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# Categories of State Control: Asylum Seekers and the Direct Provision and Dispersal System in Ireland

Steven Loyal & Stephen Quilley\*

Like Socrates described by Plato, the immigrant is atopolos, has no place, and is displaced and unclassifiable.... Neither citizen or foreigner, nor truly on the side of the Same nor really on the side of the Other, he [sic] exists within that “bastard” place, of which Plato also speaks, on the frontier between being and non-social Being.... Always in the wrong place, and now as out of place in his society of origin as he is in his own society, the immigrant obliges us to rethink completely the question of the legitimate foundations of citizenship and of relations between citizen and state, nation or nationality.... He forces us to discover what Thomas Bernard calls the “state controlled” thoughts and bodies that a very peculiar history has bequeathed us and which, despite all the humanist professions of faith, very often continue to prevent us from recognizing and respecting all the forms of the human condition. (Bourdieu 2004, xiv)

**O**N MAY 25, 2015, IRELAND BECAME THE FIRST COUNTRY IN WHICH the mass of the electorate voted for the introduction of same-sex marriage. This constituted a remarkable turning point in a country still dominated by Catholicism, in which abortion is still prohibited and

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divorce is difficult. Not surprisingly, gay marriage became the focus for much self-congratulation. It followed just over a year after the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Enda Kenny apologized on behalf of the state to the women confined in Magdalen Homes: “Today we live in a very different Ireland, with a very different consciousness and awareness. We live in an Ireland where we have more compassion, empathy, insight and heart” (O’Brien 2014). What this article wishes to show, by contrast, is that underlying this hegemonic construction of Ireland as an open, tourist-friendly society characterized by the celebrated liberal values of *Cead Mile Failte*—a hundred thousand welcomes—is the harsh reality of capitalist production and exclusionary nationalism. This article will map the dark side of contemporary Irish society by examining the rationale for the introduction of the Direct Provision and Dispersal (DPD) system to house the growing number of asylum seekers who started arriving in the mid-1990s.

Introduced in April 2000, the DPD was a new regime designed to manage what was perceived and presented as a burgeoning crisis of asylum seeker immigration. Housed in the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, which has historically been responsible for both immigration and security, the asylum process involves three major administrative bodies: the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC), which deals with asylum applications; the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT), which deals with appeals made by asylum seekers concerning their applications; and the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), which is responsible for housing and maintaining asylum seekers while their applications are processed. Replacing the existing statutory provision with a departmental fiat, the DPD has entailed coercive dispersal of asylum seekers away from Dublin to regional centers across the country, the replacement of regular welfare (cash) payments with centrally allocated food aid and housing, and the administrative separation of asylum seekers from regular welfare claimants and recipients.

The central questions this article seeks to address are ostensibly simple: What was the rationale underpinning the introduction of the DPD system in Ireland? And why 15 years later, despite almost universal condemnation by non-governmental organizations, has the state continued to use it? This article argues that the system emerged in response to multiple drivers attending to several very different functions. Such drivers include the state’s twin desires to discourage and deter the further arrival of more asylum seekers while defining, controlling, and managing those already within its borders. This, in turn, has to be understood against the backdrop of wider

social, economic, and historical factors, including: (a) a long-standing predisposition towards restrictionary policies rooted in an exclusionary ethno-national/cultural identity, perceived security problems, and concerns relating to financial costs and economic integration; (b) a preexisting institutional culture of confinement; and (c) an attempt to reassert sovereignty in an era of globalization and within the context of various international rights treaties, growing exposure to the free flow of labor within the European Union, and the operation of a Common Travel Area between Ireland and the United Kingdom. Finally, to understand such a complex constellation of processes, it may be useful to see the state—albeit qualified in Bourdieu's terms—as a bureaucratic field of forces consisting of differentiated and fractured interests operating on the basis of cooperative tension.

We will begin by providing a historical context of asylum in Ireland before outlining the foundation of the DPD system and the historical continuities and discontinuities with institutions of confinement. We then discuss issues tied to Irish sovereignty and territory before moving onto how these issues have become increasingly inflected by a neoliberal logic. We conclude by suggesting that Bourdieu's theory of the state provides a useful framework for understanding the logical underpinnings of Irish immigration policy, and with it, the role of the DPD system.

### **The Historical Context of Asylum in Ireland**

Propelled forward by the Celtic Tiger economy, from the mid-1990s Ireland was the last of the EU15 group to become a country of net immigration (Loyal 2011; Mac Éinrí 2007). The framing of such a shift often intimates a ruptured sense of ethno-national cohesion that serves to reinforce a nationalistic narrative and to justify exclusionary policies. In reality (as with most Eurasian countries), immigration has been a long-standing feature of Irish society—with Vikings arriving from the tenth century, Anglo-Normans from the twelfth century, and other waves of colonists, including Huguenots and British colonists, entering from the seventeenth century onwards (Duffy 2006; Rolston & Shannon 2002). Throughout the last century, successive, albeit limited waves of migration—including refugees from Hungary in 1956, Chileans in 1973, Vietnamese in 1979, Bosnians in 1981, and a small group of Kosovans in 1999 (Fanning 2002; Keogh 1998; Lentin & McVeigh 2002; Ward 1996)—have contributed to an increasingly diverse society.

The shift to net immigration in the 1990s was signaled by the arrival of a small number of asylum seekers. In 1992, there were only 39 applications

for asylum. By 1996, this figure had increased to 1,179, rising to 7,724 in 1999 before peaking at 11,634 in 2002. The number of applications dropped back to 7,900 in 2003 and began to decline thereafter, with just 3,276 applications in 2015 (ORAC 2016). Between 1992 and 2015, there were just over 100,000 applications for asylum in the country (ORAC 2016). In 2000, the year that the DPD system was introduced, Ireland actually received the lowest number of asylum seekers within the European Union (2.4 percent of the total); but whereas the absolute numbers were low, the country did have the fifth highest number per capita (Faughnan & Woods 2001, 12). Significantly, unlike elsewhere in Europe, relatively few asylum seekers came from Eastern Europe (Geddes 2003; Gibney 2004; Marfleet 2006); rather, the majority (60% in 1998) came from Africa, principally from Nigeria (Faughnan & Woods 2001, 14; ORAC 2002).

The state initially dealt with asylum seekers through the punitive and authoritarian 1935 Aliens Act.<sup>1</sup> However, a steady increase in number of asylum seekers in the 1990s led eventually to the Refugee Act, which although published in 1996 was not enacted into law until November 2000.<sup>2</sup> This act became the primary piece of legislation for guiding asylum policy and interpreting the 1951 Geneva Convention. Under the convention, Ireland (signing in 1956) committed itself to providing a place of safety for refugees, to respecting and valuing human rights, and to protecting vulnerable and at-risk individuals. After joining the European Community in 1973, Ireland also had separate obligations under EU law to bring its policies into line with the Schengen Treaty (1985) and the Dublin Convention (1990).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, policies and practices are not wholly uniform across the European Union: Ireland's procedures have remained consistently out of step with the EU norms and putative aspirations (Irish Refugee Council 2013, 9) even though the nation's actions are seen as meeting the minimum standards required by international obligations. Successive governments have, for example, refused to enter into the European Reception Conditions Directive designed to ensure common standards in EU policy, primarily because the Directive includes a right to work for asylum seekers (Irish Refugee Council 2013, 10).

### **The Direct Provision and Dispersal System**

Prior to the introduction of the Direct Provision and Dispersal (DPD) system in April 2000, asylum seekers residing in Ireland were not permitted to work, access third-level education, or carry out any form of business

before the final determinations of their cases. Instead, they received full Supplementary Welfare Assistance (SWA) payments, which stood at about £72 Irish pounds (€91.40) for a single adult and £13.20 (€16.70) per child per week in 1999 (Cullen 1999, 22). They were also free to find their own accommodation, usually with the aid of the local Health Board. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority (over 90 percent) settled in Dublin. At the end of 1999, approximately 6,500 asylum seekers were living in private rented accommodations, while 2,500 were in emergency accommodation in the city (FLAC 2003, 8).

Those who arrived after the establishment of the DPD system were subjected to a very different regime and targeted by a novel form of state intervention. Overseen by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), which was part of the Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform (DJELR), the DPD system had no statutory basis. Instead, it was introduced by fiat on the basis of a ministerial circular, thereby allowing it to bypass the scrutiny of equality legislation (O'Connor 2003). Under this new system, asylum seekers were to be housed around the country in various buildings, some of which were state owned but the majority of which were privately owned and sub-contracted, including hostels, hotels, former convents, prefabricated buildings, and mobile homes. They were to be provided with three fixed meals daily. Instead of the higher social welfare payments that are given to Irish nationals, they were now to receive €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child each week.

At the end of 2000, there were 394 people living in a few DPD centers. By the end of April 2008, this number peaked at 6,850 asylum seekers who originated from 96 different nationalities and were dispersed in 62 centers throughout the state (ORAC 2001). As the number of asylum applications began to fall, however, centers began to close. At the end of 2015, provisional figures indicate that there were 4,696 residents in 35 centers spread across 16 counties in Ireland (Irish Refugee Council 2016, 14). In terms of geographical origin, the majority of residents were from Nigeria (30 percent), the Democratic Republic of Congo (7 percent), and Somalia (4 percent). Age-wise, the population was relatively young, with just over 50 percent between 18 and 35 and about 30 percent aged 17 years or younger (RIA 2016).

Since the inception of DPD, over 50,000 asylum seekers have passed through the system. When the centers were initially introduced, it was envisaged that individuals would be housed there on a temporary basis and that claims would be processed within six months (NASC 2008; O'Connor

2003). As of March 2016, more than 1,500 people had been in DPD for over three years (33 percent of the total), and more than 600 (13.4 percent) had been in the system for over eight years, with the average length of stay standing at 38 months (Irish Refugee Council 2016, 2). Various NGOs as well as academic and semi-state bodies have documented the adverse living conditions of asylum seekers housed in DPD centers in numerous reports, of which only a handful are cited here (Fanning 2002; Fanning et al. 2001; Faugnan & Wood 2001; Fekete 2000; Irish Refugee Council 2001, 2013, 2016; Lentin & McVeigh 2002, 2006; Loyal 2011; NASC 2008; O'Connor 2003). Specific problems have been detailed in relation to accommodation, dietary provision, health, and employment. The standards of accommodation for asylum seekers vary greatly. Many asylum seekers live in sub-standard accommodations, often in cramped and overcrowded conditions (NASC 2008). In some centers catering primarily to single adults, between four and six individuals share one room, and overcrowding is the norm. For example, in Viking House, which is in many ways indicative of other centers, 90 percent of individuals shared a room with at least three others (Waterford Area Partnership 2006, 32). The consumption of poor quality, high-carb, and high-fat food and the lack of dietary variety have been linked to both weight gain (up to 40 percent in some cases) and weight loss as people become discouraged from eating (Barry 2014; Friel et al. 2006). With reference to mental health, although some asylum seekers are likely to have had acute psychological problems before arrival (Begley et al. 1999; NASC 2008), the vast majority have either developed or exacerbated preexisting problems as a result of living in these centers (Begley et al. 1999; NASC 2008; Waterford Area Partnership 2006). It has been estimated that 90 percent of asylum seekers suffer from depression after having spent six months in these institutions (NASC 2008). They are also five times more likely than Irish citizens to be diagnosed with a psychiatric illness, including suicidal tendencies (Avalos et al. 2007).

With regard to employment, Ireland is one of only two countries in the European Union (Denmark being the other) that does not provide an automatic right to work for asylum seekers after a specified period of time. The paltry weekly cash benefit precludes mundane purchases that ordinary citizens take for granted—from food and phone cards to medicine and bus tickets.

Not surprisingly, since their inception DPD centers have been the target of almost universal condemnation by non-governmental organizations and other rights groups. Disempowering and dehumanizing, and having well-



documented negative effects on life chances, mental health, and well-being, these centers are regarded as unsuitable places to accommodate adults, let alone children. Most recently, the Irish Human Rights Commission (2014), the Ombudsman for Children (2013), the Council of Europe, and the United Nations Human Rights Committee all pointed to the DPD centers' transgressions on numerous equality directives, human rights treaties, and humanitarian norms. The Special Rapporteur on Child Protection Geoffrey Shannon (2012), for example, described the system as amounting to institutionalized poverty, whereas the Fourth Report of Ireland from the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (2013, 26) recommended a complete review of the system.

In light of these adverse social effects, in 2014 the Irish Refugee Council initiated its national End Direct Provision campaign to highlight and publicize the problem. The *Irish Times* also ran a series describing the acute conditions and wasted lives of asylum seekers as part of its "Lives in Limbo" series (O'Brien 2014). The continued long-term wait for claims to be processed as well as poor economic and social conditions also led many asylum seekers to protest in 2010 (Conlon 2013) and again in 2014 (Lentin 2015).

### Understanding the DPD system

In the face of these criticisms and protests, the question remains: Why have DPD centers continued to exist and operate for so long within an ostensibly advanced liberal democratic state? The Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform (DJELR) (now renamed Department of Justice and Equality) claimed that the DPD system was introduced for reasons of both humanitarian concern and rising costs. For the department, it was a necessary response to the rising numbers of homeless asylum seekers (especially in the last three months of 1999) presenting themselves in Dublin within the context of an acute housing crisis (FLAC 2003, 8). The RIA argued:

A total of 7,724 asylum applications were received in 1999 and a further 10,938 in the following year. Of these, most presented themselves in Dublin. The homeless service of the then Eastern Health Board could not cope and there was a serious prospect of widespread homelessness among asylum seekers. (RIA 2010, 9)

However, this account from within the state bureaucracy to some extent functions as a screen discourse, obscuring and downplaying other equally significant drivers of policy. It needs to be supplemented by a broader his-



torical and sociological analysis foregrounding the strategic role of the DPD system as a deterrent aimed at potential new arrivals as well as a means to manage, control, confine, and discipline those already within the country's borders. This combination of deterrence, penalty, and surveillance has to be understood socially and historically.

*Historical Continuities: Institutions of Confinement*

Historically, state policy in relation to immigrants (or aliens, to use the original term) was dominated by economic cost/benefit considerations—what can be called a logic of capitalism—and, to an even a greater extent, by question of social cohesion and ethno-national and religious identity on the one hand as well as security, law, and order considerations on the other—what can be referred to as a logic of state formation and reproduction. Neither the international context nor activist pressures from civil society had much impact.

Exclusionary forms of social closure emerging from economic and ethno-national/security imperatives were evident in Ireland's treatment and reception of Jews at the turn of the twentieth century, of the recipients of Programme Refugees after World War II, and of Hungarians after 1956, Chileans in the 1970s, Vietnamese in the late 1970s, and Bosnians in the 1980s (Fanning 2002; Keogh 1998; Lentin & McVeigh 2002; Loyal 2011; Ward 1996). The DPD system similarly reflects the interplay of these socioeconomic logics. Its primary threefold rationale is: (a) to keep asylum costs to a minimum in respect of meeting bare subsistence needs; (b) to segregate, render invisible, and confine ethno-racially distinct groupings away from the general citizen population whilst acting as a deterrent and reducing immigration to a minimum (Conlon 2010; Lentin 2015); and (c) to maintain a level of knowledge, through surveillance, on the whereabouts of asylum seekers as an extension of border control policy (Bosworth 2008).

These patterns of exclusion did not apply only to aliens and outsiders. Rather, they resurrect, albeit in a modified form, processes of containment and confinement that have been a significant aspect of the state's repertoire for two centuries (O'Donnell & O'Sullivan 2012). The argument proposed here is not that Direct Provision centers are the logical outgrowth of institutions of confinement: the latter operated in other countries without a DPD-like system emerging. Rather, the institutions manifest and express forms of categorical and practical exclusion that are structurally intrinsic to the internal logic of nation states: to subjugate and biopolitically regulate parts of the population (Foucault 2003).

Institutions of confinement followed a recurring operational logic with strict orders, regulations, and directions on the admission and classification of indigent individuals and paupers, including the selection of diets as well as punishments for misbehavior. Such institutions included workhouses (County Homes), psychiatric and mental hospitals, Magdalen Homes (Smith 2007), and reformatory and industrial schools that operated in Ireland from the eighteenth century up until at least the mid-1960s—the Magdalen Laundries still operating until 1996 (Smith 2007). County Homes, originally built as workhouses in the 1840s, functioned to accommodate paupers, the dispossessed, the infirm, and so-called mental defectives in the wake of the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act of 1938, which was based on the English Poor Law. The guiding principle of the 1938 Act was that “No individual capable of exertion must ever be permitted to be idle in a workhouse” (O’Connor 1995, 102). The establishment of County Homes was also centrally underpinned by deterrence as an overriding core principle—inmates should “be worse fed, worse clothed and worse lodged than the independent labourers of the district” (O’Connor 1995, 94). By combining relief with punishment, conditions and entitlements for individuals were deliberately made so harsh and punitive that only that the utterly destitute would seek to enter.

Other institutions of confinement included: mental hospitals, which were established in Ireland in the early nineteenth century and which had, by the 1930s, the highest rate of institutionalization in Europe of “the insane or mentally defective” (O’Donnell & O’Sullivan 2012, 10); Magdalen Homes or Laundries, established from the middle of the eighteenth century, in which unmarried women were “branded simultaneously a mother and a criminal” (Smith 2007, 1) and which were often used by Catholic parents to “hide the ‘shame’ visited on their families by wayward daughters” (Luddy 2008, 304); and reformatory schools, established in the 1850s and 1860s, which often functioned to punish minor acts of “delinquency” and were employed to house the young and destitute and to instill “industry, regularity, self-denial, self-reliance and self-control” (Kilcommis et al 2004, 22; see also Barnes 1989).

In a national context where prison was not the primary site of containment for errant individuals and incarceration rates remained comparatively low, such institutions functioned “as repositories for the difficult, the disturbed, the deviant and the disengaged” (O’Donnell & O’Sullivan 2012, 5), playing a surrogate role as sites of social control and as part of the “carceral archipelago” (Foucault 1977). The DPD system retains isomorphic, structural, organizational, and cultural homologies with such institutions, primarily in

terms of a deeply entrenched predisposition towards the management of populations and regulation of human conduct. The vacated roles once played by criminals, paupers, deranged minds, unmarried mothers, and parentless children are played now by asylum seekers.

Nevertheless, despite these continuities and convergences, DPD centers differ from these past forms of coercive confinement in terms of the specificity of their developmental logic. First, they are unique in the sense that asylum seekers are perceived by the state as others from the outside rather than others from the inside. Second, they are run and controlled by the state in cooperation with private businesses rather than by the Catholic Church as the “self-appointed guardians of the nation’s moral climate” (Smith 2007, 2)—though, strictly speaking, no institutions of confinement operated under the tutelage of the Church. Third, relating to the insider/outsider distinction, the DPD’s target population is not subject to what Foucault (1977) described as a “regime of transformation.” Although informed by imperatives of surveillance, examination, and control, these techniques are not directed towards behavioral change or normalization in the sense of enforcing non-idleness and preventing mendacity. Rather, the opposite is the case. Asylum seekers are forced into idleness. Perceived by the state as having crossed territorial borders under false pretenses or for so-called bogus reasons, they have an unwanted liminal presence. Such individuals breach “the identity between the human and the citizen,” which “unhinges the old trinity of state-nation-territory” (Agamben 2000, 20). From the perspective of the state, the strong but unstated implication is that these unwanted individuals will eventually be expelled from its sovereign territory. By denying them the right to work or preventing their integration into the community, the state actively hinders their ability to develop social and economic ties (Conlon 2010; Lentin & McVeigh 2006). In addition to the functions of deterrence and surveillance, DPD centers therefore operate as exclusionary forms of spatial and social closure that separate and conceal asylum seekers from mainstream society and ultimately prevent their long-term integration into Irish society.

Since the presence of asylum seekers is deemed temporary, disciplinary forms of rehabilitation are considered superfluous or inexpedient. The major purpose of the DPD is therefore not inspired by the Foucauldian idea of rehabilitating consciousness, governing the soul, or regimenting individuals (Dean 2010; Dreyfus 1987; Foucault 1977, 1980; Rose 1991); it is rather the more prosaic function of enacting symbolic and punitive deterrence, warehousing, and surveillance—via obligatory registration with

the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) and compulsory daily signing-in at DPD centers—to facilitate an efficient regime of deportation. Nevertheless, through unintended secondary effects DPD centers also operate as total institutions: “part residential community, part formal organization” (Goffman 1991, 12; Loyal 2011). Such prolonged segregation and institutionalization means they operate as “forcing houses for changing persons ... a natural experiment on what can be done to the self” (Goffman 1991, 22; Loyal 2011). The process of separation and containment serves to stigmatize group identity in such a way as to undermine the capacity of individual migrants or asylum seekers to interact easily or equally with “us ... normal” (Goffman 1963, 5). For Goffman, a core function of stigma is to facilitate social control through the internalization of group shame on the part of the subaltern group (Goffman 1963; Elias & Scotson 1965). In processing asylum seekers, DPD centers progressively strip them of any vestige of autonomy and self-determination, corroding the sense of self and self-esteem that, for Goffman, constitutes an essential dimension of the process of individualization in modern societies. In total institutions, human needs are organized so that nearly all aspects of an individual’s life take place under one roof. Taken-for-granted social and spatial divisions between sleep, work, and play are also broken down. A process that amounts to “mortification” takes place: a “trimming” or “programming” (Goffman 1991, 27) in which the individual is transformed into an object that can be worked on and regulated by the institutional logic of the center.

### *Sovereignty and Border Control*

The defining structural feature of the modern nation-state is the assumption of sovereignty over the population within its territory (Foucault 2003; Giddens 1985; Krasner 1999; Mann 1993; Soysal 1994; Tilly 1991). As Soysal (1994, 8) notes: “The principle of national sovereignty ordains that every ‘nation’ has a right to its own territorially delimited state, and that only those who belong to the nation have the right to participate as citizens of the state.” The extent to which the sovereignty of modern states has been undermined by globalization is disputed (De Genova & Peutz 2010; Hirst & Thompson 1999; Joppke 1997; Krasner 1999; Mann 1984, 1993; Sassen 1994). However, it is clear that there has been some shift in the meaning and exercise of sovereignty as a result of complex interdependencies between states, supranational institutions, and global markets and corporations (Bosworth 2008; Dicken 2007; Garland 1996; Harvey 2005). This weave of

constraint is expressed most clearly in the proliferation of treaties, protocols, and conventions regulating the behavior of states. In this light, states are certainly subject to an increasing range and intensity of diplomatic, security, reputational, and market pressures to internalize such constraints in the fabric of national law and administration. Such constraints include legal obligations to honor a commitment to human rights, constitutional liberalism, and the rule of law. Ireland signed the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1956 in order to acquire international prestige within a tense Cold War context (Ward 1996). This commitment, as well as a number of other international obligations to meet basic standards in asylum and protect human rights, often exists more in rhetoric than in practice. Nevertheless, as rights have become both universalized and more concretely specified in case law, this enshrinement of rights has had significant bearing on national belonging, citizenship, and sovereignty.

In addition to becoming a signatory to the UN Convention, in the 1960s Ireland also began to move away from an inward-looking and semi-autarkic model of economic development towards a more global open economy focused on foreign capital (Allen 2007; O'Hearne 1998). Joining the European Union in 1973 came with a commitment to movement freedom and a pan-European labor market; but this commitment had little impact until after the development of a Celtic Tiger economy heavily premised on neoliberalism in the mid-1990s (Allen 2000; Kirby 2002). The exposure to intra-EU migration became further marked from May 2004, when Ireland, along with Sweden and the United Kingdom, started to allow EU nationals to enter and find employment without a visa. The latter move was part of a second phase in the development of the Celtic Tiger—based upon a property boom rather than on the initial impetus derived from Foreign Direct Investment (Allen 2000; Allen & O'Boyle 2013)—and expression of a strategy to acquire cheap flexible European labor from largely white, Catholic, and/or English-speaking countries whose populations were considered easier to assimilate (Loyal 2003).

In the light of such political and economic changes, the introduction of the DPD system can be seen as an attempt by the state to reassert and revamp its traditional ability to monitor, control, and order migrants and their movements to regain “a monopoly over the means of movement” (Torpey 2000). This attempt to reassert sovereignty and control was also demonstrated in the Citizenship Referendum held in 2004 which, with almost 80 percent of public support, removed the automatic *jus soli* principle of citizenship (Conlon 2010; Lentin & McVeigh 2006). The relinquishing of the state's

capacity to regulate the movement of capital and to control European labor flows was counterbalanced by the simultaneous hardening of policies regarding the entry and regulation of non-EU migrants (Allen 2007). Such restrictions applied to all non-EU nationals—both to asylum seekers with reference to the 1951 Convention and to non-EU labor migrants—who were regulated through a rigid work permit system that was renewable on a yearly basis and provided minimum rights and entitlements in terms of residence (Allen 2007; Lentin & McVeigh 2006; Loyal 2003, 2011; Migrant Rights Center 2007). The adverse treatment of non-EU migrants should perhaps not be interpreted as a manifestation of the state's strength but, as Bauman (2004), Bosworth (2008), and Garland (1996) have all suggested, as demonstrating its weakness and the limitations of its sovereignty within the context of globalization. As De Genova (2010, 34) also notes:

Associated with the ascendancy of an effectively global, neo-imperial sovereignty (and a more general rescaling of various state functions and capabilities) a decidedly inverse relation may be detected between the distinctly waning fortunes and diminishing returns of nation-state sovereignty, as such, and the exuberant attention to ever more comprehensive and draconian controls that states seek to impose upon the most humble cross-border comings and goings—and settlings—of migrants.

The DPD system should then be seen as part of a wider state regime that seeks both to deter the arrival of asylum seekers and to control and regulate individuals already there: it is a form of “punitive containment as a government technique” (Wacquant 2010, 204). Deemed a surplus population whose labor was not needed, asylum seekers have been dispersed to remote, peripheral areas (often in the countryside) where they are rendered increasingly invisible to the general population and are significantly less costly to accommodate. Such a policy supplements the border control policy already in place and various immigration acts—the most recent being the International Protection Act of 2015—while providing the state with constant information on the whereabouts of asylum seekers so as to facilitate their deportation in the event of an unsuccessful asylum application. Having their application denied is the likely outcome for more than 90 percent of applicants—one of the highest rates in the European Union (Eurostat 2016; Loyal 2011; ORAC 2016).

A further important contextual factor underpinning the DPD system is the prior establishment of a similar system in the United Kingdom in 1999. The existence of the Common Travel Area between Ireland and the



United Kingdom since the 1920s—itself partly an artefact of the disputed territory of Northern Ireland—means that no border control operates between the two countries. For practical reasons, Irish migration policies have therefore often mirrored those in the United Kingdom (Fraser & Harvey 2003; Mac Éinrí 2007). A fear that asylum seekers would choose Ireland over the United Kingdom if the former offered a more generous series of social welfare payments was therefore also a crucial economic factor underpinning the Irish state's decision to introduce DPD. In 1999, the United Kingdom introduced a DPD scheme in which asylum seekers were given £35 (€44.50) per week in vouchers to be spent in designated shops. As the Minister of Justice responsible for introducing the DPD system in Ireland, John O'Donohue, noted: "If my scheme is more attractive than the British scheme, it must stand to any kind of logical reasoning that I would have a disproportionate number [of asylum seekers] coming here from Britain" (O'Donohue 2000). Consequently, the Irish state offered £15 (€19.10) per week, albeit in cash form (O'Connor 2003, 3). The disincentive provided by a lower payment was to be coupled with harsher housing and social conditions than those found in the United Kingdom.

It can therefore be argued that the punitive and prolonged treatment that asylum seekers are likely to receive in Ireland is not accidental but part of a deliberate deterrence strategy common to other state practices (Bloch & Schuster 2005; Calavita 2005; Joppke 1997; Schuster & Solomos 2004). Such degrading treatment of a transient and vulnerable group is possible because this group has been segregated and pushed "behind the scenes of general social life" (Elias 2000) into remote rural locations, rendering them invisible to the general population. Significantly, however, their condition is explicitly designed to be visible to other would-be asylum seekers, especially through social and communication networks that are increasingly important in structuring migration processes (Arango et al. 1993; Morawska 2011). Here, DPD centers function as a "spectacle" (Foucault 1977, 3–9, 32–71), a punitive display of sovereignty and unchecked power (Garland 1996, 460) providing compelling images of control and regulation that serve a clear politico-juridical function of deterrence.

### *Neoliberalism and the DPD System*

The state's policy with regard to asylum seekers has taken place within the context of a marked shift towards a neoliberal social and economic strategy. The ability of large corporations, multinational companies, and the global



financial sector to use electronic markets to move capital unhindered by the regulatory capacity of national states has been fundamental in tilting power to capital and markets (Harvey 2005; Sassen 1994, 4). From the 1970s and accelerating in subsequent decades, Ireland made the transition from an inward-looking national-autarkic economy to an outward-facing, global, free-market economy championing a neoliberal political agenda. It is now rated as one of the most (if not the most) “open” globalized economies in the world (Allen 2000; Kearney 2004).

Neoliberalism has often been used as a pejorative, catch-all label of opprobrium, aggregating all of the problems facing modern societies or referring to the withdrawal of the state from economic life and the rolling back of the Keynesian welfare state (Harvey 2005; Monbiot 2016). Here, it is used to refer to an increasingly deregulated global economy characterized by changing employment relations, a flexible labor market, and sociopolitical factors including the recomposition and retrenchment of the social and welfare state, the expansion of a proactive penal apparatus, and the championing of possessive consumerism and individual responsibility (Garland 1996; Wacquant 2010, 213). Hence, rather than a withdrawal of the state from the economy per se, neoliberalism refers to a reconfiguration of state policies, organization, and goals in both economic and social life. It generally exacerbates and reconfigures existing tendencies in modern capitalist nation-states rather than creating them ex novo; it signifies not a break with the past but a torsion of it.

Instituted under a Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrat government and supported by politicians on the right, DPD has continued under the watch of politicians from both the center-right and the center-left. The retrenchment of welfare payments for asylum seekers—deemed unaffordable costs, especially with the soaring rents engendered by a deregulated housing market in Dublin—was therefore also a major factor underpinning the introduction of DPD centers. As Abdelmalek Sayad (1999) notes, from the point of view of the state and the economy, immigration and the immigrant have no meaning and *raison d'être* unless they bring in more than they cost. The question facing policy makers is how to maximize the profits (primarily economic, but also symbolic) while minimizing the costs (economic, but also social, cultural, and national). However, what constitutes a benefit or a cost is always open to contestation (Sayad 1999).

With the spread of neoliberal ideology and practices, asylum has become like any other commodity. Commercial and capitalist interests and profits increasingly dictate its state-informed logic. As noted above, the state

chose not to fund the DPD system directly; rather, it sought to contract-in a number of private companies, believing this would cut costs and ensure greater efficiency. Such an undertaking “between the state and the private sector in the management of non-citizens” is especially evident in the running of removal centers in the United Kingdom (Bosworth 2007; 2008, 208) and parallels a similar process in the privatization of prisons in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (Genders 2013; Harding & Rynne 2016). In addition to private outsourcing, the structure and mandates of both the Office of Refugee Applications and the RIA have become characterized by a quasi-business model, providing services for so-called customers as well as measuring inputs and outputs. For example, the RIA (2010, 16) noted:

The main output of the programme is the provision of accommodation and ancillary services to asylum seekers. A key aspect of that output is the effective dispersal of asylum seekers in accordance with the dispersal policy. The primary unit of output of the programme can be described as: The use of a dispersed bednight (including food and ancillary services) of the requisite quality by an asylum seeker.

Of course, despite talk of cost-effectiveness, such private provision has not been cheap; and it is private hostel owners and commercial entities, rather than asylum seekers, who have benefited. Between 2001 and 2010, the DPD system has cost the state approximately €83 million per year to run, peaking at €91.5 million in 2008. These are, to a great extent, necessary costs for any state concerned with security and sovereignty to outlay. However, the manner in which they have been deployed through the free market is telling. Between 2005 and 2008, eight companies ran over half of the centers. The former Butlin’s holiday camp, Mosney, was the largest recipient of state funds, receiving €105 million since the system’s introduction (Mulally 2016). Another provider, Aramark, reported a turnover of €223 million in 2013 (Mulally 2016). In order to secure greater profits and under pressure from the RIA to further reduce their costs, the centers have consistently eroded the quality of service provision. For example, the RIA was pleased to announce that it had reduced costs from €38.60 per person per day in 2000 to €28.35 in 2006, even within the context of consistent yearly inflation.<sup>4</sup> Since 2011, overall expenditure has again fallen to €62.3 million per year. Critics have argued that it would be cheaper to let asylum seekers work and be given local authority housing, or at least be given social welfare payments commensurate to those given to citizens. However, in

evaluating these scenarios, the Value for Money Review—undertaken by the RIA—vehemently disagreed (RIA 2010, 6). Reflecting on the RIA's decision, the Refugee Council noted:

The possibility of removing reception facilities from private business and therefore the profit motive was not considered. Neither was the possibility of running accommodation centers with proper facilities and with appropriately qualified personnel to reduce the harm and provide a level and type of support that enables people, whatever the eventual outcome of their case, to play a part in their community and stand a better chance of becoming self-sufficient and less dependent on the State. In addition, and understandably, the financial cost to the State of the actual amount paid out to run the system was paramount in the assessment and also the easiest to quantify. What is harder to assess and indeed to quantify are the unseen costs which would include the impact on mental health, childhood development, family life and the development of inappropriate learned behaviour in children which place a burden on the State but which, to a significant extent, are risks that could be diminished, if not altogether avoided. (Irish Refugee Council 2013, 21)

What is being suggested here is not that economic criteria are the sole source for determining asylum reception policy. Rather, this note suggests that (a) a state ethno-national logic, requiring the exclusion and regulation of certain categories of individuals, is a regular and constitutive aspect of state formation, which has (b) increasingly come under the sway of economic criteria tied to cost and performance indicators.

Moreover, through the liberal/internationalist lens of human rights, the stark difference between the treatment of migrants without territorial status and that of citizens makes it rather easy to assemble the case against a callous and indifferent state apparatus. This distinction maps onto ethno-racial and religious distinctions, making the notion that the state is intrinsically racist compelling (Agamben 1998; Goldberg 2002; Lentin & McVeigh 2006; Omni & Winant 1994). Indeed, it must be recognized that all processes of nation-state formation involve coercion and violence on the one hand and insider/outsider distinctions on the other. The coercive suppression of competing (tribal, clan, religious) “we-identities” has always been a precursor to the emergence of any “imagined community” linking the nation-state and the individual (Anderson 2006; Elias 2010). Therefore, immigration can

only be grasped and interpreted through categories of state thought based on a binary division between “nationals” and “non-nationals”:

It is as though it were in the very nature of the state to discriminate . . . to make the distinction, without which there can be no national state, between the “nationals” it recognizes as such and in which it therefore recognizes itself, just as they recognize themselves in it (this double mutual recognition effect is indispensable to the existence and function of the state), and “others” with whom it deals only in “material” or instrumental terms. It deals with them only because they are present within the field of its national sovereignty and in the national territory covered by that sovereignty. (Sayad 2004, 279)

Such views of an intrinsically racial state, however, are partial: They not only provide a restricted conception of a polymorphous entity carrying out everything “from the provision of subsistence to the patronage of the arts” (Weber 1978, 58), but also tend to view the state as a free-floating entity that exists above a passive civil society rather than being shaped by social resistance and struggles (Bourdieu 2014; Gramsci 1973).

### Neoliberalism and Theories of the State

It has become commonplace in sociology to see the simple notion of the state as a single coherent actor as a problematic reification (Abrams 1988; Bourdieu 2014; Corrigan & Sayer 1985; Foucault 1980, 2003). We suggest that Bourdieu’s (2014) more nuanced theorization of the state provides a better point of departure. The state, he argues, is better conceived as a bureaucratic field of power defined by the possession of a monopoly of legitimate physical and symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1994, 3). The state certainly engages in objective processes—the production of legislation, government directives, policing, border control, and the regulation and management of populations. But this ability to regulate social life depends also in part on subjective processes—the capacity to sustain and impose categories of thought through which institutions and individuals make sense of the world. This potential to impose a “vision of divisions” is the “power of making social divisions and hence the political power par excellence” (Bourdieu 1984, 468). The state accomplishes three functions through its official institutional discourse:

First, it performs a diagnostic function, that is, an act of cognition which enforces recognition and which quite often tends to affirm what a

person or a thing is and what it is universally, for every possible person, and thus objectively. It is an almost divine discourse, which assigns to everyone an identity. In the second place, the administrative discourse, via directives, orders, prescriptions, etc., says what people have to do, given what they are. Thirdly, it says what people really have done, as in authorised accounts such as police reports. In each case, it imposes a point of view, that of the institution, especially via questionnaires, official norms. This point of view is set up as a legitimate point of view, that is, as a point of view which everyone has to recognise at least within the limits of a given society. The representative of the state is the repository of common sense. (Bourdieu 1990, 136)

The administrative categories and classifications used by the state play an important role in defining broader forms of identification and exclusion. Both dominant and marginalized groups come to define themselves and each other through such categorizations. These categorizations are used by state service providers as the basis for judgements about individual entitlements to social, political, and economic support. Bureaucratic categories that may appear neutral are also inflected by an ethno-racial logic.

In addition to seeing the state as a field of forces, Bourdieu argued that one must see the state as Janus-faced: as having both a progressive and a regressive side. If it is a mode of domination, it is also an institution offering security, protection, and social welfare. The contemporary welfare state, Bourdieu argues, is characterized by two major forms of internal struggle. First, there is a struggle between the higher and the lower state nobility—i.e., between those who impose market-centered reforms and the lower-level officials who administer the system and identify with the idea of the state as an expression of a universal interest or common purpose (“we the people”). Second, there is a tension between the right hand and the left hand of the state: the punitive elements that enforce the new market discipline and those that aim to defend the state’s social functions. To that effect, the (progressive) agents in the left hand of the state “are the trace within the state of the social struggles of the past” (Bourdieu 1998, 2).

The state then is a fractured, contested field of forces. High-spending government departments are frequently pulling in opposite directions from the treasury or competing ministries. With regard to the DPD, the two core state departments responsible for immigration—formerly the DJELR (now the Department of Justice & Equality) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment (DETE) (now Department of Jobs, Enterprise &

Innovation)—both fall within what Bourdieu would call the right hand of the state. They can be contrasted with the Department of Social Welfare and Family Affairs (DSFCA) (now the Department of Social Protection), which is based on and retains a social welfare needs ethos. The conflict between the state departments was evident in the initial implementation of the DPD system:

The introduction of Direct Provision was the cause of considerable interdepartmental conflict. Records from the period show that much pressure had to be placed on other departments by the DJELR before the necessary personnel were seconded to the newly established directorate with responsibility for enforcing the dual policies of Direct Provision and Dispersal. Relations between the DELR and the then DSFCA were also strained. In January 2000, a senior DJELR official accused the DSFCA of undermining DJELR policy. More than 550 CWOs [Community Welfare Officers-SL] threatened to boycott Direct Provision, claiming that it was blatantly discriminatory and effectively confined recipients to the small provincial towns to which they had been consigned. They saw the role which they had been assigned as a policing and not a welfare one. (FLAC 2003, 36)

However, when it comes to immigration policy, the Department of Social Protection remains on the sidelines. The Department of Justice has overall responsibility for national immigration policy and security and has retained a deeply embedded, insular, and skeptical worldview in relation to outsiders. Meanwhile the Department of Jobs, Enterprise, and Innovation—responsible for regulating and supplying an adequate workforce by issuing work permits, work visas/authorizations, and green cards—has increasingly shaped the state's immigration policy, especially during the boom years when the country experienced acute labor shortages (Allen 2007; Loyal 2011). Contemporary immigration policy has therefore emerged at the interface between two quite different worldviews and institutional habits of mind, although both located on the right hand of the state: neoliberal economic maximization and labor commodification combined with punitive anti-foreigner sentiment, ethno-racial and cultural preference, and concerns about national security. And it is at the intersection of these worldviews that asylum seekers feel the effects of state power.

By foregrounding how states have the power to stratify precisely by claiming to speak on behalf of a collectivity [Anderson's (2006) "imagined community"] as well as by showing the contested space within the state,



Bourdieu lays the ground for a more nuanced and realistic account of state power and practices (Loyal 2016). However, his account is also problematic. Three of the most significant problems are: (a) He sometimes writes with a top-down approach that ignores the formative influence of social struggles from below; (b) his account overstates the power of the state to control and regulate populations through the imposition of a state doxa, which implies that all significant social categories originate with the state rather than internationally defined legal classificatory schemes; and (c) it does not adequately foreground the role of political economy in terms of labor and exploitation, especially the condition faced by non-EU work permit holders (Migrant Rights Centre 2007). Nevertheless, Bourdieu does highlight the ideational or symbolic aspects of the state, the importance of social classifications as regulatory devices, and the contested nature of the state as a field of forces—all of which are quite clearly at play in the development of the DPD.

### Conclusion

The state exclusionary processes directed at asylum seekers in Ireland may be understood more broadly in terms of a tension between four irreducible discursive and practical logics: (a) a logic of capital; (b) a logic of ethnic/national identity, state formation, and state legitimation, which is reflected in the overarching concern to maintain sovereignty and control over the population through classificatory and law-making activities—functions that Bourdieu refers to as the monopoly over symbolic violence; (c) a constitutional logic relating to enshrined liberal commitments and the rule of law; and (d) the logic of civil society—i.e., the social struggles of immigrants, NGOs, and groups supporting and challenging immigration. Given limitations of space, this article has largely focused on the first two logics, mentioning the latter only in passing. Our analysis also points to the fact that, with respect to immigration, the state operates “with many hands”—i.e., it is involved simultaneously with contradictory logics and activities (Morgan & Orloff 2014). We will now conclude by referring to the fourth logic shaping immigration processes—that of civil society. This is a helpful corrective, balancing any suggestion of state activity as a one-way process of determination operating upon an otherwise powerless group of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers, unlike labor migrants, do not have the capacity to withdraw their labor. They lack the power or access to voice their concerns and needs or to react to negative media and political representations.



Nevertheless, despite living what Agamben (1998) calls a “bare life,” many recently protested against their abject social conditions. First in 2010, but more forcefully in September 2014, there have been dramatic displays of resistance. Nearly a decade and a half after its inception, a flurry of spontaneous protests concerning living conditions and application processing delays took place in Athlone, Foynes, Portlaois, Kinsale Road, and Ashbourne House in Cork; Atlantic House Hotel in Tramore; and Birchwood House in Waterford (Conlon 2013; Lentin 2015). It was within the context of these confrontations that the government agreed to set up a new working group to review the DPD system and that the Minister for Equality, New Communities, and Culture Aodhan O’Riordain, a member of the Labour Party, admitted that the DPD system was “not humane” (McMahon 2014). The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Public Service Oversight and Petitions also acknowledged that the DPD system was “not fit for purpose” (MacLochlainn 2015, v). A subsequent report called for large-scale changes in the system, including doubling the payments made to asylum seekers. But other than doubling the payments to asylum-seeking children, few proposals have been enacted. Given the dominant power of the Department of Justice and the implicit functions that the DPD system performs for the state, significant reform is unlikely in the near future unless further protests emerge. Recently leaked documents reveal that the Department of Justice continues to argue in favor of keeping conditions at a minimal level to prevent generating a “pull factor” or making Ireland appear as a “soft touch” (O’Brien 2014).

## NOTES

1. The Aliens Act, which drew heavily on the British Aliens Restriction Act, itself drafted on the eve of World War I, governed entry into and residence within the state. The Act concentrated into the hands of the Minister of Justice enormous and substantial unchecked powers concerning the regulation of movement of aliens within the state and their deportation.

2. The Refugee Act sets out core aspects of the law concerning the processing of asylum applications in light of the state’s obligations under the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees. This established the Office of the Refugees Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and an appeal tribunal, later named the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

3. The Schengen Area has abolished internal border controls between members so as to effectively function as a single country for international travel purposes with a shared visa system. This means that Schengen area countries formally have a common system for dealing with asylum seekers. The Dublin Convention determines which member state deals with

an application for asylum and aims to prevent multiple applications in different countries by deeming the first EU country where the asylum seeker has entered as responsible for processing his or her application.

4. Letter to T.D. Jim O'Keefe from RIA, October 25, 2005.

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