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Refugees, political bounding and the pandemic: material effects and experiences of categorisations amongst refugees in Scotland

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ABSTRACT

Scholars are increasingly interested in and concerned with both the way various migrant populations are categorised, and the lived impacts of that categorisation. In this article, we examine how categorisation was experienced by people at various stages of the refugee journey during the biggest public health crisis for generations. We argue, using original interview data, that the way refugees are categorised, or politically bound, has material impacts on the way they experience their lives, and that this was evident in extremis during the Covid-19 lockdown in Scotland. As populations attempted to traverse public health messaging, this is shown to interact with longstanding state proclivities to control, marginalise and stratify. Consequently, how people experienced and managed the request to 'stay home and save lives' varied markedly by where they were in their refugee journey and how they arrived in the UK.

Introduction

Readers of this journal will be only too aware of the 'hostile environment' policy underpinning immigration policy and practice at the UK level, practices that extend with the passing of each Act of Parliament (see Yuval Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2018; Cassidy 2019). At the time of writing, the UK Home Office's consultation on its New Plan for Immigration 2021) detailed the ways in which the system would be 'modernised' to reflect the needs of Britain and 'protect those with genuine need of asylum' and 'remove those with no right to be here'. The Nationality and Borders Bill (July 2021) ominously allows for 'differential treatment of refugees', and therefore their rights to asylum depending on their mode of arrival. In doing so it both codifies existing practice and folds in further layers of political bounding, defined by Crawley and Skleparis as 'the process by which categories are constructed, the purpose they serve and their consequences, in order to denaturalise their use as a mechanism to distinguish, divide and discriminate' (2018, 1). Meanwhile, governments, nations and communities across the globe continue

to address the social, economic and health impacts of COVID, with research confirming concerns that inequalities in society were not only reproduced, but magnified (Armstrong et al. 2020; Marmot et al. 2021).

Prior to the pandemic, the UK incrementally restricted the rights of migrants (MIPEX 2020) and as it has unfolded, migrants and minorities here and across the globe have been disproportionately impacted (Hayward, Deal, and Cheng 2021; IOM 2021). As international borders closed and movement within states was restricted in an effort to contain the virus, those fleeing persecution and seeking asylum were rendered immobile (Burns et al. 2021; Meer et al. 2021). In the UK and elsewhere, people were detained in camps, hostels and hotels, placing refugees and people seeking asylum at greater vulnerability of virus transmission due to lack of sanitation and access to water and 'squalid' living conditions (Taylor 2021; Heller 2021; Finlay, Hopkins, and Benwell 2021). This contributed to the backlog on asylum case processing being at an all-time high (Refugee Council 2021). As we seek to illustrate, the experience of people in the asylum process and refugees is not uniform and reflects the categorisation of those seeking refuge and the resulting stratification of rights (Mallet-Garcia and Delvino 2020; Finlay, Hopkins, and Benwell 2021).

This article arose from a seminar hosted by the Scottish Refugee Council in 2021 around the impact of COVID on refugees and people seeking asylum in Scotland. The research teams, based at the University of Glasgow (GU) and Queen Margaret University (QMU) respectively, were struck by both the similarities and differences in the experiences of research participants in two separate projects, both funded by the Chief Scientist Office of the Scottish Government, conducted over the course of 2020 where immigration status appeared to be a key differentiating factor (see Armstrong et al. 2020; Strang and Sagan 2020; Vidal et al. 2021). The studies differed in terms of focus, scope and voices captured, and this article is not a comparison of them, but rather of the experience of three populations that the projects engaged with. We describe these three populations as (1) people seeking asylum of their own volition and who are dispersed across the UK, (2) dispersal pathway refugees, people whose asylum claim has been accepted and who then have refugee status and (3) resettlement pathway refugees who have been transferred from the country in which they have sought protection to another state that has agreed to admit them. Where someone finds themself in the asylum process, shapes their experiences of life before and during lockdown and is a central feature of political bounding in that it has both distinct but also overlapping material effects. In this paper, we begin with an overview of the two-tier system of refugee support in the UK and how those constructed as 'good' and 'bad' migrants experience their rights. We take our lead from Crawley and Skleparis (2018) in simultaneously critiquing the boundaries drawn by such categories and illustrating the material effects of such categories in the biggest public health crisis in living memory. We seek here to contribute to debates about how categories are experienced and given material force. We then provide an overview of the projects, briefly detailing research aims and objectives, scope and approaches taken. Presenting our participants' accounts of their experiences of living through lockdown, we then illustrate the very real material effects of categorical fetishism on their access and navigation of information, material, economic and social resources, with a focus on housing and home. In the conclusion, we reflect upon the implications of our participants testimonies around the practices of political bounding both on the individual's

ability to comply with national directives to 'stay safe, stay home and protect lives' and broader questions around the integration or settlement experiences of people in the asylum process and refugees within Scottish society.

The two-tier system of refugee support

Britain has had a long history of labelling migrants and minority populations along a continuum of 'good' to 'bad', and historically this has tended to oscillate along lines of race and class. Put bluntly, the whiter and the wealthier, the more likely the person or group would be placed on the 'good' side. Refugee populations have never been seen as good or wanted, but at best tolerated in small numbers. Britain for most of the history of the 1951 Refugee Convention has attempted to admit only small numbers of refugees, and usually those who have had their claim to protection already recognised. The corollary of that has been the ongoing attempts to deter and prevent the more spontaneous arrivals of other people seeking refuge. However, the operationalisation of this good-bad continuum is also evident *within* refugee populations, where good, or at least tolerated, refugees are contrasted with the bad, the 'bogus', the 'illegal', the 'clandestine'. As Apostolova (2015) points out, there is an artificial demarcation between political and economic migrants whereby, for example, fleeing hunger that may be a result of misrule is viewed as economic, while fleeing the oppressions that results from misrule can be political. The 1951 Refugee Convention sets this within a policy framework that signatory states then apply to their own jurisdiction as they see fit, where they can then also apply their own supplementary good and bad labels. Thus, these various levels of continuums operate to marginalise, prevent and deter, producing a politics of bounding. More recently this demarcation has been implemented in numerous ways by successive UK Governments producing a tiered system of refugee support. The practices of categorisation are omnipresent but are particularly visceral at times of 'crisis', a term itself that is bound up with the power of framing it as such ('t Hart 1993 see also Vigh 2008 on the chronicity of crises). Nevertheless, migrant categorisation has in many ways adopted the frame of race relations established in the 1960s, whereby internal and external dimensions are linked, indeed where one presupposes the other, where 'good race relations' are predicated on low numbers (Solomos 1989), a focus that continues to the present. 'We' can only deal fairly with migrants here if 'we' prevent largescale arrivals. This demarcation is evident across migrant groups but is perhaps most evident with refugee movement, due at least in part to such movements potentially clashing with key state imperatives of control.

There is continuity in state behaviour. The approach to Kosovo by the Labour Government in the late 1990s saw good and bad categories based almost entirely on mode of arrival. After being shamed into accepting resettled Kosovans, the modest support they received can be contrasted with those who arrived and claimed asylum, who were treated as criminals (Bright and Veash 1999). Accompanying this, and complimentary to it, have been successive ways in which those in the latter category are both prevented from being able to arrive in the UK and treated worse if they do manage to traverse the complex bureaucratic and physical barriers to claim asylum in the UK, for example, refusals to consider cases for those who arrive from certain countries or without specific documents (see Mulvey 2010). Indeed, successive governments lauded their participation

in small and tightly controlled resettlement programmes, while treating 'spontaneous arrivals' with suspicion. In 2005 the Gateway Protection Programme resettlement scheme was introduced and in 2007, a total of 77 Congolese refugees, many from refugee camps in Zambia, were resettled in Motherwell. At the same time, hundreds of Congolese seeking asylum were forcibly dispersed to Glasgow, just 17 miles away with very different experiences of 'settlement' (Piacentini 2018). Not only that, Home Office deportations of Congolese nationals who had claimed asylum continued during Gateway. A similar process was evident with Syrian refugees in 2015. The UK government's perspective was, like that of Kosovo and the DRC, that they sought to keep people in neighbouring countries rather than relocate them here. After public pressure in 2015, the government agreed to resettle 20,000, initially Syrians, between 2015 and 2020. However, again, dispersal pathway Syrians had very different experiences to resettlement pathway refugees (Karyotis, Mulvey, and Skleparis 2021). The current Afghan context is but another re-affirmation of the approach, whereby the UK seeks to allow only very small numbers of refugees, instrumentally selected, to enter the country, where they will now be provided with permanent status, while simultaneously indicating that Afghans crossing the channel will not be treated generously, and continuing with deportations back to Afghanistan.

Linked to the findings in this article, the provision, though far from perfect, available to resettled refugees allows time and space for settlement and multi-agency supports that are not available to those recognised as refugees after going through the rigours of the asylum process, based not on need but solely on the mode of access. This two-tier system of refugee support emanating from state categorisation processes has severe ramifications for those who arrive in the UK and apply for asylum, but there is evidence that there is territorial variance alongside experiences of a two-tier system (see for example Mulvey and Skleparis forthcoming). The retainer model of British devolution means that entry to the UK and the legal-political rights that people have once here is reserved to the UK Government. However, Holyrood has jurisdiction over almost all social policy and so has the power to impact on a large part of the experience of settlement. Thus while there is not yet the evidence to compare refugee experiences of the pandemic by location, it might be surmised that the less hostile approach in Scotland would impact on experiences of the pandemic, as it did experiences before the pandemic.

Categorisation and political bounding

There is a longstanding interest in framing that has often been tied in political science literature to issue definition (Rein et al. 1991). The process by which something is seen as being a policy issue, as well as the way it is subsequently defined, can set the framework into which policy debates then fit. It also sets the parameters in which those subject to framing experience their lives. Thus, immigrants are defined and organised into groups by state structures, whether or not they could 'objectively' be seen to fit into such groups. According to Geddes (1930) much of the distinction made in policy between good and bad migrants, relates to perceptions of the implications they may have on national resources, particularly the welfare state. We would add the key issue of controllability to this, that spontaneous arrivals concern the state due to being beyond immediate bureaucratic control. Paradoxically, despite the much publicised

'new' focus on mode of arrival in the Nationality and Borders Bill 2021, the UK Home Secretary already treats refugees differently depending on their mode of arrival. Nonetheless, as far as immigration policy is concerned, the labelling of asylum as a security or numerical issue creates political space that allows a range of prescriptive measures to be implemented *against* those categorised as unwanted (Moncrieffe 2007; Karyotis, Mulvey, and Skleparis 2021).

The bureaucratic process underpinning political bounding is presented as a simple and benign one, as people are effectively shoehorned into specific categories to allow state authorities to sift populations according to the rights that they 'deserve' (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). Moreover, the attempt to present this process as apolitical is, for Zetter (2007), Crawley and Skleparis (2018), and Karyotis, Mulvey, and Skleparis (2021) purely presentational: a migrant's individual story is converted into a state ascribed 'bureaucratic category' (Crawley and Skleparis 2018) that allows for 'differential inclusion' (Crawley and Skleparis 2018, see also Bigo 2002). In a sense, categories of refugee and migrant are seen by the state to simply exist, and consequently deservingness of support is not related in any way to need, for reasons of flight or for vulnerability, but only about how refugees and people seeking asylum arrived in the UK.

Methodology

The focus of interest for this article is the material effects of such categorisation processes in the biggest public health crisis in living memory. The UoG study – Scotland in Lockdown (2020) – was a 6-month rapid research project focused on the impact of Covid-19 restrictions ('lockdown') for four groups already experiencing exclusion, isolation and marginalisation: people having a disability or long-term health condition; people involved in criminal justice; refugees and people seeking asylum who were at risk of destitution and people surviving domestic abuse or sexual violence. Using multiple methods, the study sought to find out what their experiences, access to services and information were like and how they were affected by Covid-19 suppression in Scotland (Armstrong et al. 2020). The data we draw from here comes from 26 interviews (with an even gender division) with people over 18, living in Glasgow at different stages of the asylum process or with refugee status. None were settled through the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme. The Scotland in Lockdown Study (GU) also interviewed 4 third sector representatives. Participants from different nationalities were recruited in collaboration with project partners (Safe In Scotland, Maryhill Integration Network, Empower Women for Change and Govan Community Project). All interviews were conducted online (via video calls and telephone) towards the end of the first national lockdown and were completed in November 2020 during easing of restrictions. Interviews were recorded, and audio transcribed. Of these approximately half were conducted with an interpreter, and transcribed interviews were translated into English. Working closely with project partners gave us a deep understanding and knowledge of the obstacles to participation and we devised together ways to overcome these, including accessibility, language inclusivity, digital exclusion and representation, as well as the care required for conducting research with people at the sharp end of immigration processes, and many of these issues are discussed elsewhere (see Piacentini, Mirza, and Gilmour 2022)

The QMU study - Impacts of Covid-19 restrictions on Scotland's Refugees (2020) - was designed to identify the extent and quality of refugees' social networks during Covid-19 restrictions and to explore the relationship between sudden-onset isolation, loneliness, mental health and well-being (Vidal et al. 2020). Data from this study comes from 51 interviews with people at different stages of the asylum process or with refugee status covering 14 different local authority areas of Scotland. Twenty-three of these interviewees were resettled through the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme. Local Authorities and third sector organisations were not interviewed. Interviews were held remotely (via Zoom or WhatsApp) with an interpreter as needed. The topics included in the guide were informed by members of a Research Advisory Group (RAG) which included people with lived experience as refugees and asylum seekers along with research partners; Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). Participants were recruited with support from the third sector, COSLA and through referrals from members of the RAG. Interviewees of 18± years were then selected according to a sampling frame to broadly reflect the diversity of refugees resident in Scotland (immigration status; age, gender, location in Scotland, country of origin). Interviews were recorded and audio transcribed.

Both studies received ethical approval from their respective institutional Research Ethics Committees.

For this discussion we have organised our participants into three categories, though there is often fluidity between them: (1) people seeking asylum, including people refused and appealing and those considered appeals rights exhausted (and rendered destitute); (2) dispersal pathway refugees (people with refugee status granted through the asylum route) and (3) resettlement pathway refugees (people with refugee status resettled through Resettlement Programme (Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme)). Table 1 reflects the breakdown of participants along these categories.

We used a thematic approach to data analysis, focusing on the intersection of immigration status with experiences of housing and poverty. In this paper, we foreground their voices.

Table 2 summarises the rights entitlements and wider support available according to four broad categories which reflect Immigration Status in the UK.

'Stay at home, save lives': experiences of home in the pandemic

During lockdown, everyone in the UK was told to 'Stay at home, protect the NHS. Save lives'. As a result, housing and 'home' became a key focus of the lockdown experience, as many were confined to the private space of the home which were variously repurposed for work, leisure, quarantine, education and safety. For our participants, ability to comply with the directive to stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives was mediated through

Table 1. Breakdown of participant immigration 'category'.

	(1) People seeking asylum	(2) Dispersal pathway refugees	(3) Resettlement refugees
(STUDY 1) 26 interviews	20	6	0
(STUDY 2) 51 interviews	15	12	24

Table 2. Overview of rights, entitlements and support services of people seeking asylum and refugees.

Status	Rights and entitlements				Support services	
	Allowed to work?	Access to state benefits	Access to FE/HE education	Access to housing	Local Authority/ Statutory	Third sector
People seeking asylum This includes people refused asylum and appealing and people who are appeals rights exhausted (ARE)	No	No Asylum claim ongoing: segregated welfare provided via Section 95 support = £39.63/week per person per household If ARE, in receipt of S (4) Support, must be destitute and meet a narrow set of criteria. = accommodation + £39.63 a week via a pre-paid Visa card (ASPEN card).	Yes, but limited to 16 h a week	Yes, but no choice housing provided under contract by multinational organisations such as G4S / Mears	Yes No if Refused and appealing or ARE	Yes
Dispersal pathway refugee	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Resettlement pathway refugee	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

political bounding around immigration status and accompanying rights and entitlements. Decent accommodation is a foundation to access all the other types of necessary support for people subject to immigration regimes in the UK and for any semblance of a dignified life (Scottish Refugee Council n.d.). Meer, Peace, and Hill (2019) provide a detailed discussion of the different housing pathways in relation to political bounding in the Scottish context. Our focus here is on how people with varying immigration statuses experienced this instruction to 'stay home' and survive COVID lockdown and how this is directly shaped by the different categories in which our participants have been assigned in the asylum system. In demarcating our sample in this way, we are not suggesting that, for example, gendered experiences are not of relevance, but just that for those in the asylum process in particular, the state-imposed category, and the rights associated with that category are something of a 'master status' that 'overrides other attributes in reactions to the individual such that others view the person only in terms of the stigmatized label' (Lucas and Phelan 2012, 326). This master status underpins all other intersectional experiences, a commonly expressed view by all people in the asylum process in our two studies.

People seeking asylum: 'Hotel detention', no-choice forced relocations and temporary housing

We take the position that whether an asylum claim has been refused or whether a decision is pending, all people subject to asylum immigration controls are still seeking asylum. But within this broad category, despite much fluidity as people move through the stages of their asylum claim and back again, experiences of home during lockdown were quite specific in terms of whether one is seeking asylum, a dispersal pathway refugee or a resettlement pathway refugee. Moreover, within the category of people

seeking asylum, experiences of lockdown were directly shaped by the forms of support received depending on stage in the asylum process, namely Section 4 support (S(4)) or Section 95 support (S(95)), as we now go on to explore in the following sections.

'It's like a mode of detention': emergency housing for people who are newly arrived or facing destitution

In response to the pandemic in March 2020, the Home Office through accommodation providers MEARS, determined to house recently arrived asylum seekers and people on S (4) support (see Table 1) in hotel accommodation. This accommodation response was framed by the UK government as a 'public health informed' approach (Home Office blog 2020).[1] People were moved at short notice, provided with 'full board', and it took 9 months for a minimum amount of cash support to be reinstated. The temporary nature of contingency accommodation for many increased feelings of uncertainty and extreme isolation. People in hotels were moved with little notice, and with no sense of how long it would persist, the hotel was often described as 'prison-like' mirroring in many ways how immigration detention is described by advocacy organisations like Detention Action (2015), creating more anxiety, stress and hopelessness. The introduction of cashless forms of support increased dependency and exacerbated already extreme forms of daily hardship people faced.

> When I was in the apartment, they usually gave me Home Office support, which is £35, and when we move from the apartment to the hotel, it stopped. All they can issue now is food. […] We are two in the apartment, it was lovely, it was good. You can cook what you want. And when we were getting to the hotel, even to have a space, I can be in my room throughout the day, I can only come down for food. So that was very stressful, it was a traumatic event, we had nowhere to talk, nobody to talk to. So it's like a mode of detention we are in. (person seeking asylum)

> I would ask them to improve the quality of the food. I haven't been able to wash my clothes. There is no washing machine. So that is an issue. A lot of accessories, like for the shaving, the spray, I need them you know […] It's obviously it's just a hotel, it's one-bedroom, obviously. For example, there is no Hoover. It seems to be because here is meant to be for the homeless people, it seems to be that in the past there were some stolen, therefore for each room they don't provide Hoover. (person seeking asylum)

Strictly enforced meal collection times, loss of autonomy, controlled and surveilled food access, meant people were provided with culturally inappropriate food that was seen to have little nutritional value, creating more difficulties in observing social distancing rules, and making people more reliant on third sector community supports.

> We could do whatever we want [in pre-Covid accommodation], as I said there wasn't any problem. But unfortunately since the corona started, they have transferred us into a hotel and there is around about 70 people in the hotel. And we don't get what we want … we cannot pick our food. We don't know what type of food they are giving to us, I mean this is another problem, we are not happy the way we are treated in the hotel, it's unacceptable. (person seeking asylum)

Such contingency housing measures removed possibilities to live any kind of dignified life. Access to food preparation and consumption and independent food choices are all important for good mental health and well-being and their removal can have

devastating effects. Combined with lockdown restrictions, people described feeling even more invisible and of being reduced to dependent aid recipients. For refused applicants, as well as those still in the asylum process their label as not (yet) refugees therefore had severe implications relating to how they experienced home during the pandemic. People described feeling locked in for lack of other spaces, with choices severely constrained, contributing to feelings of institutionalisation; they felt devalued, neglected and unseen. People who were newly arrived and those facing destitution relied heavily on third sector organisations for practical and emotional support. Some were able to access limited support through pre-paid cards that can only be spent in certain shops.

For people who were destitute they had been sleeping in emergency accommodation night shelters while those in receipt of S(4) support were housed in different forms of temporary accommodation. Daily life was already characterised with the challenges of finding warmth and shelter, searching the city for free Wi-Fi access to contact family and friends during the day and finding somewhere to sleep at night. There was for the first time some attention to the dangers of street homelessness, and unusually this universal concern extended to, rather than excluded, destitute refugees. It is important to note that over the period of lockdown, the material conditions for people facing destitution had changed in some respects. Some temporary measures, for example, the extension of emergency section 4 support, have been welcomed, as was the temporary pause on evictions, although since reintroduced, and the reinstatement of a small weekly cash support that is, at the time of writing, still to be backdated (about £8/week). However, the experience of what was largely and wearily felt of as being ignored, neglected and marginalised by the state was consistent. Tied to these experiences of housing are engagement, or lack thereof, of state and statutory supports, and this is intricately linked to political bounding. Indeed, the state or statutory organisations were not mentioned as a form of support in any of the GU interviews. For some, the daily humiliation and mental health distress of hotel accommodation became a life-or-death struggle. On 26 June 2020, there was a terrible tragedy at the Park Inn Hotel in Glasgow - used as contingency asylum accommodation - which resulted in a death and multiple injuries. A number of participants spoke directly about this tragedy and its dreadful, ongoing impact on their lives. One month earlier, on 5 May 2020, a 30-year-old refugee from Syria, took his own life in another hotel used as emergency accommodation in Glasgow. His mental health had drastically deteriorated as a result of hotel accommodation (Akhtar 2020).

Surviving lockdown on Section 95 support

For people in continued receipt of Section 95 support (see Table 1), lockdown came to represent another form of life in limbo, where they felt unseen, unheard and forgotten. The bureaucratic processes they are subject to when claiming asylum are characterised by rules subject to change, waiting, unpredictability, fear and complex systems where information is not explained well if at all (Rotter 2016; Stewart 2005; Abdelhady, Gren, and Joormann 2020). This in many ways mirrored the confusion around and changeable nature of covid restriction guidance. At the point at which the wider UK population was being told to stay home, some in the asylum process were being forcibly moved from one home to another, without any choice. No-choice dispersal and short-notice

movement are characteristic of dispersal policy, and so the associated distress is not new but doesn't make it any easier to bear. Despite what we understand about the isolation caused by lockdown restrictions, people in Home Office allocated accommodation talked about their frustration – and the humiliation – of forced relocations, confined in often cramped, substandard conditions with broken amenities.

One interviewee who suffered from long-term health conditions expressed distress as they were told that they must move from their home in 24 hours, yet their new housing provider had not yet confirmed that the new accommodation was accessible:

> I was feeling safe but when they talk about moving it makes me scared so I don't know where am I going to be? What's going to happen? That makes me more scared now. (person seeking asylum)

The absence of choice and the stripping of agency are fundamental parts of the asylum system. The interviewee continued:

> They say I have no choice, there's no choice about the accommodation, and so imagine me with four children living in two-bedroom house. That has really added to my depression and I said do not take me to a house that is not habitable, because I won't collect it, I won't take it. (person seeking asylum)

The meagre support provided to those in the asylum process has always resulted in impoverishment (Mayblin 2019) and meant that there is a need to access material goods elsewhere, often in the form of foodbanks provided by the third sector, and this increased dramatically in the early weeks and months of lockdown. Reliance on food-banks often requires people to take many buses across a city to access essentials. Yet during and after the first lockdown, these foodbanks were closed, and people were not able to access ongoing essentials such as food and toiletries, or new essentials like masks and hand sanitiser. Supply of resources, such as masks, to enable food to be sourced safely and competing priorities of paying for food or masks highlight the ways in which the difficulties experienced by many sections of the population as a whole, found expression within the experience of those within the asylum system.

> I have to choose wisely how to use my £38 per week between bread, masks or money to call my mum. (person seeking asylum)

Safety measures to reduce physical contact resulted in many shops imposing cashless payment systems. But for people in the asylum process who are not legally eligible to open bank accounts and therefore do not have access to cashless forms of payment, this was stigmatising and created dangerous barriers. Public messaging directed the population to stay at home and wear masks when outdoors. Our interviewees described constantly being required to travel to get food from various organisations' supplies, combined with concerns about how to acquire masks with no cash.

> We need to lose the dignity and to explain every time to the shop owner or the pharmacist that we have to answer without the mask, because we are asylum seekers and we don't have enough money to buy masks. It is very humiliating. (person seeking asylum)

Digital poverty was a major stressor for all the people we spoke to across all three populations, although the impact and implications were greater for some than others, be that ways to keep socially connected, or inaccessibility to cashless modes of payment.

> I use the Wi-Fi from the library. The library itself is closed but the Wi-Fi itself it's working, so I just approach the building and use the Wi-Fi. That's how I can log in online. It's very humiliating but I don't have any other way and that's approximately the situation with other people. They all communicate through phones and can log in online and they read the news online. (person seeking asylum)

Relocations and run-down properties also created problems around issues of the digital divide. For many, not only did the digital-only lifestyle severely limit possibilities for creating meaningful social interactions, but it also impacted those who could afford to maintain mobile data or pay for internet. The lack of ability to top up mobile phone data was discussed by many of our participants who were still seeking asylum. Given the limited funds provided to asylum seekers, resources to support living life in lockdown were denied to many. One woman felt constant worry over the inability to pay for Wi-Fi. Her children's school teachers were often in contact with her since her children were unable to participate in lessons or do homework, leaving her feeling berated and guilty. The stress was even greater for her because she was faced with the impossible decision of determining which of her family's needs she would be able to prioritise to pay for.

> You have limited data just only 20GB. It's crazy because 20GB just are two hour then finish … Because I have many things I don't have rights I just on the give £5 stay at home, eat only £5 and that's it, you need clothes, you need things, going out one weekend or going out with family but we can't. (person seeking asylum).

How people navigate surviving asylum and lockdown is revealing of the geopolitics of political bounding and how these play out in terms of support networks. Glasgow has its own ecology of third sector expertise compared to wider Scottish context, where local level networks have a long history in the city of providing all kinds of support, information, human rights advocacy and campaigning since dispersal was introduced in 2000 (see Wren 2004; Piacentini 2017; Mainwaring et al. 2020). Even so, in Glasgow, lockdown changed things for the third sector, with the statutory sector conspicuous by its absence. We heard how voluntary organisations went to great lengths to meet the needs of people in the asylum system, with emergency supports taking precedence over other services normally offered such as community meals, casework, women's and men's groups and language classes. But we also heard how social connections and community embeddedness were impacted by the pandemic.

> before the lockdown, that's where we normally go (community group), to share, you know, share experience, we learn about things, new things. And during the lockdown, that was, that's nearly stopped, you know, no meetings, we can't meet people, you know, we can't go up there. (person seeking asylum)

Voluntary sector innovations developed to mitigate for emergency hotel accommodation, digital poverty and food insecurity, including running groups in parks while adhering to social distancing, moving information services online, purchasing and delivering food supplies and mobile phone top-ups, providing crafting supplies, toys and games to families, purchasing bus passes and prepayment cards to allow for contactless shopping and purchasing e-vouchers that allowed people to buy food with some autonomy and dignity (Armstrong et al. 2020). Voluntary sector workers described this work as 'becoming the full-time job'.

Dispersal pathway refugees: 'coming out of one limbo to another'

For dispersal pathway refugees processes of political bounding continue to play out in quite specific, material ways. With refugee status comes a shift from asylum support to 'mainstream benefits' and out of temporary accommodation into other forms of, mostly, social housing. There are differences within this group dependent on what and where they have fled and the time it took to be recognised as a refugee. What they have in common is that they were all forcibly dispersed to Glasgow and treated with suspicion at best by the state, and this was entirely due to the way that they arrived in the UK.

While it might be expected that being recognised as a refugee would produce moments of celebration, or even contentment, this is often not the case, as the traumas of flight and of experiences of the asylum process often hit people all at once, and this combines with a new set of bureaucratic processes to traverse. This secondary upheaval is difficult enough in pre-covid times (Fraser and Piacentini 2014). However, whilst covid forced people indoors, involuntary relocations as a result of positive asylum decisions removed dispersal pathway refugees from familiar neighbourhoods, producing a 'double locked in/out' effect with people feeling they have to fend for themselves or rely on community supports (Piacentini 2014). The bewilderment and isolation that accompanies a positive asylum decision is already well documented (see, for example, Strang, Baillot, and Mignard 2017 and Refugee Council 2014) and as our participants shared, this has been worsened by the pandemic context.

For those granted refugee status early into and during the pandemic, their lives remained 'on hold' as they had to navigate this transition, whilst many support organisations faced backlogs and paused services. Again here, statutory support was absent.

One woman explained that her family had only moved to their new accommodation two days before lockdown began, resulting in them having no support networks in their new community and no state organisations facilitating settlement. She described a sense of complete isolation, which has disrupted their entire family life.

> Now we have leave to remain. Like coming out of limbo and going into another limbo, you know? It's just like I am still where I was before. I'm thinking about when will all this end? […] Because I was an asylum seeker then became a refugee then I was transferred to this accommodation. I just came to this accommodation and then two days later the lockdown was in place. So, it was very difficult because we were just in a new area and the lockdown was in place, so they consider them as new, so they didn't enrol them in nursery … The lockdown had a significant impact on my kids, and it has affected their behaviour too. So if you are now just saying you are moving me, I don't know how the house is, where it is at, so where, so I'm not taking the offer. And I just started crying, because I couldn't imagine, with this pandemic, in a new area where I've nobody, who is going to help me? Imagine that situation. (dispersal pathway refugee)

Long-standing issues around substandard and poor-quality housing have continued. Local authorities are required to offer two homes for newly recognised refugees, but there is an ongoing fear that should they refuse the first that the second will be worse and a second refusal means that the Council need not provide any further help, in stark contrast to ongoing supports available to resettlement pathway refugees. Increased dependency meant pressures on voluntary services and 'pinch points' which existed pre-covid but have worsened through lockdown, whilst raising new challenges around how to

support increased referrals. When discussing the forms of support she had benefitted from during lockdown, one woman, whose husband was shielding said

> Frankly speaking, benefiting from what? Nothing from any official government's department, but from charities? Yes. (dispersal pathway refugee)

For people who have traversed the complex and bureaucratic asylum process and been recognised as refugees the state effectively withdraws and they are expected to build their new homes with just the support of the voluntary sector. This makes building a new life difficult at all times, but with the added public health demands of the pandemic this population have struggled to create any sense of home and, it is worth reiterating, that this lack of support is based entirely on the way they entered the UK.

Resettlement pathway refugees: disrupted integration journeys

Resettlement pathway refugees have been the beneficiaries of a far more thorough set of social and institutional supports from the immediate point of arrival, from having council officers with a specific remit of helping their settlement to more open access to educational options, employment support and, crucially, stable housing (see Table 1). Despite having full social rights, they still experienced deleterious impacts arising from the pandemic, though perhaps impacts more akin to those of the overall population. Moreover, homemaking still felt insecure and unstable because of limited options to relocate to other parts of Scotland where they might feel more connected and because of ongoing worries about substandard housing. The quality of their accommodation, the suitability of their location and whether they were based in places that offered enough to meet their needs and those of their families preoccupied many participants. For example, for one refugee the situation was so unmanageable for his family, he began the process to move to a more populated area. He was forced to put his planned move to Glasgow because of the lockdown restrictions.

> Actually, before the crisis of the Corona, I was planning and working towards moving into Glasgow, relocating into Glasgow. But when all of this has happened I just feel my hands are quite tied up, because everything seems to have taken a whole different direction. Because I need help with housing in Glasgow, somebody to guide me on a few things, but it just feels my hands are completely tied up at the moment because of the Covid. (resettlement pathway refugee)

Those who possessed greater material and social resources were better able to exercise agency and choose from a greater number of strategies to navigate life under the pandemic in contrast with people seeking asylum, and dispersal pathway refugees. Resettlement pathway refugees also benefited from ongoing support, in terms of information, guidance and indeed involvement in resettlement from Local Authorities, including material supports, who were noted by interviewees for their care and support and were positively spoken about in interviews:

> After the council arranged a person or staff to communicate with us and give us information about COVID-19 and ask us if we need help, anything, as an additional voluntary they ask us if we need anything, food or if I afraid to get our they can offer me to a person who can do shopping, things like this … any news from Scotland or any rule from the Government the council direct to give us the new information stuff through the staff or through the workers. (resettlement pathway refugee)

> Because we were affected financially, the local council gives us a call and sent us something for home every Tuesday [and] were in touch to support us … Also the local school checked on people and they were sending some food support as well. (resettlement pathway refugee)

This was in stark contrast in Glasgow, third sector organisations were markedly more present and involved with dispersal pathway refugees and people seeking asylum providing food parcels and mobile phone top ups as well as wider social supports t, as this dispersal pathway refugee woman explains:

> Unfortunately, nothing was benefitting from the government but I benefitted from the organisations where they helped to deliver dried food to them, which reduced the pressure on us to go and look for that. And also bringing some toys and other stuff. These are the things which have been benefitting for us, but all of it are from non-governmental organisations. […] Actually, for the children, I mean, of course the priority is food for them and to play is very important. But also there is an organisation helped us by giving us colouring stuff and toys and this helped us a lot by the children just playing or distracting them, or games. (dispersal pathway refugee)

Changes in the quality of informal and formal social interactions caused by the pandemic have had a great effect on the ability to cultivate local social contacts, strong connections and deep relationships and build a semblance of home. For many resettlement pathway refugees, the additional demands of lockdown served as a reminder of lives still in transition and disrupted integration journeys. Those who reported greater support from family, friends and services were better able to exercise agency in responding to their housing needs.

What did become clear in interviews with resettled refugees, was that their experiences of coping with lockdown resonated with those of many households throughout Scotland of 'homemaking' and re-making, and saving money as normal forms of leisure were unavailable through lockdown. One man explained that the cost of living decreased during lockdown because purchases for children decreased:

> Each Saturday [before lockdown] I have to visit a restaurant in Glasgow, my children want to have breakfast there and that cost me each Saturday £50 and when the lockdown I said to my children we can't go anymore. I will make our food in the home. (resettlement pathway refugee).

He also adapted part of his home to keep children entertained during lockdown:

> I managed to change my home to, for example one of my children bedroom changed to playroom. I got many things for them like a laptop, T.V, toys, some things like that. To keep them busy. (resettlement pathway refugee)

As described earlier such practices, such as the option of changing home arrangements to accommodate the new digital learning and home leisure set up, were absent for those seeking asylum and dispersal pathway refugees. Their 'home-making' narratives were instead weighed down with stories of extreme digital poverty and daily survival.

Conclusion: 'just holding on'

The pandemic brings into sharp relief the entrenched inequalities within Scottish society for people in the asylum system who are already locked out and locked down. Contingency housing, living in poverty, reliance on charities to meet basic needs, facing

hostile immigration procedures, struggling in many cases to access information in forms that you understand are all enduring aspects of the asylum process, but lockdown has in many cases made these significantly worse and experiences vary markedly by immigration status. In the post-covid context, what 'normal life' will look like will be the same but also potentially harder for people bound by bureaucratic immigration categories who have been locked out in the pre-covid context. What comes next will be hugely significant.

There is a policy juxtaposition we can offer to help us understand the drivers behind political bounding of immigration categories. On the one hand, resettlement pathway programmes have integration designed in, offering safe routes and with a full range of designated local authority supports on arrival including ESOL, housing, education, employment and health. Dispersal pathway asylum on the other hand has segregation designed in and integration designed out, with its separate welfare system and exclusions from employment, most education and choice-based housing. And so, with the latter, different forms of social network and forms of integration - in the sense of mixing with people who are subject to segregating measures - emerge, raising important questions about who is doing the integration work and how it develops despite, and not because of state policies. The pandemic has offered another way in which to scrutinise the implications of category fetishism in how this played out in the lives of community members within the asylum/ resettlement processes.

What we hope to have shown here are some of the material effects of political bounding, where such tiered levels of 'support' dehumanises and debases dispersal pathway refugees. This serves as a timely reminder, as if one is needed, that the systems of state racism underpinning bounding practices (Akhtar 2020) are not solely about interactions with other people but also interactions with the state. Contingency hotel accommodation or hotel detention as it has come to be described by advocacy groups and activist organisers must be, as Akhtar (2020) argues, considered an appropriate form of containment in the context of neoliberal state racism, given the privatisation of asylum accommodation and the cost-cutting measures involved, including the removal of wraparound services and supports for people seeking asylum. As we have argued, this is part of a wider process of categorisation and political bounding. Such processes are even worse for those either not yet recognised as refugees or those who have been refused, at least in the first instance. The lack of wraparound care offered by MEARS, the largest provider of emergency and temporary accommodation in the UK, combined with being denied access to many of the rights of social citizenship means people in the asylum system live in a state of perpetual fear, with potentially devastating consequences. Many spend long periods of time experiencing street homelessness, with the additional associated dangers.

Scholars are beginning to understand more about both how and why state categorisation processes take place, and to an extent also how they are experienced. This article contributes to the latter, suggesting that even within the context of a global health crisis, some categories of refugee experience the hardships of the pandemic more viscerally than others. In a sense the state creates and then responds to a hierarchisation of refugee deservingness, with resettled refugees as the most deserving and refused and destitute at the other end. And while there has been useful discussion about the ways in which inequalities across society have become visibilised by the pandemic, inequalities

within the various refugee categories are, we would argue, still largely invisible. What is clear from our studies, is that the 'good refugees' (resettlement pathway refugees) were still subject to some forms of state support, mostly through Local Authority resettlement officers, but for others (people seeking asylum and dispersal pathway refugees) the state largely disappeared as a form of support and guidance, even during a major health emergency. Where the state remained visible was solely in relation to the removal of welfare support, and of choice and autonomy around housing issues in particular, but with the many knock-on effects already discussed. For the rest, the absence of the state required already-stretched third sector organisations to step into the breech. Our final reflection on these two studies is an ominous one. All of the people who are still in the asylum process were 'just holding on', keeping at bay the harshest effects of lockdown. At the time of writing, there are more than 200 asylum seekers still living in hotel accommodation across Glasgow due to insufficient housing (BBC 2021). As the pandemic continues through 2021, even with lockdown easing, all the evidence suggests that there will be significant social and personal needs that are being stored up now that will unleash a significant challenge for services and support.

Note

1. Hotels have also been used to host people who are street homeless in Glasgow. Guests at Glasgow Night Shelter and other emergency homelessness services were put up in hotels immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic began. This is a separate operation from the above Mears/Home Office accommodation and provisions (Scottish Refugee Council 2020).

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