Living and dying with the state: The Netherlands according to Egyptians in Amsterdam

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The State, Institutions, and Street-Level Bureaucrats

The state – writ large – enters people's lives through concrete institutions, and the people who represent those institutions. As a result of my offer to help, I worked with people who were deeply embroiled in those institutions and the street-level bureaucrats, or professionals who are in a position to shape policies as they implement them. These included the deportation agency and deportation officers, various social workers, child protection officers, school care-coordinators, and teachers, to name just a few of the street level bureaucrats who have already figured in this dissertation.

Across institutional settings, street-level bureaucrats would say they were there to help. The people whom I accompanied wanted to, and often actually did, believe street-level bureaucrats. Yet, many of the people I knew also experienced street-level bureaucrats as the gatekeepers to desirable services and knew that these institutional actors could push 'solutions' that they themselves saw as the problem, such as deportations, or placing a child in foster care.

In between their desire to believe street-level bureaucrats and the perceived need to convince the latter to provide access to desirable services and desist from unwanted interventions, the

people with whom I worked tried to develop close ties to street-level bureaucrats while also keeping their strategic distance. For their part, the street-level bureaucrats on the other side of the table were also cultivating close ties, for example by asking people about personal affairs that were not of any relevance to the situation at hand. In some cases, this led to close or even friend- or kin-like relationships. Still, that did not prevent disagreements.

When the people whom I accompanied dared to express their doubts about the help on offer, these same street-level bureaucrats would say that they understood where their clients were coming from, before emphasizing that they were convinced that the course of action they proposed was in everyone's best interest. Usually, this prompted the people whom I accompanied to say that they would reconsider. This did not stop them from wondering whether the course of action proposed to them was in their best interest, or in that of the street-level bureaucrat or the institution they represented.

In this chapter, I describe these dynamics in much more ethnographic detail, to show how national agendas get refractured through specific institutions, specific street-level bureaucrats, and specific state-subjects. To do so, I return to some of the people who figured earlier in this dissertation, namely Mahmoud, who left his house after his wife threatened to call the police on him (Chapter Three), Saïed, who was detained for deportation when I met him (Chapter One), and Amira, the divorced mother of three whose fourteen year old son attracted a myriad of youth welfare professionals (Chapters Three and Four). I begin by locating these negotiations at the intersection of the ideal of impersonal authority, and concrete institutions and professionals who embody a politics that is deeply personal.

5.1 Impersonal authority

In his posthumous magnum opus *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Max Weber (1922) promises that bureaucracy brings about impersonal authority – or the situation in which public offices are ruled by law – while warning us that it will become like a *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, or a 'shell as hard as steel[1]', that diminishes individual freedom and eats away at the sense of community, and as such may well be experienced as a polar night of icy darkness.

[1] The most well-known translation of *stahlhartes Gehäuse* is Talcott Parsons' phrase 'iron cage'. Here, I use Baehr's (2002) translation, which, as he explains, better reflects Weber's much more complex understanding of bureaucracy, amongst others because unlike the element iron, steel is human-made, and whereas a cage suggests confinement, a shell suggests the emerging of a new human being.

After *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* was translated as *Economy and Society* (1978) and gained prominence, Michael Lipsky (1980) famously showed that so-called street-level bureaucrats are not only ruled by laws and regulations, but also make rules and regulations, through the specific ways in which they implement them. In the meantime, Marxist, feminist, and later critical race theorists developed more fundamental critiques of Max Weber's take (Golman and van Houten, 1977; Ferguson, 1984; Byron and Roscingo, 2019). Their critical work makes it clear that laws and regulations reflect and reproduce power, so that impersonal authority is not rational or fair, but just that, authority. In practice, instead of acting on these more fundamental critiques, policy makers have adopted Michael Lipsky's view and put the onus for irrational and unfair outcomes on inflexible and biased street-level bureaucrats. The solution to this problem has been to continue to "professionalize" street-level bureaucrats (Hall, 1968), and to subject them to more, and more elaborate audits, giving rise to what Marilyn Strathern (2000) has called 'audit cultures'.

In the meantime, street-level bureaucrats have also been tasked with bending the shell as hard as steel, or, more concretely, with customizing generic, one-size fits all provisions to fit local and personal needs (Rose, 1996; Vollebergh, de Koning, and Marchesi, 2021). In the Netherlands, welfare workers are now supposed to maintain close relationships with their target groups in order to offer tailor-made solutions, which is expected to not only produce a more human centered government, but also reduce costs (Duyvendak and Tonkens, 2018; cf. Tonkens and van Kampen, 2018). Meanwhile, so-called participation officers are supposed to activate people who are apparently not yet participating, or not in the right ways (see Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2008, for more on the social construction of participation).

The work that street-level bureaucrats are thus called upon to carry out may undermine the ideal of standardization and impersonal authority. My colleagues Anick Vollebergh, Anouk de Koning, and Milena Marchesi (2021: 750) show how street-level bureaucrats' affective labor indeed engendered confusion about the proper limits to intimacy in the professional contexts as well as rumors about favoritism and unfair treatment. However, as Fenna Smits (2022) demonstrates, in the Netherlands, street-level bureaucrats' affective labor actually evokes intimacy as a standardizing mechanism, while Milena Marchesi (2022) shows that, in Italy, volunteers' affective labor does not dissolve the distinction between the public and private, but rather promises to make the public more intimate, and to bring public values into the private sphere.

Mirroring the emphasis on the work that street-level bureaucrats do, in recent years, anthropologists have drawn attention to the work that citizens do when they engage street-level bureaucrats, as well as the immaterial goods that they produce in the process. In her ethnography

of a government hospital in Papua New Guinea, Alice Street (2012) shows how citizens engage in their own translational work as they try to fit themselves in policy categories in order to be seen by the state. Insa Koch (2019) highlights the affective labor that residents of a council estate in the UK carry out in order to influence the way in which street-level bureaucrats do their work to suggest that, in doing so, they "personalize" the state. Tatjana Thelen and colleagues (2014) interpret the relationship between elderly Serbians and their care-workers as kin-like in order to show the intertwining of kinship and the state (see also Johanssen and Grøn, 2022).

In this chapter, I generally follow their approaches and analyses, but emphasize that making things personal does not negate the impersonal, but rather produces it, by implication. That is, while street-level bureaucrats made personal the state, or at least the specific institution they were working for, and while the people whom I accompanied personified the immigrant, or at least a specific version of the immigrant, their interactions and relations also contribute to the production of the state and the immigrant as impersonal abstractions. To show this, I turn to the three distinct types of encounters between the people with whom I worked and street-level bureaucrats that I observed: encounters animated by attempts to become eligible for 'good' services; encounters animated by attempts to keep away 'bad' services; and encounters that took place after people enrolled in particular services. As I describe these interactions, I emphasize both the intimate relations that emerged and the way boundaries between public and private were enacted, negotiated and contested.

5.2 Accessing services: Mahmoud

In the Netherlands, and across the bureaucratized world, street-level bureaucrats check eligibilities. In some cases, this does not involve any human contact. For example, you may apply for benefits only, and since the tax office already knows your income, you merely have to confirm your identity. In other cases, it does involve human contact. In these latter cases, eligibility checks range from strictly defined check-lists to unpredictable negotiations involving various actors. In the following two sections, I discuss what these different kinds of checks may involve in terms of affective labor. In the next section, I discuss the case of Amira, who tried to make her son eligible for psycho-social care, and once he was signed up, to speed up the waiting list. In this section, I discuss Mahmoud's application for a so-called urgency statement [*urgentieverklaring*] for social housing.

On a sunny Tuesday morning in June 2017, at 11 am, a few weeks after he had been compelled to leave his marital home, Mahmoud was called forward for his "urgency statement advice

interview" [*urgentieverklaring adviesgesprek*]. This was a big moment for Mahmoud. If this interview went well, he would actually get to apply for an urgency statement, which would grant him priority on the waiting list for social housing and would cut his waiting time from up to fifteen years to just several months. He hoped that, after securing housing, child protection services would reinstate his visitation rights. In order to appear pitiful, Mahmoud had clearly dressed down, and as we walked towards the cubicle, I wondered if he had also skipped a night of sleep for the occasion.

The interview was set in a small, closed-off cubicle, and conducted by a woman in her mid-twenties who introduced herself as an intake officer. She began by walking us through the procedure. She explained that she would first ask some questions. Based on Mahmoud's answers, she would advise him whether to apply or not. In the end, it would be Mahmoud's decision, she asserted, but her advice would be part of his application. So what if your advice is negative, Mahmoud asked. Well, in that case I would not advise you to apply, but it's up to you, the officer said. The application fee would be €50 and would not be reimbursed in case of a negative decision, she said, as if to emphasize how much she would advise against it.

Then the interview started. "Where did you live in the last six months?", the intake officer asked. This was a crucial question, because only formal residents of the city are eligible. Mahmoud lived in Amsterdam for nearly twenty years, but after his divorce he briefly registered outside of Amsterdam, and he had only recently re-registered in the city. In an attempt to stay truthful, Mahmoud avoided a direct answer, and instead began to tell the intake officer about his attempts to return to Amsterdam. His approach seemed to work, as the intake officer swiftly moved on to the second crucial question: why did Mahmoud need an urgency statement? Mahmoud was short and to the point: "I need a home to be a father to my children again", he said. "Sir, I need to warn you that the non-resident parent is not eligible for an urgency statement based on the children's needs. Are there any other reasons you need housing urgently, like a medical condition", the intake officer said, in a way that made it seem like she used this phrase often. "Yes, yes, there is!", Mahmoud said, sounding both confused and relieved. He explained that, as a result of a car accident, he suffered from severe pains in his shoulder, back, and legs, and struggled to climb stairs. He had doctor statements to prove his condition, he said. Convinced, the intake officer congratulated Mahmoud, and advised him to apply for a statement based on his medical conditions. "But I cannot guarantee you that they will grant you urgency", she added, as a disclaimer. At 11.10, Mahmoud and I left the cubicle.

Outside, I tentatively inquired about the car accident. As far as I knew, the accident had indeed injured him, but I did not know he was struggling to climb the stairs. "Well, *wat niet*

is kan nog komen", he said in Dutch, conveying that, perhaps, this was still to come, if not in everyday life, than perhaps at least on paper. "Now let me go and find €50", he said, as he walked away. A few weeks later, he told me that his family doctor had refused to provide a statement confirming the condition of his legs, and so he felt like there was no point in applying.

These interviews put interviewers in the position of helping aspiring applicants like Mahmoud by pushing them in the right direction or being lenient, as this particular interviewer did, or to frustrate their attempts. I saw both happen, but the urgency advice interviewers I saw at work were usually quite forthcoming. As such, these interviews seem to undermine the goal of reducing costs, and more generally, the goal of impersonal authority. However, while interviewers may have genuinely wanted help, in this particular case, their leniency was quite inconsequential, as it did not actually make people eligible for an urgency statement, merely to apply for one. Moreover, the interview itself already discouraged aspiring applicants, so interviewers did not necessarily need further discouraging on top of that. A social worker based at a women's shelter once told me she had been instructed to be lenient in order to deflect people's anger, and to let better trained/more senior professionals do the work of saying no. I do not know if that was the case with urgency advice interviewers, but it seems plausible that at least part of their job was to carry out the work of suspicion, while producing a nice atmosphere.

If these interviews put interviewers on the spot of helping or frustrating applicants, then applicants felt it mattered who interviewed them, and how they conducted themselves. This prompted Mahmoud to dress down and to provide the 'right answers', which he knew, but for which he had to stretch the truth a little. He got away with it, not necessarily because he was convincing, but probably because the interviewer wanted to preserve peace, although it could also be that his tactic of trying to come across as especially deserving had actually worked. Mahmoud at least appeared to feel good about himself as we left the interview, even as he was still angry at Hollanda for leaving him out on the street like that.

I do not know how the interviewer felt after the interview. I suspect that, on the one hand, the interview made her feel good, because she had been able to help someone and/or because she had been able to defuse someone who was desperate enough to start a scene. However, I also imagine that conducting interview after interview like that must make interviewers suspicious of applicants, precisely because it puts interviewees in the position of trying to prove their eligibility. In this case, Mahmoud was vague about being registered in Amsterdam, and overemphasized the pain in his legs, and the interviewer must have been aware of that. If that happens time and again, it may be hard to approach each new interviewee open-minded.

In sum, then, eligibility criteria make it such that applicants need to prove their eligibility,

while interviewees get to tell applicants that, if it were up to them, they would grant a particular service. This created interactions that were, at least discursively, marked by understanding, and in the moment, applicants not only felt like they were making a genuine human connection, but also like they had met someone who had truly tried to help. However, as they walked away, they still distrusted Hollanda. Meanwhile, I suspect that eligibility checking street-level bureaucrats walked away suspecting applicants of bending the truth.

In these instances, then, street-level bureaucrats were able to distinguish themselves from the institutions they represent, while the institutions they represent come to overlap with the municipality, or even the state in general.

5.3 Accessing services: Amira

As I described in Chapter Four, a few hours before I first met her, Amira wrote an e-mail to let her son Ahmed's school care-coordinator know that she would consent to the so-called exploratory program (*uitzoektraject*). The care-coordinator had been pushing for this intervention for a while, but Amira had tried to resist in favor of getting Ahmed enrolled in psycho-social care, which she hoped would discipline him. She had discussed this with Mounir, the Parent-and-Child Advisor assigned to their case, who was responsible for identifying Amira's and Ahmed's care needs, link them to relevant care providers, and coordinate between different care providers involved. However, Mounir had insisted that there was no point in forcing Ahmed into psycho-social care if he did not want to enroll, and instead had signed Ahmed up for kick-boxing. In the meantime, Ahmed had continued to get suspended, until Amira realized she did not have much of a choice but to consent to the exploratory program. To her dismay, when she did consent, she found out that, actually, there was a six to eight week waiting list for the exploratory program. In the meantime, Ahmed was supposed to go to the school that he felt had pushed him out, which Amira rightfully predicted he would not.

In the weeks of waiting that followed, Amira continued her efforts to get Ahmed into psycho-social care. Her efforts centered on Ahmed, as well as Mounir, who proved to be hard to track down. The few times that he did pick up the phone, he told her to be patient, even after Amira admitted that Ahmed was not going to school and only attended kickboxing once, which she had hitherto kept to herself out of fear of getting fined by the school attendance officer or having to pay back the kickboxing fees.

Then, on an ordinary afternoon, Ahmed hit his five year old brother in the face with his fist after he had accidentally pushed the shut-down button on the PlayStation in the middle of a

game. Ahmed otherwise adored his brother, and the fact that he was able to do this shocked him, so much so that he agreed to see their family doctor the next day, to talk about his angry outbursts and the possibility of enrolling in psycho-social care. The next day, I met Amira in front of the doctor's office, but Ahmed was nowhere to be seen. When I asked her where Ahmed was, Amira shrugged and said that he had changed his mind and was probably playing PlayStation at home. A few minutes later, in the relative privacy offered by speaking in Arabic in the Netherlands, Amira confessed that, sometimes, she wished child protection services would come and take Ahmed away, for the sake of her two other sons. What kind of mother feels this, she asked. Then, as the doctor called us in, she asked me not to mention what had happened, to avoid child protection services from interfering. As expected, their doctor said that she could not refer Ahmed to psycho-social care without seeing him, and instead offered to enroll Amira. Wouldn't it be nice to talk to someone about everything that was going on. Amira gracefully declined, saying that she did not have time for all that, and after five minutes, we were outside again.

A few weeks later, Ahmed was finally invited for his intake at the exploratory program, which by then came as a relief to Amira, who was hopeful that some structure would do Ahmed well. Unfortunately, things did not go as planned. In his first week, Ahmed got suspended twice, once for skipping his afternoon class and once for refusing to work in class. After another week like that, Mirjam, the program's care coordinator called for an emergency meeting with everyone involved, including Ahmed, Amira, her ex-husband Salah, who was visiting the Netherlands from Egypt, Mounir, Ahmed's mentor, the program director, and, finally, me.

The next day, we squeezed into the school's meeting room. After we all found a spot to sit or stand, Mirjam announced that it was against the program's principle to suspend students, but that Ahmed had left them no choice, as he was preventing the other students from working. She then announced that, in the weeks to come, Ahmed would be on a modified schedule, according to which he would study from home, and come to school half an hour after school was out to discuss his work with his teacher for forty-five minutes. This way, they could establish a relationship of trust, after which Ahmed could return to school. Anticipating Amira's objections, Mirjam said that, given how Ahmed had behaved in class, this was really all that they could offer, adding that, if this did not work, they would have to consider School2Care, which if unsuccessful would lead to De Koppeling, a closed youth facility.

In the meantime, Mirjam wanted to explore why Ahmed was struggling in class so much. Ahmed cleared his throat, and said that, after everything that had happened, he just could not shake the feeling that he would be treated unfairly again, and that he was anyway struggling to

accept authority. As he talked, Mirjam and the other professionals nodded. As he finished, they congratulated him, and Mirjam said that understanding the underlying problem was the first step towards a solution, and then introduced the idea of looking for a training of some sort that could help Ahmed to work on said underlying problems. Amira lit up, and taking the floor for the first time that afternoon, said that this was what she had wanted all along, but that Mounir had so far refused to refer him. Mounir objected, but while trying to explain why he had not referred Ahmed before, also said that maybe the time had come for something like that. In turn, Salah suggested sending Amira to a parenting course to prevent Ahmed's younger brothers from going down the same path, but Amira told him he had no idea what he was talking about, and even Ahmed told him to stay out of it (*bemoei je er niet mee*). The care coordinator backed Amira up as well, saying that Amira had been very cooperative so far, and that if it had not been for her, Ahmed would be struggling a lot more, before concluding that she would call different care providers to check if they had an opening. You are a smart boy, you can still make it, so take this opportunity while you can, she said, addressing Ahmed once again. Yes ma'am, Ahmed said dutifully, before we all got up to leave.

The next day, Mirjam phoned me, saying that she had called Amira to update her, but wanted to update me too in order to make sure that the message had come across. She had called around, but the waiting lists were incredibly long, so she had signed up Ahmed for all the good services that she knew. She listed the names, and recommended me to check in with each organization, to see if an unexpected spot would open up. In the weeks that followed, Amira asked me to do so every few days, but it took us a few months to find a spot.

In Amsterdam, and the Netherlands more generally, children who are referred to specialized schools or welfare and healthcare services invariably enter waiting lists, with waiting times often amounting to several months. Actually, waiting lists have become so ubiquitous that some organizations now employ waiting list managers (*wachtlijstbemiddelaar*), and in the year or so that I worked with Amira, Ahmed was always on one or another waiting list. Amira, and others like her, firmly believed that keeping up pressure could open up spots or at least shorten the waiting list, and some of the street-level bureaucrats they encountered confirmed this belief, as Mirjam did. So, Amira, and other parents with whom I worked asked me to keep on calling the organizations they were on the waiting lists for and their parent and child advisors, who they felt were supposed to support them in their efforts as well. They could have called on their own, but they hoped that someone with my way of speaking would have a greater impact.

Depending on the situation, the Parent and Child Advisors whom I called explained that they were still waiting to see how a previous intervention was working out before they would

scale up, or that they could not make the waiting lists disappear either. The people working for organizations with a waiting list emphasized that they could not speed up the process either. However, when a spot did open up, they often presented the opening as a unique opportunity, saying that people were lucky to get a spot so soon. On the one hand, parents took this to confirm that keeping up pressure had helped, and I often felt it had too. On the other hand, parents suspected that maybe the waiting list had been less long than the people on the other end of the phone had said, and although I do not know whether it was intentional or not, I also observed that presenting the opening as a unique opportunity prevented hesitation and induced gratefulness. Indeed, when Ahmed was finally enrolled in psycho-social care, Amira, who was usually adamant about researching the particular organizations her son was sent to, was just relieved and immediately accepted it. The ability to take action also fueled the distinction between good and bad professionals. Amira saw Mounir as a bad professional because he ignored her phone calls and refused to scale up earlier, but saw Mirjam as a good professional, because she was straightforward and took quick action, and in doing so, ignored that Mounir was not in the position to take quick action, whereas Mirjam was.

Here, the state became personal in that sense that it seemed to parents that it mattered highly who represented the state, not only in terms of the atmosphere, but more concretely, in terms of material outcomes. However, it remained impersonal, in that sense that street level bureaucrats had to weigh the interest of the individuals they were meant to help against their own interests, the interests of their institutions, and perhaps even the public interests. Or, in other words, while someone like Mirjam was positioned to set herself apart from the institution, and the state at large, that she represented, Mounir was less so, despite his employer's assumption that he would be closer to Amira and Ahmed.

In the above two sections, I focused on encounters that were marked by the scarcity of desirable resources. In the next section, I show what happened in the opposite situation, that is, with an abundance of resources that are undesirable, or worse, scary.

5.4 Avoiding services: Saïed

The people I worked with distinguished between good and bad services, and subsequently tried to keep away bad services, while attracting good services. In the next two sections, I explore the affective labor that street-level bureaucrats carried out to compel people to use services they did not want. I suggest that, across vastly different settings, street-level bureaucrats used remarkably similar strategies and language: they told people to think about their future, sold their solution

as in the best interest of everyone, and, when challenged, demanded empathy. In turn, the people I worked with were left to stand their ground or get 'convinced'. Here, I describe the dynamics that ensued in two vastly different institutional settings: the Dutch Repatriation and Departure Services (DT&V) and parent and child institutions.

Saïed arrived at Schiphol in the early summer of 2016, applied for asylum, was rejected, and subsequently moved to an immigration detention center, from where the DT&V was supposed to deport him. According to Dutch law, illegalized immigrants may be detained for deportation as long as the DT&V actively attempts to deport them, but for a maximum of eighteen months. In this case, it took the DT&V fourteen months to conclude that Saïed was undeportable, after which he was finally released (see Chapter One).

After his release, Saïed did everything he could to get his story out there. He said he hoped to cause a public outrage, or at the very least, clear himself of any suspicion. In a context in which attention for immigrant detention and deportation is scarce, he was quite successful, too. He most notably worked together with B. Carrot, who turned Saïed's story into the graphic novel *Alle Dagen Ui*[2] or Days of Onion, a title inspired by the Egyptian expression *youm asal, youm basal*, which translates as 'one day honey, one day onion', or good days and bad days, and signals perseverance. The release of *Alle Dagen Ui* prompted a series of interviews, including by journalists working for major newspapers like *NRC*[3], *De Volkskrant*[4], and *Trouw*[5], as well as Amsterdam-based newspaper *Het Parool*[6]. Since then, he has appeared on several podcast episodes, including an episode of *De Verbranders*, a podcast on the colonial origins and contemporary working of Europe's borders that my colleague and friend Neske Baerwaldt and I produce and host[7].

Saïed tends to share the same anecdotes, often using the exact same phrases and even sentences. In Chapter Three, I described that the divorced men and women I worked with did so too, and drew on the work of Kaveri Qureshi (2018) and others (e.g. Hopper, 1993; Simpson,

[2]https://issuu.com/soulfoodcomics/docs/alle_dagen_ui_-_preview

[3]https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2020/04/22/niet-weten-waarom-je-vastzit-is-het-allerergste-a3997519

[4]https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/een-jaar-gevangen-op-schiphol-in-rake-tekeningen b5c5c26b/

[5]https://www.trouw.nl/cultuur-media/vluchteling-saied-al-karim-verbleef-een-jaar-in-een-detentiecentrum-op-schiphol-ik-leefde-continu-in-angst~b65a145f/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

[6]https://www.parool.nl/ps/graphic-novel-over-egyptische-vluchteling-ik-weet-niet-waarom-ik-werd-opgesloten~b92fdf85/

[7]https://soundcloud.com/de-verbranders/ep-6-inside-immigration-detention-with-saied-al-karim-english

1998) to suggest that telling the same story over and over again is part and parcel of the process through which people establish new relations with themselves, others, and the world they live in. I believe this was true for Saïed as well, who in telling the story in the way he did, established himself as someone who fights unjust systems, as opposed to the other detainees, who he presented as less able to do so, and as opposed to the guards and DT&V officers, whom he presented as playing games in order to break detainees' spirits and protect the system. I will later discuss Saïed's rendition of the affective labor that guards carried out. In this section, I provide Saïed's rendition of the affective labor of DT&V officers, as well as his account of how he responded to them. Here is how he talked about it on the recording that Neske Baerwaldt and I did for *De Verbranders*:

> Very polite people come and sit in front of you. They start talking to you: 'We want to help you, we want to help you and your future, you have no future here, you will not get asylum. You cannot stay here, you cannot stay here at all, you will always be in prison, go back." And when you tell them your story they say, yeah, we understand, but you have to go back. "I would be killed if I go back." "Yea I understand, I believe you, but you have to go back." "Sir, I will be in prison for life or they will torture me." "Yeah yeah I know, but also here you do not have any future, you have nothing here. Do you like it here? Do you like to be in detention? Bad food, bad things, you cannot see your family, you cannot see your children. Go back, we will book a ticket and you have to go back." And you keep saying "no." "Ok, we will force you, you will go back with guards. They will take you in the airplane, and you will go back." And then the conversation ends and they come after two or three weeks, and they repeat the same thing.

> I will never forget this guy from the DT&V. He sat with me every time, and he would say, "Sir, I know, you know, I am from Morocco, I know what happened in Egypt, I know it's very bad, and I know you are also one of the wanted people, but it's not in my hands. If it were in my hands I would release you." And I believed this guy. After that, I found out that the DT&V was the organization that kept me inside. If they write, we cannot deport this guy, release him, they will do it. But he comes and sits in front of me, and looks me in my eyes and says I know and I believe you. And I trusted him and I told him everything. He was acting. I don't know, I feel bad about it.

In keeping with the contemporary ideological emphasis on people's autonomy, the DT&V are directed to aim for so-called "voluntary", rather than "forced returns" (Cleton and Chauvin, 2020). However, in practice, the DT&V only targets illegalized people or people who did not return voluntarily. In fact, as Lieke Wissink (2020; 2021) suggests, the work of the DT&V may be best described as making illegalized people deportable, and part of that work is compelling illegalized people like Saïed to volunteer to leave. To make their case, the DT&V officers working on Saïed's case emphasized that he did not have a future in the Netherlands, and that they were there to help him work out his return to Egypt. This in turn put Saïed in the position to plea for compassion. The DT&V case workers would show compassion by saying that they understood, and even claim that it if it were up to them, they would release Saïed, which as Saïed found out, was a lie, because it was up to them to release Saïed, which would have made his life a lot better. They would then repeat that there was no future for him in the Netherlands, in order to suggest that the only way to get out of the detention center and back to his family was to accept their 'service' to deport him, lest they had to use force. Saïed knew that this threat of force was empty as long as the Egyptian embassy did not issue a so-called laissez-passer, a temporary travel document, but he stayed in detention long enough to know that people are deported by force.

Saïed's rendition of his conversations with DT&V case workers matches that of anthropologist Barak Kalir (2019b) who suggests that case-workers showed compassion and underplayed their discretionary power in order to resolve any ethical tensions they may have felt due to the nature of their work and to reach their target of 'voluntary returns'. Saïed recognized that DT&V officers were playing with people's feelings and emotions to reach their targets, but did not perceive them as ethically tormented:

> They don't care about anything, only "go back". It's like you are talking to a robot who does not have feelings, who does not understand anything, his target or his goal only that, "go back."

Saïed said their strategies often worked too, if only to distinguish himself from those people who fell for them: "Those tricks work with a lot of people. People give up and go back, people give up and go to the embassy and they got the laissez passer." Saïed did not give up. Instead, he withdrew, refusing to dignify their tricks with any emotions. Here is how he described his last meeting with the DT&V, on the day of his release.

> The day that I was released, the DT&V came in the morning and I know, OK, they are going to say stupid things. I go to that office with that stolid face, my face, like no feeling, like ok, what you want to say. Then they start talking. "You

> have been here for a really long time and 'eid is coming. You didn't see your family and you didn't call, but we come with good news." I said: "Ok, what good news." "Yeah, you will be released!" "Ok," I say, "Ok, well, ok." Then the guy says, "Oh, you are not happy?" I said "What happy, what do you want? What happy, why did you keep me for fourteen months, what happy? You want me to be happy? Don't say this word."

Saïed said he stood his ground because that was just who he is. I do not want to undermine his sense of self, but in my reading, there were at least two additional reasons. First and perhaps foremost, he knew that the DT&V case workers could not forcefully deport him unless the Egyptian embassy would issue a laisser-passez, which the Egyptian embassy would not do so unless he would present himself, and that he could refuse to do so, which he accordingly did. Secondly, Saïed actually feared for his life, and knew that, per law, the DT&V would have to release him once they reached the inevitable conclusion that they could not deport him, so although he was miserable, he readily chose a few more months in a Dutch prison over torture and forced disappearance in Egypt.

In addition to the emotional labor that DT&V workers carried out to resolve the ethical tensions they experienced, they also carried out affective labor to induce a 'voluntary return' state of mind in illegalized immigrants. To do so, they professed compassion, and said that they were there to help, while also foreclosing the option of a future in the Netherlands, and threatening to forcefully provide the 'service' of deportation, for their own sake. This left Saïed and others who were on the receiving end of these efforts with the option of giving in or standing their ground. They knew that if they gave in, they would implicitly admit to having falsely applied for asylum, yet if they did not give in, they would be to blame for their own misery, as the DT&V case worker had done what they could to help them work on their future. Saïed decided to stand his ground, because he did not feel like he had any other choice. Others also tried, but were forcefully returned, in some cases to countries where they were not citizens, but which were willing to issue a laisser-passez anyway.

The DT&V case-workers showed compassion, and in turn sought empathy for their dire position. Saïed did not buy it. Instead, he experienced case-workers' emotional labor as robot-like, that is, as part and parcel of their playbook of trying to make people cooperate with their own deportation. To Saïed, these robots were the institution, and the institution was the state. This is not to say that he did not feel that some case workers were nicer than others, but rather, that he did not seem to think that this mattered much for the actual outcome of the situation. In the context of the immigration detention center, the overlap between street-level bureaucrat,

institution, and state writ large may be clear to see. In the next section, I return to the story of Amira and her son Ahmed in order to explore how these dynamics played out in a much less hostile setting.

5.5 Avoiding services: Amira

On the morning after Amira let Ahmed's school's care coordinator know that she would consent to the exploratory program, I joined Amira for a meeting at school to discuss the incident that had led to Ahmed's latest suspension. As we entered the building, Amira was warmly greeted by a woman in her mid-thirties, who immediately said how happy she was that Amira had finally consented to the exploratory trajectory. Then, acting as if she only just then saw me, asked me who I was. When I told her, she returned her attention to Amira to congratulate her on participating in my research, before introducing herself to me as Petra, Ahmed's mentor. In the meantime, Ahmed had joined us without saying a word.

Upstairs, Petra took us to a small office, where two more women in their mid-thirties were already sitting. As we entered, they quickly got up to greet Amira and Ahmed, and then me. As we all sat down, they introduced themselves as Elze, the school's care coordinator, who Amira and Ahmed already knew, and Mirjam, the care coordinator of the exploratory program that Ahmed was going to join. I too introduced myself and handed out information sheets on my research.

After that quick round of introductions, Ahmed's mentor again said how happy they were that Amira had consented to the exploratory program and explained that they had invited the program's care coordinator to not waste any time. "Yeah, yeah, it's for the better", Amira said, quietly, in Dutch, while Ahmed looked at his lap. "We also think so", the care coordinator of the exploratory program said cheerfully, and we all smiled. Taking the cue, Ahmed's mentor proposed to not go over the latest incident but instead talk about the program a little bit more, giving the floor to Mirjam.

Mirjam first addressed Amira. "I understand you were worried", she said, "it's never a good sign if a child needs to go to a program like ours. It means they are not doing well, but it also means that he will be getting the help he needs", she continued, turning her gaze to Ahmed, who was still looking at his lap. "I have not had a chance to look at your file, because you and your mother have to agree to that first, but I hear it's not easy for you here", she said, looking intently at Ahmed, who continued to look at his lap. "You should see this program as an eight-week time-out, during which we will work together on a fresh new start", she continued, apparently

unfazed by Ahmed's lack of response. "Then, in the end, we will see whether it is better for you to stay at our school, in a small class, to return here or to go to another regular school. How does that sound to you?" Looking up now, Ahmed said that it sounded good. The care coordinator said she was glad to hear that, before announcing that, unfortunately, there was still a waiting list for the program, but that hopefully a spot would open soon. Amira nodded. Taking over again, Ahmed's mentor asked Amira and Ahmed to sign a paper to approve the sharing of Ahmed's file, which they both did. She announced that, until a spot opened up, Ahmed was of course still welcome at school, and told Amira not to hesitate to reach out in case she had any further questions. She thanked everyone for joining the meeting, signaling that the meeting had ended.

All in all, the meeting took less than twenty minutes, and I had only managed to translate some of the crucial parts, like the part about the program being eight weeks, the waiting list, and the consent, so on our way back, I asked Amira what she made of it all, and if there was anything she wanted me to clarify. Amira sighed. I do not need to understand everything they say to understand what's going on, she said. They pretend that this is an opportunity, but it is not. This is not a good place and I do not want him to go there, but what can I do, she asked rhetorically, for she clearly did not feel she had a choice.

The encounters between the parents with whom I worked and the actors involved in their children's lives were marked by a discursive emphasis on the child's best interest (see also the case of Ibrahim and his son Karim discussed in Chapter Four). The parents with whom I worked said they wanted what was best for their children, and the teachers and other professionals they encountered said they worked with and for children and their parents. In general terms, the people with whom I worked and the professionals they encountered agreed on what was in the child's best interest. They both saw education as the main way to a meaningful career, and thus a good future, and they both felt that good behavior and school results signified that children were on the right path, while poor behavior and bad school results signified the opposite. That said, if children did not appear to follow that road, parents and professionals rarely agreed on the best way to get children back on track. Parents generally wanted their children's teachers to spend more time with the children, but teachers and the welfare and healthcare professionals involved through schools generally wanted to test children. Parents were unsure about these tests. On the one hand, they wanted to believe professionals who said that testing would help their children. On the other, they feared that the outcome of these tests could stigmatize their children forever, as stupid, or misbehaving.

On paper, consent procedures enabled parents to refuse tests or other measures that they considered harmful. However, as already described in Chapter Four, in practice, refusing to

consent was a difficult step to take. First of all, as street-level bureaucrats presented tests and other solutions in the language of the child's best interest, refusing to consent would brand parents as undermining professional expertise and as refusing what was best for their child. Second, and perhaps most importantly, more often than not, school care coordinators and other welfare workers only offered one solution, so that refusing to consent was akin to foregoing any help. Despite all of this, parents often did refuse to consent, hoping to negotiate a course of action that they saw as more beneficial, or if that proved to be impossible, for the poor behavior or school results to improve. This did annoy street-level bureaucrats, who felt stuck with a problem that they were not able to solve without parents' consent, and so they kept on pressuring parents by appealing to what they called the child's best interests. In my experience, by the time parents consented, they felt defeated, as Amira did, which is to say that they were not quite convinced that the course of action offered to them was a good way forward, but rather, that they had not been able to forge a better one.

Still, invested as they were in their children's futures, the parents I worked with wanted to believe that a course of action was better than no course of action. Amira was no exception. After more than a month of waiting, in April, Mirjam finally confirmed that a spot would open up a week later. In the week that followed, Amira bought Ahmed a new backpack and other school supplies to mark the new start. On the day of the intake, we all met in front of the school: Ahmed and Amira, Ahmed's father Salah, their parent and child advisor Mounir, and I. Inside, Mirjam warmly welcomed us, and then took us on a tour through the school, emphasizing at each stop how well suited the school was for students like Ahmed. At the end of the tour, we stopped for a quick chat with the program director, who warmly welcomed us all, repeating that the program was designed as a time out during which students could work towards a fresh new start. We then sat down with Ahmed's new teacher and mentor, who emphasized how much experience they had working with students like Ahmed, and said that they were looking forward to work with Ahmed, prompting Mirjam to say that as a care coordinator, she was also looking forward to work more closely with Amira and Salah. They all looked expectantly at Ahmed, who rose to the occasion to explain that he had not been going to his school because he had felt like everyone there was already against him, and assured everyone that he was eager to get started again, earning him compliments from the people at the program, as well as Mounir, who announced that Ahmed was a smart boy who could achieve anything he wanted if he put his mind to it. Amira said that she hoped that things would become better soon and Salah said that he was going to spend a lot of time with Ahmed to ensure they would. Afterwards, I couldn't help but feel a little optimistic too.

In their attempt to convince Amira to accept a service that she did not want, the school's care coordinator resorted to very similar strategies as the DT&V case workers targeting Saïed, and as virtually all the street-level bureaucrats who had to pull people in. In my reading, there are three overlapping characteristics of these strategies. First, by targeting people for their services, street-level bureaucrats enacted some people as 'public problems', such as illegalized residents and undisciplined teenage boys in the cases above. In a way, as they applied for services, the people I worked with also enacted themselves as public problems, and they often did so in overlapping ways. Saïed was trying to resolve his illegalization by appealing the negative decision on his request for asylum. Amira was trying to resolve Ahmed's lack of school-like behavior by pushing Mounir to enroll Ahmed into psycho-social care in order to discipline him. That said, the people I worked with who were not yet convinced of the services on offer felt that the street-level bureaucrats who sold these services did not agree with their diagnosis of the problem. In fact, in these instances, the people I worked with often felt that the service on offer would make the problem worse, or was the problem, as was the case for Saïed, who considered deportation a bigger problem than illegalized stay, and for Amira, who considered a school for children with special needs a bigger problem than poor behavior.

Second, as a result of the above, in these instances, street-level bureaucrats sought to convince their clients of their interpretation of the situation. They did so by establishing the possible courses of action, and subsequently presenting one course of action as in everyone's best interest. In the case of Saïed, the DT&V case workers established that Saïed was going to be deported, and then said that it was in his best interest to cooperate and avoid a forced deportation. In the case of Amira and Ahmed, the school's care coordinator established that they could not maintain Ahmed, and then said that it was best for Ahmed to join the exploratory program rather than stay at home, which given the waiting list turned out to be rather similar options. Saïed and Amira both refused to accept the conditions presented to them by these street-level bureaucrats. Saïed maintained that he was not going to be deported, as he knew that they could not actually forcibly deport him without violating the law. Amira maintained that Ahmed could stay at his school if he received proper psycho-social care. Moreover, both Saïed and Amira ridiculed the idea that the courses of action that were offered to them were in their best interest, pointing out that instead, they were in 'their' best interest, by which they referred both to the individual street-level bureaucrats, the institutions they worked for, and the state writ large. Saïed openly resisted the DT&V workers, but he could do so because he knew that, in the end, they could not forcibly deport him. Amira was more circumspect, but still annoyed the street-level bureaucrats she was dealing with, in part because she caused delay, and in part

because she implicitly challenged their sense of self as professional who knew and wanted what was best for the children they worked with.

Third, if challenged, street-level bureaucrats underplayed their discretionary space, and instead presented their proposed course of action as in everyone's best interest, again and again, while also seeking ways to force people into consenting against their will (which indeed undermined the basic idea of consent). The people I worked with were easily convinced that street-level bureaucrats' hands were tied. Nevertheless, this did not make them believe that the proposed course of action was a good way to go, and so they continued to resist, until street-level bureaucrats found the right stick to force them into the service they were offering. If they did consent, the people I worked with made it seem as if they had accepted the measure, and in a way they had, for even if they still did not consider the proposed course of action as good, given the circumstances in which they were put, they accepted it as the least bad option.

So far, I explored the affective labor involved in negotiating access to state services and preventing unwanted interventions. I showed that, state, institutions, and street-level bureaucrats came to overlap, or appeared to be separate from one another. In the next section, I move on to explore the affective labor involved after enrollment. I continue to do so through the stories of Saïed and Amira, in order to further showcase the blurred boundaries.

5.6 Managing managers: Saïed

Street-level bureaucrats may be charged with managing clients and monitoring their progress. In the case of Saïed, DT&V officers were in charge of monitoring whether he was still making progress, and of proving that he was still deportable, while the guards and ultimately the director of the detention center were in charge of managing his conduct. In turn, Saïed sought to manage the conduct of the guards. In this section, I look closely at how they both did this.

In the early weeks of his detention, Saïed had to see a doctor outside the detention center, and to his dismay, they handcuffed him for the entire time. Afterwards, he went to complain to the people at *Vluchtelingenwerk*, the independent council for refugees, who had an office in the detention center. They told him that the guards were not allowed to handcuff him unless they could prove that he was a flight risk, which he was not. After consulting the immigration detention hotline, he filed a complaint, which was upheld by an internal disputes committee, and eventually settled with 25,- euros for the violation, which the director personally came to hand over. After that, Saïed acquired a copy of the house-rules, and began to hold the guards and the director accountable. He most notably found out that detainees had a right to enter

the courtyard during daylight hours, not just the hour that they were getting, so he demanded the guards to open the door whenever he or someone else wanted to go outside, making a point out of staying out as long as he wanted.

Saïed also made a point out of expanding the possibilities of his life in prison. Growing literally sick of the food, he took the seeds from a tomato and planted them in the courtyard. One of the hateful guards got angry, and told Saïed to stop what he was doing. Saïed, however, appropriated the DT&V discourse, and told her that he was not in prison, that was free to do what he wanted, and subsequently filed a complaint. The director agreed with him, and provided seeds for a garden, which he made that hateful guard give to Saïed.

According to Saïd, before he came, the guards were used to getting their way. He said that this was the first time they were challenged like that, and they did not always know how to respond to it. Some guards respected him for it, but others hated him. He said he could see it on their faces and hear it from the way they talked to each other about him. Going along, Saïed showed hostility to the bad cops, while only telling the good cops what he wanted the director to know, and not about the complaints that he was filing, which he said always came as an unpleasant surprise.

Then, the guards retaliated. Saïed had been calling the guards all morning for painkillers, but they had refused to provide them. Then, suddenly, a huge guard who Saïed had never seen before and who he later found out was part of a special security team came to his cell. He aggressively asked Saïed what his problem was. Saïed said he needed his medicine, but the man pushed him inside his cell, and against the ground. At that moment, another detainee and two regular guards passed by on their way to court. Saïed called out for help, and then the regular guards came. Saïed told them what happened, and shortly after, the director came to hear him out. The director told Saïed that he was making some serious allegations, and that they would check the CCTV, but that they would put him in isolation if it turned out he was lying. An hour later, he was transferred to 24 hours of isolation, according to Saïed because the cameras did not reach into his room, which the guard knew, and which the director also knew. Saïed continued to emphasize that there was a witness, and continued to make his case even after his release.

After that, the director began to treat him differently. One time, he offered Saïed to use his computer to talk to his family. Saïed refused, in part because he did not want special treatment, but also because he feared that it would be a one-time thing, and that, if so, it would only make things harder for his wife and children, whom he tried to protect from what was going on. Later, the director complimented Saïd for the work he was doing, and said that, maybe, if he would

get out and get his papers, he could come and work at the detention center. On his last day in detention, the director came to him once more, Saïed said.

> "He came like, "Oh, you are leaving, congratulations, I am very happy for you. But, those complaints, can you withdraw them?" I said "No, I will not take them back." And when I was released, I signed a paper for Stichting LOS to observe my case."

Detention centers are inherently violent. They deny certain people the right to liberty in the name of the public interest. However, detainees still have rights. They also have duties. The guards are charged with ensuring that detainees' rights are protected and that they fulfill their duties, that is, comply with the rules and regulations. According to Saïed, the guards in the detention center did not care about the detainees, but about their own peace of mind, at the expense of detainees' rights. To protect their peace of mind, the guards allegedly played a classic game of good cop bad cop, in which some guards tried to force and other guards trying to seduce detainees into obedience. The tricks they used induced a wealth of emotions, but not necessarily an obedient state of mind. Quite the opposite, Saïed decided to play them on their own terms, seeking to force them into obeying the rules through complaint procedures, while luring them into obedience through nice initiatives, and friendly talk. In a way, then, Saïed actually did obey rules and regulations, but only the written rules and regulations, not the unwritten ones. This must have induced a wealth of emotions, but it did not quite induce obedience, as indicated by the violent incident with the guard and especially the final incident with the director. In a mirror of Saïed's by-the-book obedience, the guards and the director thus only followed the unwritten rules, or the 'normal' way in which things were done.

Street-level bureaucrats across different settings resorted to using incentives and punishments (carrots and sticks) to push and pull their clients into behaving in a certain way. This put their clients in the position of responding to the sticks and carrots, because it would make them look good, and perhaps give them some leverage vis-à-vis the street-level bureaucrats who enacted the unwritten rules, or some space to resist them, as Saïed did. In the next section, I will return to the case of Amira, to show that, for mothers like her, the effort to create a space for exception involved managing complex relationships with the actors involved in their children's lives. I pick up the story at the moment when Mirjam attempts to enroll Ahmed into psycho-social care.

5.7 Managing managers: Amira

One afternoon in April, Mirjam unexpectedly called me around 2 pm. She explained that she had gone ahead and was signing Ahmed up for psycho-social counseling, but as part of the registration, his mother had to complete a rather long questionnaire about the situation at home. She had called Amira to suggest completing the questions together, but they had struggled to understand each other. She had then called Mounir but he had not picked up his phone, and she did not want to waste too much time, so she had called me to see if I was available, which I was. In fact, I was already on my way to Amira's because she had found a large quantity of pills in Ahmed's stuff, which she believed were drugs, and wanted to talk to me about what to do.

Half an hour later, Mirjam arrived with cookies and flowers, to brighten things up a bit, she said. Amira thanked her extensively for the cookies and the flowers, but also for moving so quickly. "Oh, I am just doing my job," Mirjam said as she was taking off her shoes. Standing in her socks, she began to admire Amira's place. Amira blushed and ushered Mirjam over to the couch where I was already sitting. Mirjam sat down, pulled her legs underneath herself, and accepted the cup of tea that Amira offered with two hands. She tentatively pulled out the questionnaire, which looked rather hefty, but said that, before anything else, she just wanted to check in with Amira, to see how she was doing in these difficult times.

Amira was not doing well. The night before, she had once again found drugs among Ahmed's stuff, convincing her that he would end up in a closed youth facility. I had suggested calling Mounir to get a better sense of her options, but Amira had said that she did not want to stir anything up yet. So, I was surprised when Amira said that, actually, she was not doing well, and that the worries about Ahmed were slowly killing her (her words, which I translated for Mirjam). She began to cry, uttering apologies, but Mirjam came over to her side of the couch, and held Amira tightly. Amira leaned in, and cried for a good few minutes. Afterwards, she thanked Mirjam, said she had not been held like that in a long while. Mirjam said that she could always call if she needed to cry, and then suggested to leave the questionnaire for another time and to go on a walk instead. By then, I was not translating anymore, and sensing the mood in the room, I suggested that I could come back the next day to fill in the questionnaire with Amira, and left.

The next day, I went over to fill in the questionnaire, which took us about two hours. In the meantime, we were talking about the drugs that Amira had found. She had suspected that he was dealing in drugs for a while, and now that she knew for sure, she was very seriously considering sending Ahmed to Egypt. In fact, she had already asked his father if he could take him, and he was already looking into tickets. I asked her what they would tell Ahmed, and she

said they would tell him he was going on a holiday, because otherwise he would refuse to go. I was not surprised. I knew that this happened, and given the way things were going, I too felt a sense of urgency. I said something along those lines, and to my surprise, Amira said that Mirjam had said the same during their walk. Apparently, Amira had felt comfortable enough to confide in her. I asked Amira what had made her decide to tell Mirjam. She said she did not know, but that she felt like Mirjam understood the situation better than she herself did, and would not be afraid to act, which I interpreted as a rebuke of Mounir.

In her position as the care coordinator of the exploratory program, Mirjam was meant to make sure that, after the program ended, they would know what the best pathway for Ahmed would be. She knew that in order to do so, she had to cooperate closely with Amira, who would have to give her consent for the more specialized tests, and, perhaps even more importantly, had to make sure that Ahmed would show up. So, when she showed up with flowers and cookies, and took Amira on a walk to talk about how she was doing, she was probably indeed doing her job, as she said she was. In contrast to her more threatening announcement of the day before, when she said that Ahmed would be on that customized schedule, and could end up in a closed youth facility, this was the part of her job where she got to play the good cop. I do not know whether Amira would share this analysis, but, even if she did, she would probably say that for her, both the sticks and carrots were important. Indeed, although she did not always like what Mirjam had to say, she liked her clarity, and she hoped that it duly impressed Ahmed. So, as far as street-level bureaucrats went, Mirjam presented a good one, if not the best.

Mounir, on the other hand, represented a bad professional, if not the worst. "There is no point with this man", Amira often said. For her, it did not help that he was Moroccan. For starters, she did not quite understand his Moroccan Arabic, and the few times that we all met, I actually translated between his Dutch and her Egyptian Arabic. More importantly, however, she felt that as an Arab man, he judged her for divorcing her husband, a feeling that was fueled by the fact that Mounir made a point to involve Ahmed's father Salah in all decisions, even though Salah was in Egypt and not involved in Ahmed's everyday upbringing. Later, I talked to Mounir about these dynamics, and he told me that his manager often asked him to take on Arab families, because she felt that he as a Moroccan man could achieve more. He usually agreed, not because he agreed with her reasoning, but because he did not always want to waste his time and energy on challenging his manager.

To be fair, Mirjam was much better positioned to be seen as a good professional than Mounir, who was put in a very difficult position by his superiors, and moreover, was already suspect to Amira because he was a Moroccan man. Mirjam had fewer 'clients', and moreover, appeared

to have the energy to enthusiastically carry out her work, whereas Mounir was dealing with an unruly teenage boy himself, as well as the untimely passing of his brother, reflecting his class and racialized position in the Netherlands. Still, no matter how 'good' she was, Mirjam could not prevent Ahmed from sliding down a slippery slope any more than Mounir could, and actually very explicitly put the interests of her institution over Ahmed's interests by not allowing him to attend regular classes. Amira saw all of this, and I do not think she felt that Mirjam made a real difference for Ahmed. Still, Mirjam clearly made a difference for her, and I think it was because Mirjam made her feel that she was not alone, and that Ahmed's troubles were ultimately public, in that sense that the state, through people like Mirjam, had a duty to care. Indeed, even if she would end up referring Ahmed to School2Care, thus turning Ahmed into their problem, she did not leave Amira to fight for herself as Mounir and actually Ahmed's previous school had. Or, to put it in the terms of this chapter, Mirjam turned the problems that others privatized into public problems again, which made Amira feel like she was not on her own.

5.8 Conclusion: The state multiple

In this chapter, I explored the affective strategies and tactics of the people with whom I worked and the street-level bureaucrats they encountered to explore how the Dutch state writ large is refractured through specific institutions and street-level bureaucrats, becoming a state multiple. To do so, I zoomed in on three different situations.

First, I discussed eligibility checks, which put street-level bureaucrats into the position of gatekeeper, and prompt aspiring applicants to do everything they can to make themselves eligible. In their effort to do so, the people with whom I worked tried to fit themselves into the relevant categories. I had the sense that this did not necessarily resolve street-level bureaucrats' doubts, but rather induced suspicion, even if in the moment itself, street-level bureaucrats appeared receptive to applicants' pleas, in what I read as an effort to defuse tensions.

Second, I scrutinized those scenarios in which street-level bureaucrats seek to offer services to people who do not appear to be interested, such as the situation in which the DT&V officers seek to offer the service of deportation, or the situation in which school care coordinators seek to offer the services of additional behavioral or cognitive tests. I showed that, in an effort to compel people to use such services, street-level bureaucrats repeat again and again that they are working in their clients' best interest. In order to do so, they establish a base to make the option that they offered appear as the best one available. So, DT&V officers said they would deport their clients no matter what, in order to make cooperation seem like the more attractive choice, while school

care coordinators established that they could not maintain a child at their school, so that quick cooperation would be the parents' best option. This rarely convinced the people with whom I worked, who instead suspected that the street-level bureaucrats they encountered prioritized their own or their institutions' interest. Still, in an attempt to maintain good relations with the street-level bureaucrats involved in their lives, in most situations, the people I worked with tried to make it seem like they were cooperating without actually doing so, which they hoped would buy them time to solve the issue at hand in other ways. This stalling did annoy street-level bureaucrats, who tried to enforce cooperation through more aggressive moves, like suspending a child for days or even weeks.

Third, I delved into the post-enrollment phase, during which the people I worked with and the street-level bureaucrats they encountered sought to manage each other's behavior. I showed that they did so by seeking empathy while also drawing their boundaries between their private selves and institutional personae as a particular kind of professional or a particular kind of immigrant respectively. In the process, they often developed complex relationships that at first glance appeared to blur the boundary between public and private, but upon closer look, actually re-negotiated that boundary.

Taken together, I showed that, rather than blurring boundaries, the affective mirror dance between the people whom I accompanied and the street-level bureaucrats they encountered were rooted in, and in turn reproduced distinctions between citizens, street-level bureaucrats, institution, and state. The people with whom I worked drew on these distinctions to hold street-level bureaucrats to account, or compel them to use their discretionary space, while the street-level bureaucrats on the other side of the table drew on these distinctions to present themselves as good professionals, which, depending on the situation, could mean professionals who stick to the rules, or professionals who are willing to bend them.