness, i.e., its purpose and substantive goal. The well-being of the state and the efficient use of public resources seem to be prioritized, to the detriment of the well-being of migrants who are primarily considered as individuals to be occupied and maintained while waiting for a decision on their asylum claim.

Neoliberal bureaucratization • As a kind of persistent red thread of this thesis, another effect of the outsourcing of reception is its neoliberal bureaucratization. This multifaceted process

reflects the invasion of this field by norms, instruments, and procedures with a private character, i.e., that come from the world of business and managerial capitalism. In other words, I have shown that asylum reception is saturated with neoliberal formalities, characteristic of both the bureaucratization and neoliberalization of this field.

Empirical analysis of neoliberal bureaucratization has revealed that this uneven process is embodied in different ways in the daily work of reception. On the one hand, it materializes in official documents, including mandates, governing the contractual standards that condition the implementation of reception policy, as well as in market-based control instruments such as auditing. On the other hand, it comes into being in the multitude of standards, certifications, evidence, and file notes that reception officers have to comply with and produce on a daily basis so that their daily actions can be tracked and evaluated by their principals. This paperwork piles up, particularly in the reception agents' offices, and becomes an integral part of the reception infrastructure.

Accordingly, I have demonstrated that neoliberal formalities are characterized by three peculiarities. Their first peculiarity is that they are co-produced by the public and private spheres. Indeed, I have shown that the spread of neoliberal formalities stems both from the will of public authorities to control and structure the daily work of their agents, and from the day-to-day practices of street-level organizations that, willingly or unwillingly, participate in their reproduction. The analysis of the games and tinkering around bureaucratic and neoliberal formalities has revealed that it is the articulation of formal and informal, intentional and unintentional practices that, in the end, makes up the neoliberal bureaucratization of reception. Likewise, it is in the light of these negotiations that the continuities between for-profit and non-profit organizations in the daily exercise of the reception policy, and ultimately in the strengthening of this process, has also been brought to the fore.

The second particularity of neoliberal formalities is that they participate in exacerbating the processes of abstraction, standardization, and generalization. Neoliberal formalities contribute to the transformation of complex processes and realities into general and abstract categories. Bureaucratic abstractions become, in this sense, a fiction of reality. The so-called "quality" of reception services is a striking example of this. The audit culture, as well as government through standards and quantitative indicators, literally uproots reception from its practical and lived realities and projects it into an ideal and theoretical "elsewhere", namely, into quality certifications and standards that are predefined in abstract terms and are therefore quantifiable and calculable.

Finally, neoliberal formalities are characterized by their highly disciplinary and constraining character. They are emblematic of the indicator-based government that is embodied in a whole series of particularly cumbersome and rigid quality control, financial monitoring, and

efficiency evaluation measures. Thus, by subjecting the implementing sphere to bureaucratic constraints, neoliberal formalities enable the cantonal authorities to control yet also to discipline the (deviant) behavior of the mandated organizations. In turn, the culture of evidence evaluation becomes a recursive and self-replicating mechanism, whereby what is measured in the end is not the content of the services and results originally expected, but rather compliance with the terms and conditions of this "culture" itself.

Depoliticization (or the displacement of politics) • Finally, I suggest that the contractualization and commodification, as well as the neoliberal bureaucratization of reception may contribute to the depoliticization of the reception field through the obscuration of its plural and conflictual character (Cuttitta 2018; Wood & Flinders 2014). This process, which I present here in the form of assumptions, is embodied in two main ways.

First, I put forward that these processes are likely to reduce asylum reception – at least in part – to a mainly technocratic and managerial issue, the financial and accountability risks of which can be minimized by making them quantifiable and calculable. In this sense, the translation of reception into a regime of market values, through the very process of abstraction mentioned above, as well as the definition and daily (re)production of abstract concepts such as "quality" or "efficiency", would partake in transforming it into a question of "smooth flow management" (Infantino 2016: 74).

This seems, at least, to be the framework mostly favored by public authorities, as well as by some organizations, such as ORS. As I have shown, this company is in fact characterized by its willingness to implement the reception policy *as defined* by its mandators. Coupled with a "corporate culture" enhancing technocratic forms of governance, this translates in practice into a sophisticated mechanism of ISO(9001)-morphism which sees a kind of fetishization (of respect) of neoliberal formalities. The latter are deemed as a neutral, necessary, and indisputable guarantees of high-quality reception services. Importantly, in a different register, the universal framework of humanitarianism favored, for example, by CRS may just as much have a depoliticizing effect on the reception field by also making the goal of "reducing the suffering of the world's most vulnerable populations" (Barnett 2013: 379) somehow unquestionable. Likewise, humanitarian arguments, while often coming into tension with yet also sometimes justifying the policies favored by public authorities, are likely to participate in the naturalization of the global socio-economic and political context in which migration takes place, and thus to its passive acceptance (e.g., Fassin 2007; Geiger & Pécoud 2010). Consequently, I assume that these frameworks partake in the depoliticization of asylum reception by conditioning the possibility for disagreement around this issue, rather than open it up and promoting "the existence of antagonism, conflict, difference and choice" (Wood & Flinders 2014: 162).

Yet, on the ground, street-level workers play a critical role in negotiating and implementing the conflicting goals and rationalities of the reception policy, and thus in adding thickness to its dull and seamless appearance. As I have shown, the whole depth of asylum reception – namely, its complex, lived, and contrasted realities – is not completely erased by neoliberal formalities (or alternatively by humanitarian reason). Depending on what kind of politics they intend to produce or challenge, some organizations take advantage of the "plasticity" of the (legal) norms of reception to shape them according to their moral considerations and emphasize its multiple facets and components. These actors thereby seize the issue of reception to place it in the realm of interpersonal sophistication and deliberation. These practices are often not translated into explicit and homogenous negotiation strategies, but into organizational sensitivities – for example, in terms of the perception of the beneficiaries of the reception policy, the forms of presence and possibilities of encounters within a reception center, or creativity and originality in the conception of reception.

If the patterns of reception developed by street-level organizations – and the resulting forms of contestation – might assumably become further politicized when lifted into the governmental and wider public spheres of society, this seems to be particularly hampered in the context that currently characterizes asylum reception in Switzerland. As such, despite the existence of mundane spaces of debate and negotiations, I suggest that what is really at stake in the reception field is the place of these claims in the realm of politics: The increased use of contractual logics implies that the negotiation strategies deployed by the mandated organizations are confined to the private sphere (but just as much to particular ideas and language, as we have seen). In other words, in case of disagreement with the normative and ideological framework imposed by the public authorities, their claims are only very rarely likely to be politicized through public and governmental deliberation. By stifling the social and political mobilization of street-level organizations, contractualization and neoliberal bureaucratization create a kind of "smokescreen" around the issue of reception by hiding its complexities. In turn, one can imagine that such forms of mobilization can hardly resonate with that of civil society and with that of elected politicians, whom can only with difficulty seize them to question the formal asylum system. The latter seem in effect to be limited to issues mainly related to the current lack of financial transparency of the "reception market" (and thus not related to its substance), as evidenced by the few parliamentary interventions on this subject.[93]

[93] See, for instance, Interpellation Brand Heinz 11.4162, Centres d'enregistrement de la Confédération. Adjudication des prestations d'encadrement dans le domaine de l'asile, on https://www.parlament.ch/fr/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20114162 (last accessed on 9.12.2020) ; Interpellation Glättli Balthasar 15.5507, Transparence financière des fournisseurs privés de prestations du secteur public en faveur des réfugiés, on https://www.parlament.ch/fr/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20155507 ; Interpellation Glättli Balthasar 17.3472, Encadrement des réfugiés par la société ORS. Il est urgent de créer plus de transparence dans l'affectation de l'argent des contribuables, on https://www.parlament.ch/fr/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20173472 (last accessed on 9.12.2020).

Following Darling (2014b, 2016b) and interrelated to the above, I therefore assume that the second element partaking in the depoliticizing effect of outsourcing and privatization is the limitation or even rejection of alternatives in public policy implementation. State-mandated organizations indeed appear to be subject to a dependency constraint limiting their means of action and their freedom of expression to what is considered acceptable (and therefore fundable) by the public authorities. As I have shown, at stake in most of the exchanges between the public authorities and the contracted organizations are the "technicalities" related to the policy of asylum reception, and not its "ethical, political and biopolitical foundations" (Kalir & Wissink 2016: 46). In this sense, contractualization contributes to the depoliticization of public action by ruling out potential alternatives in the reception field or, to put it differently, by limiting openness in the face of divergent creativities. This is what I have referred to in this thesis as the politics of enclosure, namely, the "ordering tendencies and alliances that produce and maintain particular perceptual orientations towards the contours and limits of political debate" (Darling 2014b: 74).[94]

To be more precise, it is not so much the public authorities who explicitly exclude certain readings of asylum reception by determining its substance in advance. As I have argued, the public authorities indeed distance themselves from any moral responsibility for the content of reception, other than to ensure dignified and respectful treatment of asylum seekers. Therefore, it is instead the prior choice of contractual partners that limits the range of moral considerations involved in the interpretation and implementation of reception policy. To use the metaphor of the tree that two interlocutors in the canton of Ticino used to share their analysis regarding the reception mandate, public authorities simply shape the trunk of the tree (i.e., the foundations and parameters of reception) and entrust their representatives with its care and cultivation daily. The latter then have the choice of either keeping the tree trunk alive by providing the minimum care for its survival or ensuring that the tree produces leaves, flowers, or fruit. The richness and profusion of these leaves, flowers, or fruits – which here symbolize the "little extras" of reception – depends on the moral dispositions of street-level organizations and their officers, as thoroughly discussed in this thesis.

Consequently, the emphasis here is not so much that the issue of asylum reception is being depoliticized as a whole. Rather, following Wood & Flinders (2014: 155), I suggest that this governmental task is *displaced* to a less obviously politicized arena (because often constrained by the mechanisms of contractualization), namely, the sphere of "outsourced" public governance. As such, the politicization of this issue may indeed still take place, but mostly

[94] On an interesting (but equally unfortunate) side note, closure to alternatives can also occur through the recruitment process and the "natural" self-selection of agents who – for many – end up resigning in the face of the overwhelming dilemmas they encounter in the daily exercise of their work, thus involuntarily participating in the reproduction of a homogeneous order of thought and action .

outside the formal asylum system. In Switzerland, the contestation movements in relation to the housing conditions of asylum seekers are a notable example of this.

To reiterate, in a field the formal contours of which are somehow "smoothed" through managerialization, technicization, but also humanitarization, the questioning of asylum reception – in other words, the assumption of political responsibilities – by contracted (yet to some extent probably also non-contracted) actors becomes unfounded since this issue acquires "the form and appearance of objective facts of life" (Jessop 2014: 216). Yet, in the implementation sphere, contestation is also hampered by a competitive context in which the risk of losing a mandate, often essential to institutional survival, is real. The example of ABR, which lost its mandate in the context of the restructuring of the asylum system in the canton of Bern, is edifying in this respect.

A dilution of responsibilities by (the interface of) distance

The many processes referred to above indicate and participate very clearly in the governance at and through the distance that is being put in place in the realm of asylum reception. I would like to return here to this distance and, in particular, to the resulting dilution of responsibilities.

I was actually confronted with this distance even before carrying out my research in Chamfors, Bürgistadt, and Tirossa. Indeed, the relatively easy access to my field already indicated to me the particular position of reception and its actors within the governance of asylum; a position determined by its "unspectacularization" [95], subsidiarization, privatization, and managerialization. In short, this indicated to me from the outset that, within the ideal and administrative landscape of asylum, the reception field was situated yet also perceived as far from the "heart of the state" and its prerogatives. To use Brenner's (2004) words, it was characterized by a double process of downward and outward rescaling. Thus, beyond its epistemological, theoretical, and political implications, which I later analyzed, I believe this distance somehow facilitated my access to the field from a methodological point of view.

More concretely, through a thorough analysis of the organizations, instruments, rationalities, and mechanisms that shape the reception apparatus, I have shown that the distance involved in the governing of reception is complex and diffuse. It operates, undoubtedly, through the displacement of a task from the public to the private sphere. Yet it also manifests itself through the interposition of private intermediaries between public authorities and the beneficiaries of reception policy. I have shown that the articulation of these intermediaries forms an "interface of distance" that links and distances the public authorities from their agents and from the everyday life of the reception center. Thus, while being linked by the same contractual norms,

[95] As opposed to the more "spectacular" (De Genova 2013) functions of state action, as for example border control but also the decision as to whether or not grant asylum.

the decision-making and operational spheres of the state are separated by a multitude of thin layers – the neoliberal formalities – which increase the distance between them. Specifically, the interplay of these formalities creates a multi-layered buffer zone that diverts and dilutes, but also displaces the structural and organizational uncertainties that determine the governance of asylum reception. It diverts them by emphasizing the managerial parameters of reception rather than the content of these services, that is, its social and political dimensions; it dilutes them by establishing an "aura of clarity and control" (Boswell 2018) around the question of reception, which becomes a space considered as calculable and predictable; it moves these uncertainties away from the decisional and public sphere by transferring them to the operational and private sphere.

In the end, the interface of distance engenders a process of disempowerment through the displacement and absorption of the social, political, and moral components of reception. More precisely, it leads to what A. Williams et al. (2016: 2309) call "moral outsourcing". Indeed, as I have shown throughout this thesis, accountability for the reception apparatus and its effects is located in an "elsewhere": on the other side of the (imagined) boundary between the public and the private (Gill 2019: 106), but also in the plethora of documents, procedures, and certifications that navigate between these two spheres. Thereby, the separation between the decisional and operational spheres allows each party to evade responsibility. Through public-private partnerships, political authorities can, on the one hand, "look the other way" (Riches 2002: 661), while at the same time establishing a form of government that ensures their legitimacy through the efficient use of public resources. On the other hand, by presenting themselves as neutral and independent contractual partners, street-level organizations may cognitively detach themselves from the state and from what they consider to be the "brutal elements" (Gill 2016: 147) of reception policy for which they do not feel responsible. As I have shown, however, the interface of distance also represents a kind of shield behind which actual forms of contestation may hide. Hence, while the outsourcing of the reception implementation to the private sphere does not entail a privatization in the strict sense of the term, it certainly implies the privatization of the political and moral responsibilities related to the reception policy.

The multiple fragmentations of asylum reception

The main results of my thesis indicate a multiplication of spaces for mediation and interpretation in the governing of asylum reception, particularly through shifting the political task of operationalizing the (conflicting goals of the) reception policy to the implementation sphere, the diversification of organizational and street-level actors, and therefore of the moral disposition towards reception, as well as the proliferation of bureaucratic and managerial

norms. More particularly, I would like to address here the multiple fragmentations of state action highlighted in this thesis by replacing them in the political cycle of asylum reception.

First, the governing of reception is fragmented by the distinction between its decision-making and operational spheres, which contributes to the multiplication of institutional and moral spaces and, more broadly, of responsibilities in the reception field. As I have shown, this distinction goes along with an intensification of the processes of bureaucratization and neoliberalization which, through the contractualization and therefore increased institutionalization of reception, in turn, is likely to cause a second fragmentation between the associative actors and institutional actors (Valluy 2009) of asylum reception.

Then, as I have mentioned several times, the normative environment of reception is experiencing a third fragmentation between, on the one hand, the proliferation of norms that structure the public-private relationship and the system of service provision, and, on the other hand, the meagerness of the norms that define the content of reception services. More specifically, procedural considerations prevail over the substantive goal(s) of asylum reception: The financial and managerial rationalities that characterize the contractual relationship in a relatively homogeneous manner have a strong influence on those that determine the content of reception services, which are more heterogeneous and defined by non-economic criteria. This fragmentation is accentuated by the processes of contractualization and commodification of reception, which intensify the importance given to its technical and managerial dimensions.

Finally, the diversification of street-level organizations means that asylum reception is, on the ground, completely fragmented. Indeed, I have shown that the policy of reception at the street-level is mediated through informal, mundane, and discretionary practices stemming from the very identities and institutional environments of the mandated organizations. Following Brodkin (2011a), this is what I have referred to as the "routine patterns" of asylum reception. Yet, in the field, the mediation of asylum reception is, in turn, fragmented between the form and content of reception services; two aspects of reception, between ethics and ethos, which in practice often come into tension. More precisely, I observe that negotiating the managerial language and the form of service provision is extremely difficult and, whatever the strategy put in place, involves an alignment – at least apparently – with the norms and rationalities imposed by the public authorities. Conversely, the negotiation of the content of reception services leaves room for a multitude of (extremely) different languages, conceptions, and practices. This is made possible by plasticity and legal vagueness with regard to the content of these services, but also indicates that public authorities are departing from the moral considerations of reception. These are left in the hands of street-level organizations which, based on their respective moral dispositions, interpret and prioritize the substantive goals the apparatus of reception is geared toward differently.

A specific stage in the political cycle of reception? • However, the question I ask myself, as a final reflection on this thesis, is the following: How can we interpret the fragmented character of day-to-day asylum reception when the processes that currently delineate this field seem to indicate its uniformization and flattening through financial and managerial logics? Without entering a debate on the discretion inherent in street-level bureaucracy, which obviously implies divergent practices in the field, nor on the advantages or disadvantages of the discretionary power of street-level actors, I would like here to replace the governing of reception in its historical context and, more precisely, in the continuity of the political cycle evoked at the beginning of this thesis.

In so doing, I contend that Switzerland is currently in a phase of change with regard to its asylum policy; a political cycle that is clearly marked by privatization and depoliticization tendencies, but the future contours of which can only be the subject of conjecture for the time being. In my opinion, the restructuring of the asylum system, which came into force in 2019, is indeed symptomatic of the ongoing transformation of state action that is taking place in the asylum field. This transformation occurs in two ways: first, through the accentuation of the structuring and therefore bureaucratization of this policy through the definition of procedures and the selection of resources aimed at speeding it up. In this sense, the public authorities responsible for asylum are expanding their control and management capacity over the asylum procedure. Second, the transformation unfolds through the increased outsourcing of operational tasks related to the asylum procedure (including accommodation, reception, and integration) and the selection of contractual partners. Although still in the making and therefore partly incomplete, these processes are indicative of the future developments that may take place in the coming years in the asylum field.

One of these is, I believe, the consolidation and extension of contractualization. In effect, the choice of contractual partners clearly appears to be a crucial stage in policy, not so much in terms of the selection of their skills, and thus the quality and relevance of the services provided on the ground, but rather in terms of their adequacy with the norms prioritized by the public authorities. Indeed, the examples presented in this thesis – and, more generally, the current situation of asylum in Switzerland – seem to indicate that an implementation tinged with activism has no place in this field at present. In this sense, the fragmentation that I have observed between 2015 and 2020 in the everyday practices of reception might indeed be reduced in the future by the intensification of the contractualization of asylum and the resulting uniformization of the contractual and operational partners of the governmental authorities. As is already the case at the federal level and in some cantons, these would then be selected for their "non-dangerousness" and their compliance with the technical and managerial norms favored by the public authorities.

Yet another development that could also take place is the strengthening of the role of non-contractualized organizations as advocates for the public interest and the welfare of the beneficiaries of asylum policy. As mentioned in Chapter 2, civil society – understood here in a broad sense as being composed of non-state actors, private individuals, associations, or movements – plays a crucial role in the asylum field. Its action indeed influences and sometimes modifies Swiss asylum policy and legislation (Avanza et al. forthcoming; Efionayi-Mäder et al. 2015; Miaz 2017b). Moreover, its intervention often complements tasks related to reception, personal and legal support, and integration that are not provided for by legislation or political will. The associative world would thus constitute a "non-governmental solidarity space" (*espace de solidarité non gouvernementale*) (d'Halluin-Mabillot 2012) with forms of intervention that are parallel but complementary to those of institutional asylum actors, ranging from legal aid to psychological support and political mobilization. It could provide an impetus to repoliticize and thus reinvigorate the political nature of asylum.

However, there are still many questions about the real scope of this type of action in the context of the restructuring of asylum: How could civil society mobilize and form a united front when it is itself deeply fragmented? What would be the real impact(s) of the action of associations on the evolution of policy practices that have become "indisputable" because they are abstract and oriented towards the efficient use of public resources? What strategies of resistance could the associative world deploy in order to face the risk of bureaucratization of the reception services it develops? Above all, what forms of funding could it mobilize without entering into a relationship of dependence, and therefore of constraint, with the public authorities? Indeed, the current legislative changes geared towards the enclosure of the asylum field, including the regulation of access to federal infrastructures by third parties, seem to limit the scope of the means of action in this field.

Thus, I suggest that what the current political cycle of asylum reception indicates is its increasing foreclosure through its commercialization and uniformization, but also the stifling of political possibility and discussion. In this sense, we are witnessing the reinforcement of the fragmentation of public action in the reception field by the division of the associative and institutional actors of asylum reception. This not only generates the distancing of the former from the formal system of reception but also the locking of the political scope of the action of the latter.

⁂

The (dis)order of state action: closures and open endings

The advance of managerial logics in the governance of asylum reception that I have analyzed in this thesis do not indicate either the withdrawal of the state or the loss of its sovereignty. On the contrary, it indicates a political cycle in which the state redeploys itself through private intermediaries. In other words, the contours of the state are redrawn through a whole range of actors, instruments, and rationalities from the private sphere. In particular, after the political cycle of the 1970s and 2000s, during which the issue of asylum, and indirectly that of reception, were particularly politicized through the prevalence of security concerns, I have shown that the current cycle of asylum is characterized by a dual process of bureaucratization and neoliberalization. This is leading to a re-qualification of the "asylum problem" from a political or social issue to a primarily bureaucratic and managerial one. Of course, these are not the only rationalities that currently determine the governance of asylum: They are the ones that prevail in its shaping and that seem to condition the possibility of public and governmental debate.

I start from these observations to broaden the reflection in several directions. The first relates to the possible alternatives of reception, as well as to the fields of actors whose perspective would make it possible to deepen, but above all to diversify and refine the analysis of asylum governance. The second questions the role of outsourcing and privatization processes in the reproduction of a given and, perhaps more importantly, seemingly indisputable political order. As these analyses go far beyond the Swiss borders and the scope of this thesis, I limit myself here to sketching the contours.

Several avenues of research for future work – including other actors or levels of governance – would be possible to pursue the reflection at the heart of this thesis. As mentioned above, it would be interesting, for example, to include the perspective of the inhabitants of reception centers. It would imply opening up a whole range of questions deliberately left aside in the context of this thesis, but which are nevertheless central to the understanding of reception policy. First of all, the everyday discourses and experiences of refugees should be collected and brought to light. Among other things, this would make it possible to refine the understanding of asylum facilities as instruments of power, yet also as social and political spaces. Furthermore, it would be an opportunity to address the question of the relationship between asylum seekers and street-level organizations and to ask, for example, whether asylum seekers living in reception centers are aware of the discrepancies in terms of reception services that exist throughout Switzerland. More broadly, it would be interesting to question the residents about the "reception concept" that seems most relevant to them. One can indeed hypothesize that, although an overly managerial and impersonal approach is not ideal, an

overly "social" approach could also be perceived negatively by asylum seekers, particularly through its potential paternalistic and/or infantilizing tendencies.

This thesis would also require a deeper analysis of the role of public authorities in governing the policy of reception. If this thesis includes to a certain extent the perspective of cantonal actors, they nevertheless remain secondary in the analysis. Such additional investigation would refine the understanding of state action in the asylum field. More specifically, it would make it possible to better grasp the conjunctures, but also the motivations and reasons why national and/or local authorities decide, at a certain point in time, to outsource and privatize certain of their tasks.

Another group of actors that should be added to the analysis of the reception policy is the emerging field of solidarity associations. This would make it possible to give visibility to actors who are marginalized in the asylum governance, while also comparing their range of actions, services, and claims with those of institutionalized actors. Overall, this would be an opportunity to reflect on the role that civil society could play in the reception apparatus. It would make it possible to bring out the complex but also dynamic and controversial nature of the asylum field, in particular by placing greater emphasis on the changing institutional nature of the actors involved in the reception "battleground" (Campomori & Ambrosini 2020). Questioning the tension between professionals and volunteers would indeed make it possible to transcend the state/non-state opposition.

Accordingly, to come back to the alternatives that one could envision in the field of asylum, we may imagine that if we shift our attention from the rather isolated and seemingly homogeneous "microcosm" of the reception center to the set of complicated relationships that comprise the reception apparatus, then we may yield several avenues at the level of daily reception practices, but also at the one of the reception system and its organizational structure. While being aware of inevitable unequal power relations, it could be a matter of envisaging more inclusive – and thus less coercive – reception structures, for example by "decompartmentalizing" the delimited spaces that make them up (e.g., offices – living quarters for residents) and, in turn, by engaging asylum seekers in the center's internal structuration. Likewise, despite its obvious limits, one could imagine leaving more room for collaboration with associative actors, or at least with less institutionalized forms of reception. Nevertheless, any alternative would first require a reversal of focus: placing asylum seekers, in all their diversity and singularity, at the heart of the equation rather than focusing on performance measurement and accountability matters between the decision-making and operational spheres of the state.

Thus, in light with the above, I would like to suggest that what is ultimately strengthened through the current privatization of asylum reception is not so much the state itself, but rather

a certain "national order of things", as emphasized by Malkki (1995). Indeed, while the outsourcing of the implementation of reception to the private sphere certainly transcends the distinction between state and non-state, public and private, formalities and informalities, I believe it also contributes to the reproduction and strengthening of the "normal" order of the asylum problem. This process consists of several intertwined dynamics that I outline in the following concluding lines.

The normalization and ordering of the asylum problem first of all occurs by taking the contemporary order of the sovereign nation-state as a given. In effect, by adopting a sedentarist analytical scheme in considering displacement, which is therefore perceived as an anomaly, the need to control people "out of place", such as people seeking refuge and protection, is naturalized and strengthened. The creation of the legal and discursive category of "asylum seekers" is, in this respect, particularly indicative of the desire to literally suspend these people until they become "real" refugees. This process of categorization, then, in turn, naturalizes the existence and necessity of asylum centers. These are considered as standardized and generalizable technologies of government, enabling the gathering, ordering, and even disciplining of asylum seekers while similarly centralizing and thus facilitating the administrative and bureaucratic process of managing this population. In particular, outsourcing and privatization appear as modalities of government, rendering the management of reception faster, more flexible, and more efficient, thus helping to legitimize the "state system" in its governing capacities. In such a context, the daily (re)production of a plethora of standards, procedures, and other bureaucratic artifacts by both the public and private spheres contributes to the legitimization and institutionalization of asylum reception and, more broadly, of the refugee issue. More specifically, it contributes to a specific order of knowledge and truth in the governance of asylum founded on bureaucratic and neoliberal rationalities. Hence, outsourcing and privatization partake in the reproduction of a given political order – as a kind of indisputable pattern of order and governance – with which all the actors involved in asylum governance, and particularly in the reception apparatus, align (at least apparently). As previously emphasized, this order eventually conditions the possibilities of claims and alternatives emerging around the issue of reception, and asylum more generally.

More informed public and governmental debate is therefore needed on the broader dynamics of the privatization of state action and on their potential consequences on the outcomes of public policy, in particular with regard to the critical role of street-level organizations as mediators of both policy and politics. By offering ethnographic insights into outsourced asylum reception, this thesis represents also an effort in that direction.

11. References

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