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Contesting security: Multiple modalities, NGOs and the security-migration nexus in Scotland

Abstract

The security-migration nexus is ubiquitous throughout Europe and beyond. An avalanche of scholarship has explored the construction of migration as a security threat in general and, in the UK, the creation of the 'hostile environment' in particular – the problematic nature of each being well documented. Yet, far less attention has been paid to activities that *contest* this process. Deploying Balzacq's four modalities of contestation – desecuritisation, resistance, emancipation and resilience – this article addresses the imbalance, exploring how asylum and refugee sector NGOs engage in and contest security-migration politics. Using Scotland (2018-19) as an illustrative case and analysing discursive and predominantly non-discursive activities, findings demonstrate that NGOs are successfully contesting the security-migration nexus in Scotland across four principal categories, supporting the 'surviving' and 'thriving' of asylum seeker and refugee communities, problematising previous conceptualisations of 'UK' asylum and refugee politics, with implications extending globally. The article helps refine the theorisation of contestation, demonstrating first, the need to move beyond studies of 'desecuritisation', with consequences for understandings of 'success' in securitisation, and second, the potential blindness of single-modality studies to vital, meaningful contestation, resulting in the production of less comprehensive visions of the security world.

1. Introduction

The security-migration nexus is ubiquitous throughout Europe and beyond. In the United Kingdom (UK) specifically, as indicative of this broader trend, consider the following list of events. First, the 'hostile environment' for (illegal) immigrants was established in 2012 as the UK Government's flagship immigration policy, where the core principle is to force departures through destitution and misery. Second, as part of the 'hostile environment', the 2014 Immigration Act moved the border into private dwellings, with everyday citizen landlords being legally obliged to check immigration status. Third, an increasingly militarised response to migrant sea crossings between Northern France and the south coast of England has developed, with the creation of a new 'Clandestine Channel Threat Commander' to respond to the crossings, and plans considered for an Australian-style offshore processing of asylum claims, in places as distant as Moldova, Morocco and Papua New Guinea.[1] And finally, described as the most significant overhaul of asylum policy in decades, the UK Government's 2021 'Sovereign Borders Bill' has been condemned by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, further weakening global norms regarding refuge and asylum.[2]

In this context, the securitisation of migration in the UK (and beyond) appears entrenched. Indeed, there has been an avalanche of scholarship exploring both the construction of migration as a security threat in general and, in the UK, the creation of the 'hostile environment' in particular – the problematic nature of each being well documented.[3] Yet, this article contents that, whilst a major part of the story, a sole focus on the *securitisation* of migration acts to obscure the complexity of the security-migration nexus, and security politics more broadly. Security is always contested somewhere and by someone. Yet, how to study contestation – often, and problematically, conceived as synonymous with desecuritisation – remains unclear. This article aims to redress this imbalance, shifting attention to this other side of the coin to sharpen, empirically and theoretically, *contestation* of security(-migration) politics.

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[1] Paul Lewis et al., 'Revealed: No 10 explores sending asylum seekers to Moldova, Morocco and Papua New Guinea', *The Guardian*, 30 September 2020, available: {https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/sep/30/revealed-no-10-explores-sending-asylum-seekers-to-moldova-morocco-and-papua-new-guinea}, accessed 2 December 2020.

[2] Jamie Grierson and Sarah Marsh, 'UN refugee agency hits out at Priti Patel's plans for UK asylum overhaul', *The Guardian*, 24 March 2021, available: {https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/24/priti-patel-defends-inhumane-overhaul-of-uk-asylum-system}, accessed 4 April 2021.

To do so, this article focuses on UK asylum and refugee politics as an illustrative case study with global ramifications. Yet, with UK migration politics organised around a central 'hostile' policy, and with the state situated as the dominant security actor, three questions arise: Who is contesting? What form does contestation take? And, what impact, if any, is contestation having? In this context of 'hostile' migration politics, where most UK-wide political parties have hardened their migration policy and discourse[4], the job of contesting security-migration politics has fallen disproportionately on civil society actors, especially asylum and refugee sector non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Thus, to unpack these questions, this article aims to deliver a rich empirical picture of the main activities and approaches of NGOs in Scotland, as vital, hitherto under-explored actors at the forefront of contesting ‘hostile’ security-migration politics in Scotland. Scotland offers particularly fruitful terrain to explore these questions. Since devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1998, a more positive, inclusive approach to migration, including on the issues of asylum and refuge, has been crafted by successive Scottish governments: a phenomenon devoid of sufficient attention to date.[5] Beyond generating an empirically driven, nuanced picture of ‘UK’ asylum and refugee politics, the fresh empirical context[6] and, most importantly, the multi-level governance structures which exist following devolution, provide fertile terrain to sharpen the theorisation of contestation within securitisation studies.

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[3] Ayse Ceyhan and Anastassia Tsoukala, 'The securitization of migration in western societies: Ambivalent discourse and policies', *Alternatives*, 27:3 (2002), pp. 91-126. Philippe Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration: A Study of Movement and Order* (London: Routledge, 2011); Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert, *Refugees, Security and The European Union* (Oxon: Routledge, 2019); Melanie Griffiths and Colin Yeo, 'The UK's hostile environment: Deputising immigration control', *Critical Social Policy*, 41:4 (2021), pp. 521–544; Valeria Bello (2020) 'The spiralling of the securitisation of migration in the EU: from the management of a 'crisis' to a governance of human mobility?', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2020.1851464, and other contributions to this special issue.

[4] Paul Statham, 'Understanding the Anti-Asylum Rhetoric: Restrictive Politics or Racist Publics?', *Political Quarterly*, 74: 1, (2003), pp. 163-177; Tim Bale, 'Putting it Right? Labour's big shift on immigration since 2010', *The Political Quarterly*, 85:3, (2014), pp. 296-303.

Aligning with a strand of ‘second-generation’ securitisation scholarship which conceptualises the construction of security as less of a decisive moment, and instead as a contest of moves and counter-moves, existing as a pro-longed, often iterative, process[7], this article builds on recent advances in securitisation studies, moving beyond a framework of desecuritisation to deploy Balzacq’s[8] four modalities of contestation: desecuritisation, resistance, emancipation and resilience. Following the call from Hansen[9], an innovative ‘comparative’ research design is adopted, with each modality of contestation being used as a lens to ‘approach’ the same empirical phenomenon. To ensure the same empirical phenomena were approached by the modalities, an initial open, fine-grained analysis of the myriad activities of the thirteen asylum and refugee sector NGOs under investigation in Scotland, across 2018-19, was conducted. The discursive and predominantly non-discursive practices which emerged were then 'approached'[10] by each modality.

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[5] Eve Hepburn and Michael Rosie, ‘Immigration, Nationalism, and Politics in Scotland’ in Eve Hepburn and Ricard Zapata-Barrero (eds), *The Politics of Immigration in Multi-Level States: Governance and Political Parties* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 241-260.

[6] To the knowledge of the author, to date there exists no study of the securitisation/contestation of migration in Scotland.

[7] Holger Stritzel and Sean C. Chang, ‘Securitization and counter-securitization in Afghanistan’, *Security Dialogue*, 46:6 (2015), pp. 548-67; Ian Paterson and Georgios Karyotis, ‘“We are, by nature, a tolerant people”: Securitisation and counter-securitisation in UK migration politics. *International Relations*. 36:1 (2020), pp. 104-26.

[8] Thierry Balzacq (ed), *Contesting Security: Strategies and logics* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

[9] Lene Hansen, ‘Conclusion: towards an ontopolitics of security’, in Balzacq (ed), *Contesting Security*, p.219-321

The first step of the empirical analysis finds that there is a vast, varied terrain of contestation in Scotland, which aims at both the 'surviving' (the fulfilment of basic human needs), and 'thriving' (the means for empowerment and flourishing) of asylum seeker and refugee communities. This activity is both direct and immediate, focusing on service provision, and indirect and non-immediate, focusing on shaping the legislative, policy and discursive environment. Four principal categories of activity emerge: Direct – Surviving; Direct – Thriving; Indirect – Legislation and Policy; Indirect – Discourse, Narratives, and Public Opinion. A detailed mapping of this terrain demonstrates that tangible impacts are being made by these organisations, both immediately, in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees, and longer term, in the broader policy environment, with consequences for our understanding of the 'hostile environment' in UK politics. From these initial empirical insights, and the subsequent second step comparative analysis where these four main categories of activity were 'approached' by each of the four modalities, three central implications emerge.

First, the theorisation of 'contestation' is developed in two main respects. On the one hand, the article demonstrates the importance of moving beyond studies looking for 'desecuritisation' as an outcome/goal related to the successful undoing of securitised policy and structures, to instead adopt a framework of contestation. A contestation approach can reveal important political dynamics which may, if looking for desecuritisation, be missed or mislabelled as unsuccessful, revealing securitisations to be less fixed than they appear. On the other hand, the multi-modality approach demonstrates that modalities can and do provide different visions of the security world and that, in a context of diverse, multi-faceted contestation activity and practice, single-modality studies may be blind to vital, meaningful contestation, resulting in less comprehensive visions of security politics. Taking both points together, fine-grained examinations of empirical processes of contestation – as in this article – helps shift attention away from idealised (often discursively focused) theorisations of desecuritisation, to present a more nuanced, rich picture of securitisation-contestation processes.

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[10] Hansen, 'Conclusion', p. 231.

Second, for scholars of securitisation and security more broadly, shifting the analytical lens to non-state actors, in this instance NGOs, as well as adopting a predominant focus on non-discursive mechanisms (which formed the majority of NGO activity and practice) enabled a more holistic picture of 'UK' security-migration politics to emerge. In short, the analysis in this article exhibits that security(-migration) politics is not merely a top-down process driven by elite state actors, helping to clarify who can (effectively) 'do' security, when and how. Casting the analytical net wide and closely attending to non-discursive mechanisms thus supports a reorientation from *constructing* security to *contesting* security, particularly in contexts where actors lack the power and platform to speak or to directly enact policy, and whereby everyday, direct service provision is central to their practice.

Third, the article demonstrates that 'UK' asylum and refugee politics is a partial misnomer, with a failure to account for the impact of devolution obscuring key nuances. This final insight has far-reaching consequences for how we consider both contestation of the global security-migration nexus and of security politics more broadly, with complex, multi-level governance structures holding the potential to significantly impact upon the centralised security policies of many 'sovereign' states. In short, securitisations may be far less solid than typically perceived.

The article proceeds in several sequential steps. The theoretical framework acts as the point of departure, drawing upon securitisation theory and Balzacq's four modalities of contestation. Next, the security-migration nexus and UK-Scottish case are briefly contextualised. The methodology follows, detailing first, the two-step analytical process, second, the organisation of the empirical material into the four main emergent categories of activity in which asylum and refugee sector NGOs are engaging, and third, the subsequent deployment of the four modalities. The empirical analysis comes after, with the main implications elucidated in the conclusion.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Securitisation theory

The Copenhagen School's Securitisation theory has been one of the most prominent and influential challenger to traditional, realist, state-military conceptualisations of 'security'.[11] Borrowing from Austin's[12] speech act theory, security is instead conceptualised as socially constructed through discourse and 'speech acts'.[13] Thus, the objective reality of the threat is not paramount: '[w]hat is essential is the designation of an existential threat requiring emergency action or special measures and the acceptance of that designation by a significant audience'.[14] Thus, security is not an arbitrary list of 'things' determined by an analyst, but is an observed *process* of constructing shared understandings about the perceived presence of threat between elite actors and empowering audiences.

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[11] Beyond migration, securitization theory has been applied to a diverse range of issues (health, terrorism, energy, the environment) and been the subject to much critique, including for perceived Western/Eurocentrism and an under-appreciation of gender. For a review, see Balzacq et al. "'Securitization' revisited: Theory and cases", *International Relations*, 30: 4 (2016), pp. 494-531. On the reconceptualisation of security see, Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[12] John L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[13] Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in Ronnie D Lipschutz (ed), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) pp. 46-86.

However, the CS do not conceive of securitisation *a priori* as a good to be maximised. Instead, securitisation is argued to oft be imbued with a negative logic, resting on problematic Self/Other relations and harbouring characteristics (speed, lack of transparency) which circumvent democratic processes.[15] Thus, it is argued that 'in the abstract, desecuritization [broadly conceived of as the reverse of securitisation, whereby issues return to normal politics, stripped of the exceptionality afforded in the security realm, or fall out of the political sphere entirely] is the ideal'.[16]

2.2. From desecuritisation to contestation

In comparison to its antithesis, desecuritisation was initially deemed to have received 'scant attention'.[17] Whilst several notable attempts have been made to theorise desecuritisation[18], and a not insignificant number of empirical studies of desecuritisation have emerged[19], it remains true that studies of security *construction* remain dominant, with desecuritisation still scantily attended in comparison. This lack of attention is highly problematic. If securitisation is – or at least can be – normatively dangerous, with ample empirical evidence demonstrating this to be the case in the context of migration[20], understanding the reverse of this process is vital: something this article seeks to contribute to.

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[14] Buzan et al., *Security*, p.27.

[15] See Buzan et al., *Security*; Michael C. Williams, 'Words, images, enemies: Securitization and international politics', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47:4 (2003), pp. 511-31.

[16] Buzan et al., *Security*, p. 29.

[17] Claudia Aradau, 'Security and the democratic scene', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 7:4 (2004), p. 389.

[18] For example, Jef Huysmans, 'Migrants as a security problem: dangers of 'securitizing' societal issues', in Robert Miles and Dietrich Thränhardt (eds), *Migration and European Integration: The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion* (London: Pinter Publishers Ltd., 1995), pp. 53-72; Lene Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation: the normative-political in the Copenhagen School and directions for how to apply it',

Pioneering attempts to theorise desecuritisation from Huysmans[21] have been built upon with growing regularity, with the concept being progressively refined (and problematised) in important ways.[22] A productive turn in the recent literature, however, makes a useful distinction between *desecuritisation* and broader notions of *contesting* securitisations. As opposed to being the only means of challenging a securitisation, it is recognised that desecuritisation is merely one 'modality' of contesting security among many.[23] Balzacq's[24] edited volume, *Contesting Security*, offers the most complete attempt to systematise these modalities, identifying desecuritisation, resistance, emancipation and resilience as the four principal approaches.

Review of International Studies, 38:3 (2012), pp. 525-46; Jonathan L. Austin and Philippe Beaulieu-Brossard, '(De)securitisation dilemmas: Theorising the simultaneous enaction of securitisation and desecuritisation', *Review of International Studies*, 44:2 (2018), pp. 301–23.

[19] For example, Dimitris Skleparis, '"A Europe without Walls, without Fences, without Borders": A Desecuritisation of Migration Doomed to Fail', *Political Studies*, 66:4 (2018), pp. 985-1001; Arif Sahar and Christian Kaunert, C. 'Desecuritisation, deradicalisation, and national identity in Afghanistan: Higher education and desecuritisation processes.' *European Journal of International Security*, (2021), pp. 1-18. doi:10.1017/eis.2021.31.

[20] See note 3.

[21] Huysmans, 'Migrants as a security problem'.

[22] See note 18.

[23] Balzacq, *Contesting Security*, p.8.

[24] Balzacq, *Contesting Security*.

In brief, *Desecuritisation,* following McDonald[25], is conceived as 'a grammar that underwrites the enactment of practices clear of the security-defence rationale'.[26] More substantially, desecuritisation entails rearticulating and re-drawing the boundaries governing identities, away from adversarial friend-enemy dichotomies.[27] *Resistance* is defined as a direct response to security policy and practice where, "[t]o resist is to deliver a counter-force".[28] The objective of resistance is therefore malleable, with it able to be used to maintain the status quo, to desecuritise or to generate other security policies.[29] *Emancipation* is closely related to resistance, with the latter suggested to act as a springboard to the former. Yet, what makes emancipation distinct is that it is by definition transformative, that is, 'it does not aim to preserve an existing or past policy; it works to a new state of affairs'.[30] Emancipation, therefore, assumes that security need not necessarily rest on an exclusionary logic or exist as a zero-sum game, coming at another's expense.[31] Finally, *Resilience* rests on an intricate relationship between status quo and change. Resting on an acceptance of the inescapability of danger, resilience 'is a proactive ability to absorb risk hazards and pursue life without becoming dysfunctional'.[32] Yet, whether, following a key 'disturbance' – an event which triggers resilience politics – resilience means maintaining the status quo, marginalising the issue, or reshaping political structures anew, depends on what quality a politics of 'resilience' intends to imbue.[33]

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[25] Matt McDonald, *Security, the Environment and Emancipation* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[26] Balzacq, *Contesting Security*, pp. 85-87.

[27] Balzacq, *Contesting Security*, p. 86.

[28] Balzacq, *Contesting Security*, p. 13.

[29] Ibid. This includes 'counter-securitisation', see Stritzel and Chang 'Securitization and counter-securitization'; Paterson and Karyotis '"We are, by nature, a tolerant people"'.

[30] Balzacq, *Contesting Security*, p. 139.

[31] Balzacq, *Contesting Security*, p. 140. On the 'logic'/'value' of security, see Jonna Nyman, 'What is the value of security? Contextualising the negative/ positive debate', *Review of International Studies*, 42:5 (2016), pp. 821-839.

[32] Balzacq, *Contesting Security*, p. 170.

Despite their analytical separation, relationships and inter-linkages between the four modalities abound, yet remain under-examined. Concluding Balzacq's volume, Hansen[34] posits that in order to sharpen the theory of contestation – and the four modalities themselves – a fruitful line of inquiry would be comparative case-studies, but,

> [n]ot so much comparative case-studies set within particular sub-concepts […] but across the four sub-concepts. What would a study of China, immigration or biometric politics look like if approached by all four perspectives? [… in doing so] we might learn something new from seeing how concepts and theories produce different – or perhaps not so different – visions of the security world.

This article takes up Hansen's call, adopting this comparative design, with each modality being used as a lens to approach an empirical case: the contestation of the hostile environment in Scotland.

2.3. Contestation in action

How exactly to study contestation, however, remains unclear. Regarding the study of *constructing* security, the Copenhagen School's initial privileging of speech acts and discursive mechanisms has given way to a greater emphasis on non-discursive practices, policy mechanisms and institutional configurations.[35] Scholars working under the broad umbrella of the 'Paris School' demonstrate that in many cases, security is not enacted with 'exceptional', definitive speech acts, but is a rather banal, iterative process, with 'security' taking the form of everyday 'little security nothings', comprised of bureaucratic, technological practices.[36] This focus on non-discursive mechanisms is argued to be especially pertinent when issues have become 'institutionalised' as security issues, where the security drama does not require constant discursive reiteration.[37] With the 'hostile environment' structuring UK migration (and especially asylum and refugee) politics for over a decade, an 'institutionalised' securitisation captures the contemporary situation in the UK. Focussing upon the non-discursive also appears particularly appropriate if studying actors (e.g. certain NGOs) who lack the power and platforms afforded to state actors or if everyday, practical, non-discursive activity structures the bulk of their practice (e.g. certain NGOs).

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[33] Philippe Bourbeau, 'Resiliencism and security studies: initiating a dialogue', in Thierry Balzacq (ed), *Contesting Security: Strategies and Logics*. Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 173-188.

[34] Hansen, 'Conclusion', p. 231.

Recent advances in studies of desecuritisation also appreciate the significance of moving beyond a purely discursive analysis. Whilst anyone can utter desecuritising moves, for a desecuritisation move to be *successful*, it is argued, it must 'terminat[e]… institutional facts'.[38] In other words, successful desecuritisation must terminate the policies and/or structures which uphold securitisation dynamics.[39] Utilising the above insights from studies of desecuritisation, and accounting for the context of UK politics outlined above, in addition to discursive acts, this article adopts a predominant focus on non-discursive activity and practice which respond to the 'institutional facts', policies and structures of securitisation. Yet, we must look beyond 'termination' (that is, desecuritisation in full). A lack of termination does not mean that *contestation* is not occurring and occurring with some degree of success. Previous conflation of desecuritisation *as an outcome/goal* that is tied to terminating policies/structures and desecuritisation *as a modality* (that is a politics, logic or strategy) of contestation has therefore likely obscured the complexity of securitisations in myriad empirical contexts.[40] Approaching studies through a framework of contestation – as in this article – can guard against this conflation, creating a clear distinction between the two and thus provide richer, fuller accounts of securitisation processes.

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[35] C.A.S.E Collective, 'Critical Approaches to Security in Europe: A Networked Manifesto', *Security Dialogue* 37:4 (2006), pp. 443-87.

[36] Jef Huysmans, 'What's in an act? On security speech acts and little security nothings', *Security Dialogue,* 42: 4-5 (2001), pp. 371-383. See also Didier Bigo, 'Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease', *Alternatives*, 27 (2002) pp. 63-92. Despite an oft oppositional framing in the literature, insights from both Copenhagen and Paris contribute complementary theoretical 'bricks'. Philippe Bourbeau, 'Moving Forward Together: Logics of the Securitisation Process', *Millennium*, 43:1 (2014), pp. 187-206.

[37] Buzan et al., *Security*, p. 27-8; Sarah Léonard, 'EU border security and migration into the European Union: FRONTEX and securitisation through practices', *European Security*, 19:2 (2010), pp. 231-254.

2.4. Contestation actors: Widening the analytical net

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[38] Juha A. Vuori, 'Religion bites: Fulungong, securitization/desecuritization in the People's Republic of China', in Thierry Balzacq (ed), *Securitization Theory: How security problems emerge and dissolve*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), p. 191.

[39] Serhun Al, and Douglas Byrd, 'When Do States (De)securitise Minority Identities? Conflict and Change in Turkey and Northern Ireland. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 21:3 (2018), pp. 608–634.

[40] The importance of focussing on phenomena short of 'termination', and of focusing on non-discursive mechanisms is highlighted by an analysis of Floyd's theorisation of 'functional actors'. Floyd demarcates functional actors as those who object/endorse securitisation on behalf of others: they seek to persuade securitising actors (those with the power to directly affect legislation which underpins 'institutional facts') to revoke/continue securitisation policies. Yet, this ignores direct, practical contestation activity for which no request or influencing of others is necessary: if deliberate migrant destitution is part of the suite of securitisation policies, actors preventing this destitution (e.g. NGOs) move beyond functional actor status and become directly involved in (de)securitising processes as contestation actors. Rita Floyd 'Securitisation and the function of functional actors', *Critical Studies on Security*, (2020), DOI: 10.1080/21624887.2020.1827590

Finally, the question of ‘who’ to study emerges. A failure to look past the ‘state’ – recognised as the dominant securitising actor[41] generally[42], and in the UK case with regards migration – is argued to obscure much of the picture and close the door to alternative security actors and alterative security politics[43]: security will always be contested somewhere and by someone.[44] Therefore, to render the picture clearer, scholars must widen the analytical lens.

This article adds to the flourishing literature looking beyond typical state-centric security actors, examining the role of NGOs with regards to the security-migration nexus. Whilst the Copenhagen School and many ‘traditionalist’ approaches to security politics tell us (with strong empirical support) states are oft the most important actors on stage, NGOs have been shown to play substantial, diverse roles in the international (security) drama for centuries[45], including as: a threat to state sovereignty; a tool of foreign policy; a driving force on particular security issues; and as agents of humanitarian relief and development policies.[46] Regarding the security-migration nexus specifically, NGOs have, in certain instances, including in the UK, become embedded in immigration enforcement and the implementation of securitisation processes.[47] More commonly, NGOs contest. 'Search and Rescue' (SAR) operations in the Mediterranean following the recent 'refugee crisis' in Europe act as a powerful example, where NGOs have been effectively contesting the policies and practice of 'Fortress Europe', with over 100,000 persons rescued in NGO-deployed boats to date.[48] Thus, in the right conditions, NGOs can wield substantive power and influence, something that has not escaped scholars working within an emancipation framework, where NGO contestation efforts in the context of the security-migration nexus have been highlighted (for example, in Australia[49] and Germany[50]).

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[41] Buzan et al. ‘Security’, pp. 37-8. However, it is important to note that despite being considered the central securitising actor, conceptualising the state as a coherent and unitary actor has been problematised. See for example Claire Wilkinson, ‘The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is Securitization Theory Useable Outside Europe?’, *Security Dialogue* 38:1 (2007), pp. 5-25.

[42] But see Roxanne Lynn Doty, ‘States of Exception on the Mexico–U.S. Border: Security, “Decisions,” and Civilian Border Patrols’, *International Political Sociology*, 1:2 (2007), pp. 113–137.

[43] Matt McDonald ‘Contesting border security: emancipation and asylum in the Australian context’, in Thierry Balzacq (ed), *Contesting Security: Strategies and Logics* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 154-168; Nyman, ‘What is the value of security?’.

[44] Something which follows naturally if we accept, drawing on Cox’s interpretation of theory, that security is always ‘*for* someone and *for* some purpose’. Robert W. Cox ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory’, *Millennium* 10:2 (1981), pp. 126-55.

[45] Steve Charnovitz, ‘Two Centuries of Participation: NGOs and International Governance’, *Michigan Journal of International Law* 18:2 (1997), pp. 183–286.

[46] Charnovitz, ‘Two Centuries of Participation’; Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); Jude Howell, ‘The securitisation of

Yet, whilst *potentially* powerful, it is fair to ask whether this is arguably misleading in the UK case. After all, Statham and Geddes[51] argue that UK 'immigration policy is determined "top-down" in a relatively autonomous way by political elites.' On asylum and refuge specifically, the Home Office [the UK Government department responsible for immigration] is found to dominate, with little impact made by third sector organisations on policy outcomes.[52] However, this conclusion veils critical intricacies in

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NGOs post-9/11', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 14:2 (2014), pp. 151-79; Scott Watson and Regan Burles, 'Regulating NGO funding: securitizing the political', *International Relations*, 32:4 (2018), pp. 430-48.

[47] Griffiths and Yeo, 'The UK's hostile environment'.

[48] Eugenio Cusumano, 'Straightjacketing Migrant Rescuers? the Code of Conduct on Maritime NGOs', *Mediterranean Politics*, 24:1 (2019), pp. 106–114.

[49] McDonald, 'Contesting border security'.

[50] Sabine Hirschauer, 'For real people in real places: the Copenhagen school and the other' "little security nothings"', *European Security*, 28:4 (2019), pp. 413-430.

[51] Paul Statham and Andrew Geddes, 'Elites and the "organised public": Who drives British immigration politics and in which direction?', *West European Politics*, 29:2 (2006), pp. 248-6.

[52] Will Somerville and Sara W. Goodman, 'The Role of Networks in the Development of UK Migration Policy', *Political Studies*, 58: 5 (2010), pp. 951–970.

two ways. First, it implies 'impact' is restricted to government policy. This assumption, when considering broader approaches to security practice, is insufficient and overly narrow. Second, relevant policy is considered narrowly, with an assumption that *all* elements of relevant policy are controlled by the UK government at Westminster. Yet, if sub-state governments exist (as in Scotland), sufficient powers in other policy domains may be available, which are open to influence by NGOs, to contest certain policy thrusts from the central state government (in this case, the UK).

2.5. Summary

This section has sketched out key elements of securitisation and desecuritisation theory. It has argued that shifting beyond 'desecuritisation' (as an outcome/goal) to instead think through the prism of 'contestation' through multiple modalities, combined with an accounting for the iterative nature of securitisation processes and the importance of both discursive and non-discursive mechanisms, is a productive move for capturing the nuance of contestation processes. Finally, the grounds for moving beyond a state-centric analysis and focusing on NGOs as contestation actors were articulated, with it being argued that conceiving of impact on contestation processes beyond policymaking and accounting for devolution makes this potential even more potent. Before this is explored empirically, and the methodology for doing so detailed, the following section contextualises the terrain for contestation of the security-migration nexus in the UK and Scotland.

3. Contextualising contestation: The security-migration nexus in the 'UK' and Scotland

Whether the threat is framed in relation to resource access, law and order or societal cohesion, at bedrock of the securitisation of migration is an adversarial 'us' versus 'them' identity formation that presents migrants as inferior, dangerous Others who threaten 'our' way of life. [53] In line with developments in securitisation theory, a vast literature has explored the formation of this link between security and migration – the 'security-migration nexus' – with a series of discursive[54] and non-discursive processes, including but not limited to, institutional configurations[55], practices[56], processes of governmentality[57] and legal tools[58], being identified as crucial pillars generating and reinforcing said link. Asylum and refuge, the empirical focus in this article, has been no exception and, in many ways, has been at the centre of the security-migration nexus in Europe since 2015.

The last two decades of UK asylum and refugee policy (spanning entry and integration) align with this trend of securitisation, epitomised by the so-called 'hostile environment', where the explicit aim is to make life difficult for undocumented migrants and to 'weaponise total destitution and rightlessness' to force self-deportation.[59] Announced in a 2012 interview by the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, the creation of a 'really hostile environment for illegal migration'[60] was fulfilled through a complex combination of Parliamentary Acts and bureaucratic rules and regulations spanning many sectors of policy and practice. Prominent were the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts, which are considered a step-change in the 'diffusion of national borders… into everyday spaces'.[61] Immigration control was 'deputised'[62] to a variety of third parties, including employers, bank employees, marriage registrars, landlords and even some homelessness services[63], whilst monitoring of asylum seekers was enhanced by the creation of 'information sharing pathways between the Home Office and social and health services.'[64] Beyond engendering a politics of exclusion[65] the 'everyday bordering' of the hostile environment created barriers to access services[66] and strengthened a culture of instability and fear among migrant communities.[67] As Mulvey[68] explains, however, whist the formally stated 'hostile environment' was devised and implemented under the Conversative-Liberal Democrat Coalition administration (2010-2015), anti-integration measures, despite lacking the same fervour, also characterised the most recent Labour administrations (1997-2010), with the removal of the right to work from asylum seekers in 2002 being a key example. Further indicative of this 'destitution to deter' approach, asylum seekers have 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) (no access to means-tested social security benefits) and instead receive a meagre £39.63 per week.[69] In the context of the hostile environment, it is thus difficult to disentangle policies of entry and integration, as destitution and hostility, tied to deterrence to reduce inward migration through asylum routes (a cornerstone of UK government policy during this time period[70]), are intimately connected to integration. Finally, this context of hostile policy and practice regarding entry and integration has, unsurprisingly, been accompanied by a prevailing discourse in which asylum seekers and refugees are principally presented in negative, securitised terms.

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[53] Buzan et al, 'Security'.

[54] Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 'The Securitization of Migration'.

[55] Jef Huysmans, 'The European Union and the Securitization of Migration', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 38:5 (2000), pp. 751-777.

[56] Léonard, 'EU border security'.

[57] Bigo, 'Security and Immigration'.

[58] Tugba Basaran, 'Security, Law, Borders: Spaces of Exclusion', *International Political Sociology*, 2:4 (2008), pp. 339–354.

[59] Frances Webber, 'On the creation of the UK's "hostile environment"', *Race & Class,* 60:4 (2018), pp. 76–87.

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[60] James Kirkup and Robert Winnett (2012) Theresa May interview: 'We're going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception'. *The Telegraph*, 25 May.

[61] Griffiths and Yeo, 'The UK's hostile environment.

[62] Ibid.

[63] The co-option of civil society actors and broader 'vernacularisation' of immigration control is not unique to the UK's securitisation of migration. This demonstrates that the roles NGOs play in security politics are undetermined, that not all NGOs will contest and that a fine-grained, contextually grounded empirical assessments are required when exploring securitisation/contestation processes. See Anthony Cooper, Chris Perkins and Chris Rumford, 'The vernacularization of borders', In: Reece Jones and Corey Johnson (eds) *Placing the Border in Everyday Life* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

[64] Cathy A. Wilcock, 'Hostile Immigration Policy and the Limits of Sanctuary as Resistance: Counter-Conduct as Constructive Critique', *Social Inclusion*, 7:4 (2019), pp. 141–151.

[65] Nira Yuval-Davis, Georgie Wemyss and Kathryn Cassidy, 'Everyday Bordering, Belonging and the Reorientation of British Immigration Legislation', *Sociology*, 52:2 (2018), pp. 228–244.

[66] Griffiths and Yeo, 'The UK's hostile environment'.

The migration, including asylum and refugee, politics being pursued by the Scottish Government is in sharp contrast. The Scotland Act 1998 established the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh, transferring powers over several core policy areas (such as education, health, social services, housing and law and order) that were previously held by the UK Government at Westminster. Other policy areas, such as immigration (including asylum and refuge), defence and foreign policy, remained reserved at Westminster. However, asylum and refuge are best conceptualised as a 'transversal or polycentric policy area, covering, at the very least, immigration [entry rules], employment, housing, health, education, community planning, naturalisation and citizenship, policing, national security and foreign policy, and operating across multiple layers of government.'[71] Thus, despite 'immigration' being a formally reserved policy area, many levers of policy that effect immigrants (including asylum seekers and refugees) once they have arrived, particularly those related to societal integration, are devolved to Holyrood, whilst the exact boundaries of policy competency between Westminster and Holyrood are blurred.[72]

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[67] Flynn D, 'Frontier anxiety: Living with the stress of the every-day border.' *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture* 61: XX (2015), pp. 62–71.

[68] Gareth Mulvey, 'Refugee Integration Policy: The Effects of UK Policy-Making on Refugees in Scotland', *Journal of Social Policy*, 44:2 (2015), pp. 357-375.

[69] Webber, 'On the creation of the UK's "hostile environment"'.

[70] Antonio Zotti, 'The Immigration Policy of The United Kingdom: British Exceptionalism and the Renewed Quest for Control', in Enrico Fassi, Sonia Lucarelli and Michela Ceccorulli (eds), *The EU Migration System of Governance. Justice on the Move* (Palgrave, 2021), pp. 57-88.

Contrary to the securitised discourses from Westminster, 'the political climate around migration issues is different in Scotland from the UK as a whole'[73], with prevailing messages from Holyrood portraying asylum seekers and refugees in positive, inclusive terms. Whilst the reserved nature of immigration policy makes the Scottish Government's approach important for its symbolism, the shape of devolution outlined above means that certain policy levers are also available to create a somewhat less hostile environment for refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland.[74] For example, whereas integration strategies from the Home Office put the onus on 'them' to ingrate with 'us'[75] – and only applied to refugees, excluding asylum seekers altogether – the Scottish Government's key policies (*New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy,* 2014-17; 2018-2) perceive integration as a two-way process that should begin from day of arrival. Additionally, unlike in England, asylum seekers can access further education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) (removed in England in 2011 when linked to 'actively seeking work'), whilst healthcare remains free for those who have been refused asylum but remain in the country. Moreover, as the empirical analysis demonstrates below, there is a positive culture of partnership with civil society and, whilst control over entry is fully reserved, where possible the Scottish Government have adopted a more generous approach with regards to hosting refugees through UK government resettlement programmes.[76] Yet, despite this difference in approach, it is important to be clear that many of the most damaging and immiserating policies, such as having NRPF and the ban on work, are not under the remit of the Scottish Government to change, meaning that a substantial degree of the hostile environment policy – not to mention that political signalling and its psychological effects – continues to impact on asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland.

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[71] Mulvey, 'Refugee Integration Policy', p. 363.

[72] Gareth Mulvey, 'Social Citizenship, Social Policy and Refugee Integration: A Case of Policy Divergence in Scotland?', *Journal of Social Policy*, 47:1 (2019), pp. 161-178. To highlight these complex, blurred boundaries, as asylum policy is reserved, housing for asylum seekers is provided by UK government contracted agencies. Yet, housing is a devolved issue, meaning this accommodation must meet minimum standards set by the Scottish Government. Once refugee status is granted, Scottish housing policy becomes fully dominant, with refugee housing rules varying from those in England.

[73] Mulvey, 'Refugee Integration Policy', p. 373.

[74] A full treatment of the Scottish Government's own contestation of the UK Government's securitisation of immigration, asylum and refuge, including the many hypotheses as to why it is being pursued

In sum, this brief overview highlights that the UK Government's securitisation of asylum and refugees at the level of discourse, policy and practice has, alongside myriad other effects, institutionalised poverty, precarity and skill erosion, whilst generating a prevailing signal of exclusion and unwelcome. Yet, in Scotland, a different asylum and

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(economics, demographics, state-building) and how it is facilitated (political culture, public attitudes) is beyond the scope of this article. Future attention will be useful to further illuminate the intricacies of both 'UK' migration policies and sub-state actors' roles in securitisation processes.

[75] Mulvey, 'Refugee Integration Policy'.

[76] Angus Howarth, 'Scotland takes twice UK average of refugees', *The Scotsman* 23 September 2019, available: {https://www.scotsman.com/news/uk-news/scotland-takes-twice-uk-average-refugees-1407054}, accessed 2 November 2020.

refugee politics is being articulated and, within the blurred and complex lines of devolution, practiced in limited forms. It is in this context that the empirical analysis explores the contestation of the security-migration nexus by NGOs in Scotland. Next, the methodology to conduct this empirical analysis is detailed.

4. Methodology

This article specifically focuses on asylum and refugee politics, with these communities particularly exposed to a 'hostile environment' policy targeted at 'legality' of migration status. Thus, asylum and refugee sector NGOs are an ideal focus to analyse *contestation* of this hostile environment and redress the current overemphasis on *securitisation* processes with regards the security-migration nexus.

The period of analysis spans 2018-19. This timeframe captures a vital period in UK migration politics in the context of Brexit and subsequent debates about the values and identity of 'Britain',[77] whilst a two-year period provides sufficient space to explore the work of asylum and refugee sector NGOs, accounting for the iterative, relational nature of contestation-securitisation processes.[78] Thirteen asylum and refugee sector NGOs were selected as a locus for analysis: British Red Cross, incorporating the VOICES network (BRC); Community InfoSource; Glasgow Night Shelter (GNS); Govan Community Project (GCP); JustRight Scotland (JRS); Maryhill Integration Network (MIN); Positive Action in Housing (PAIH); Refugee Survival Trust (RST); Scottish Detainee Visitors (SDV); Scottish Refugee Council (SRC); Shelter Scotland; Refuweegie; and Unity Centre

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[77] Paterson and Karyotis, '"We are, by nature, a tolerant people"'.

[78] Additionally, the existence and accessibility of crucial documentary evidence was most plentiful across 2018 and 2019.

(UC).[79] Whilst a complete analysis of the universe of organisations operating in Scotland is beyond the scope of this study, the sample of organisations aims to provide a reasonable cross-section of the sector in an attempt to create as holistic and broadly representative an analysis of contestation activity and practice as possible – deemed vital to ensure fairness for the comparative design outlined below. Thus, the sample includes the largest actors in the sector, smaller organisations, organisations with wide, diverse aims, single-issue organisations, and organisations where lived experience is foundational.[80]

It is important to address a delicate methodological question. Channelling classic concerns over the elasticity of 'security' and the potential for this to undermine its analytical usefulness as a concept, the question of what 'counts' as practices of contestation emerges. In short, if everything is contestation, then is nothing contestation? This is a vital question, and not one that can be treated fully here. Yet, in brief, in a setting of institutionalised securitisation as found in the UK, with the hostile environment colouring the entirety of UK asylum and refugee policy, the security drama is clearly underway. It is therefore argued that in this context, engaging in asylum and refugee politics is, even if unintentional, and however subtly, engaging in security politics.[81] Thus, in a setting of institutionalised securitisation, activity from asylum and refugee sector NGOs in Scotland – whose mission is to make the system and its navigation less

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[79] The majority of activity/organisations concentrate in Glasgow, Scotland's only asylum dispersal location (receiving approximately 10% of person's seeking asylum in the UK, with an estimated population of 5,000). Organisations contracted by the Home Office (e.g. Migrant Help) were excluded, as were several long-standing inter-organisational networks (to prevent duplication).

[80] Thus, whilst capturing a substantial element of the contestation terrain, this is by no means an exhaustive or fully representative list. Scholars are encouraged therefore to build on this initial investigation.

[81] To be clear, the mode of engagement (securitising actor, executor of securitisation, functional actor, contestation actor) cannot, however, be known *a priori*.

‘hostile’ – is conceived of as contestation.[82] However, the type (modality), impact and ‘success’ of said contestation, remains an empirical question.[83]

Thus, a two-step analytical process was enacted. First, so that the same empirical phenomena could be approached by the four modalities, an initial open, fine-grained analysis was conducted of the myriad activities of the NGOs under investigation. Each organisation’s websites and online archives were searched to gather a holistic picture of their discursive and non-discursive activity and practice, with the latter predominant. Principally, annual reports, blogs, policy briefs and research notes were utilised, supplemented with information provided on websites. From this first step in the analysis, four broad categories of activity emerge: Direct – Surviving; Direct – Thriving; Indirect – Legislation and Policy; Indirect – Discourse, Narratives, and Public Opinion (see Table 1). The first and second correspond to the provision of direct, immediate support to facilitate ‘surviving’, that is the fulfilment of basic human needs (food, shelter, safety), and ‘thriving’, that is the means for empowerment and flourishing (economic agency, social connections, and skills), respectively.[84] The third and fourth correspond to activities also aimed to aid surviving and thriving, but in less direct and immediate ways, via influencing legislation, policy and public discourse. Whilst the four categories reveal the breadth, diversity and impact of activity, there are, naturally, no hard boundaries between them and activities and practice over-lap and inter-link.

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[82] It is possible to query whether this activity is fairly called *NGO* contestation. It is common, for instance, that a portion of NGO funding (including among organisations under study) comes from the Scottish Government, and these NGOs can directly and indirectly implement elements of Scottish Government asylum and refugee policy (although, the intricacies of devolution mean that this funding is restricted and cannot be used to fund projects that remain the preserve of Westminster, such as provision of asylum housing). Yet, this does not mean that NGOs are merely implementing Scottish Government policy as ‘executors’ of contestation. Beyond the many elements of NGO activity and practice which are not tied to Scottish Government funding/direct policy, the culture of partnership which exists between the Scottish Government and the third sector, and the extent to which NGOs have driven and co-created asylum and refugee policy and practice in Scotland – epitomised by the *New Scots* strategy, see section 5.3 – mean that, in many places, it is difficult to fully disentangle NGO/Scottish Government work. Thus, in the Scottish context, NGO activity and practice, even if tied to implementing elements of Scottish Government policy, is still fairly considered as *NGO* contestation of the hostile environment. Yet, whilst this conceptualisation is argued to be justified in this case, more broadly, boundaries of contestation/non-contestation activity, similar to boundaries between securitising actors/executors of securitisation policies – blurred when considering the role of ‘little security nothings’ in constructing securitisations (see also note 40) – require further theoretical refinement through studies across issue and context. Moreover, whilst beyond the scope of this study, further explicit exploration of the relationship between NGOs and (sub)state actors offers a fruitful pathway forward.

[83] The methodology does not enable robust exploration of the differences between organisations regarding effectiveness in contestation. Although beyond the scope of this study, this offers a promising avenue for further scholarship.

[Table 1 about here]

The four categories of activity which emerged thus double as helpful organisational tools to structure the second analytical step. As per Hansen’s instructions, each of the categories, or more precisely the empirical material within each category, were ‘approached’ by each of the four modalities of contestation in turn. Space dictates that a full account cannot be provided. Instead, key insights are introduced to demonstrate that there is indeed value in adopting a contestation (rather than desecuritisation) approach and in taking up Hansen’s call to conduct a multi-modality examination. It is to the two-step empirical analysis that the next section turns.

5. Surviving and thriving: Contestation activity in Scotland

5.1 Direct: Surviving

The first category of activity which emerged in the step one analysis related to ‘survival’: the immediate, direct fulfilment of basic human needs. Destitution and safety, in terms of both immediate harm and in the context of (oft initially rejected) asylum applications, all central to making the environment 'hostile', dominated this first category.

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[84] The distinction and language of ‘surviving’ and ‘thriving’ draws upon asylum/refugee literature and practice. See Alexander Betts et al., ‘Thrive or Survive? Explaining Variation in Economic Outcomes for Refugees’, *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 5:4 (2018), pp. 716-743.

On destitution, there were several schemes in play which centred on direct provision, the largest being the Destitute Asylum Seeker Service (DASS). DASS, a partnership of several organisations (including SRC, GNS and BRC), coordinates a range of services to generate a holistic response to destitution. To illustrate impact, in 2018-19, DASS provided 392 advocacy and advice sessions, 213 referrals to food services[85] and 52 referrals to specialist health services. In addition, 68 people were returned to Home Office accommodation or support, 11 persons were granted leave to remain, and 11,620 nights of accommodation were provided.[86] In addition to DASS, welcome packs containing daily essentials (e.g. Refuweegie) and direct monetary grants are provided in emergency. For example, in 2018-19, RST administered 1494 destitution grants (totalling £110, 000)[87] and PAIH's 'Lifeline' service provided 957 Crises Grants.[88] Moreover, many of the organisations provide advocacy support with regards to asylum claims, whilst housing repairs and mental health support schemes operate.

With security politics manifesting as an action-reaction game of moves and counter-moves, activity also responded to new security moves. The *Stop Lock Change Evictions* Coalition (SLCEC) provides an exemplary case of spontaneous contestation to support surviving.[89] In July 2018, Serco – the multi-national contracted by the UK government to provide asylum accommodation in Glasgow – announced a new evictions policy: changing the locks on people's accommodation if their eligibility for asylum support had ceased, forcing street homelessness. The lock change evictions (LCE) were set to effect over 300 persons seeking asylum in Glasgow. SLCEC began to form within one week of Serco's announcement, with several third sector organisations and a series of specialist lawyers convening to organise contestation of this policy. By autumn of 2018, members of the Coalition had successfully launched legal challenges which resulted in Serco pausing the planned LCEs. A key move identified by SLCEC as enabling this initial success was the framing of the issue beyond immigration/asylum policy, with the Coalition situating their opposition within a framework of human (and particularly housing) rights. Yet, in June 2019, Serco announced that it would reinitiate the LCE policy and the formal legal battle was finally lost in April 2020, with the UK Supreme Court upholding LCEs as lawful. Despite this outcome, SLCEC had a series of successes and tangible impacts. From those targeted by LCEs, 159 Interim Interdicts were granted, 36 people were assisted back on to asylum support and 10 people were granted refugee status. Moreover, in June of 2020, Mears Group – the multi-national which has succeeded Serco – publicly ruled out ever using LCEs in Scotland in response to SLCEC's campaign.

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[85] GCP, for example, provided 1800 food parcels. Govan Community Project, 'Annual accounts, 2018-19', available: {https://www.govancommunityproject.org.uk/about.html}, accessed 2 November 2021.

[86] Refugee Survival Trust (RST), 'Annual Review 2018-19', available: {https://www.rst.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/RST_Annual_Review_2018-2019_v5.pdf}, accessed 2 November 2021.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Positive Action in Housing, 'Impact Report, 2018-19', {https://d1wt0km90huff3.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/24.-Annual-Report-2018-19.pdf}, accessed 2 November 2020.

As the methodology detailed, the initial empirical analysis to systematically identify the broad NGO activity was followed by a second step, where this same empirical material was approached by each of the four modalities. In doing so, the analysis of direct, survival-focused contestation activities and practice reveals several points. Broadly, the resistance modality was able to identify and best comprehend the survival-focused analysis. In short, these practices act as an immediate ‘counter-force’ – that is resistance – to the security policies of the hostile environment (and are not, for example, seeking transformative change in the vein of emancipation). The others did not provide the appropriate theoretical devices and language, and in simple terms, could not ‘see’ this work. Therefore, had the original research question been approached solely with a modality other than resistance (emancipation, for instance), where the step one analysis was not conducted, this activity would have been ignored. This reaffirms the necessity of conceptualising (de)securitisation processes as a *contest*, rather than a single act or moment. Attempting to mitigate destitution and the specific contestation of the LCE policy, for example, whilst not fully successful in the legal sense, resulted in concrete improvements in the lives of some persons seeking asylum and refuge, partially blunting the sharpest edge of the hostile environment. Had the study been approached from a desecuritisation (as outcome/goal) perspective, this failure to fully ‘terminate institutional facts’ and remove the grammar of security-defence entirely would therefore be classed as a ‘failure’ and/or have been ignored all together. Overall, from the analysis of the first area of NGO contestation activity, one can begin to infer the importance of adopting a contestation rather than desecuritisation (as outcome/goal) approach, alongside the potential blindness of single-modality studies to critical insights.

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[89] Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this paragraph is derived from, 'A Site of Resistance: An evaluation of the Stop Lock Change Evictions Coalition', available: {https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Stop-Lock-Changes-FINAL-VERSION.pdf}, accessed 2 November 2021.

5.2. Direct: Thriving

The second category of activity comprises the other pillar of direct support provided by asylum and refugee sector NGOs, centring on ‘thriving’, pushing beyond the meeting of basic human needs to areas of empowerment and flourishing, responding to the broad social exclusion wrought by the hostile environment and key policies, such as the ban on work. Whilst vast and varied, three themes were central to this work: social connections; skills; and practical life support.

The first theme, social connections, aims to support challenges to psychological wellbeing, such as loneliness and isolation, by creating opportunities for social connections with other persons of asylum and refugee background and local populations. For example, in 2019, SRC launched 'New Scots Connect', a Scotland-wide network of community groups (170 as of 2019)[90] which work with asylum seekers and refugees to support the coordination of activities and the development of best practice through shared experiences, and to enhance the welcome, support networks and connections of 'new Scots'. Several other programmes also targeted social connections, including: befriending programmes with locals ('Welcome Programme', RST), specific men's and women's social groups (GCP, MIN, UC) and a post-detention support group (SDV).

The second theme, skills, captures activity and programmes designed to facilitate the development of skills to support integration and agency, concentrating on language and employment. To supplement statutory provision, several organisations provide regular ESOL classes (GCP, UC, MIN). In addition, RST offer an 'Internship Programme' for refugees and people seeking asylum, with 17 interns placed in 2018-19.[91] Specific grants are also provided by RST to surmount small financial barriers to education and employment (e.g. course materials, travel expenses), with 100 grants distributed (totalling £11,000) in 2018-19.[92]

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[90] Scottish Refugee Council (SRC), 'Annual Impact Report 2018/19', available:{https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Annual-report-2018-2019.pdf}, accessed 2 November 2021.

[91] RST, 'Annual Review'.

[92] Ibid.

The third theme, practical life support, regards the provision of broad support to facilitate integration – in a holistic sense – and empowerment. SRC's Refugee Integration Service and Family Key Work Service, for example, provide tailored one-to-one advice for individuals and families across housing, education, health, learning English and social connections, to support the development of high-quality life in Scotland. In 2018-19, the former supported 1147 users and the latter 181 families.[93]

As above, the second emergent category of activity was approached by all four modalities. In this instance, the emancipation modality proved most fruitful in helping to comprehend this immediate, direct, thriving-orientated work, as the aim is to be transformative and create a 'new state of affairs' (rather than, for example, to resist and 'hold the line' against the hostile environment or to 'absorb risk hazards' in the vein of resilience).[94] That is, the emancipation lens helped illuminate an attempt to create a new security politics with a reimagining of the referent object (asylum seekers/refugees rather than British society), threat (the original securitisation rather than asylum seekers/refugees) and means to achieve security (inclusive, rights-based rather than exclusive, violent practices). However, the activity aimed at emancipatory (thriving) ends are intimately connected with, and appear to rest upon, the resistance-centric (survival-focused) activities identified above and would not, for example, be impactful in a context of destitution. In this empirical setting – with an institutionalised securitisation in place – resistance, as an initial counter-force, does seem a necessary pre-requisite that 'paves the way' for emancipation.[95]

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[93] SRC, 'Annual Impact Report'.

[94] Balzacq, *Contesting Security*, p.139.

[95] Ibid.

Thus, from approaching the second area of activity with all four modalities, the same two points emerge. First, if looking for desecuritisation as an outcome (termination of institutional facts), this activity would have been ignored or classed as a failure. Yet, within a contestation framework, this activity can be identified and seen as having a degree of success, by subtly softening the hostile environment in important ways for a not insignificant number of people. Second, the significance of selecting (or not selecting) modalities is vital. After exploring the first two areas of activity, a combination of modalities (resistance for 'survival work', emancipation for 'thriving' work, for example) offers a more complete, rich vision of the security politics landscape through their capacity to 'see' and make sense of different things. To be blunt, a sole desecuritisation or resilience approach would have very likely failed to effectively capture the activity explored thus far.

5.3. Indirect: Legislation and policy

The third category of activity to emerge was indirect, moving beyond immediate service provision, to aim at longer-term impact, via influencing legislation and policy, to cut against the hostile environment to enhance inclusion and improve access to rights. Certain (often, but not limited to larger) organisations engage across various policy areas which impact on asylum and refugee politics, whilst other organisations are single-issue orientated (SDV and 'detention', for example). Organisations conduct and participate in research, give expert evidence to parliamentary committees at Holyrood and Westminster, work closely with the Scottish Government on legislation and conduct general lobbying activities. Thus, these endeavours span both the surviving and thriving dimensions. Two examples help illuminate this category: the Right to Vote campaign and the *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy*.

First, the Right to Vote campaign, organised by a series of organisations (including SRC, MIN, BRC/VOICES network) culminated in February 2020[96], with the Scottish Parliament passing the Scottish Elections (Franchise & Representation) Act. The act extended the right to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections to those with refugee status, who were previously excluded due to lack of British, Irish, EU or Commonwealth citizenship.[97] Second, the *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy, 2018-22*[98], is the Scottish government's flagship asylum and refugee policy. The vision underpinning *New Scots* is '[f]or a welcoming Scotland where refugees and asylum seekers are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive'.[99] The person-centred, rights-based strategy is designed 'to coordinate the efforts of organisations and community groups across Scotland involved in supporting refugees and asylum seekers'[100] and provide 'a clear framework for all those working towards refugee integration' to maximise resources through partnership and collaboration.[101] To achieve effective integration, 'the New Scots strategy supports refugees, asylum seekers and our communities to be involved in building stronger, resilient communities, which enable everyone to be active citizens'.[102] The strategy was created as a collaborative effort, principally between the Scottish Government, COSLA, (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Scotland's local government apparatus) and SRC, accompanied by a plethora of other actors from across the public, private and third sectors.[103] The significance of the role played by SRC, as one of three principal partners, in shaping the design and implementation of the Scottish government's flagship policy which sets the strategic framework for asylum and refugee politics in Scotland, emphatically demonstrates the impact NGOs can have in securitisation-contestation processes.

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[96] Although beyond the period of analysis, it is deemed fair to include as this is the culmination of a campaign active throughout 2018-19.

[97] The campaign to extend voting rights to asylum seekers continues.

[98] This follows the original *New Scots* strategy (2014-17).

[99] Scottish Government, 'New Scots', p.10.

[100] Scottish Government, 'New Scots', p.13.

[101] Scottish Government, 'New Scots', p.10.

[102] Scottish Government, 'New Scots', p.12.

Turning to the second analytical step for the third category, for both examples, the desecuritisation modality appears most suited and was most helpful for comprehension. Beyond being 'clear of the security-defence rationale', at base there is a deliberate reconstitution of the political community. Creating a more inclusive electoral policy and the significance placed within *New Scots* on welcoming and integrating individuals *from day one* – not only after refugee status is granted – cuts against the hostile environment to facilitate an inclusive, non-antagonistic framing of asylum seekers/refugees and the 'native' population. Yet, *New Scots* also coordinates resources and the activities of organisations across the sector who are involved in direct and indirect 'surviving' and 'thriving' support activity. Thus, there are elements of the strategy where the resistance and emancipation logics are key, whilst resilience (of communities) is also flagged as a core principle. Therefore, in a policy that aims to be comprehensive and circumvent the hostile environment, perhaps unsurprisingly, the logics and strategies at the centre of all four modalities of contestation are present.

Furthermore, the logic of desecuritisation is key to activity in the third category, but desecuritisation has not been achieved. Again therefore, approaching the analysis through a framework of contestation, rather than desecuritisation is vital, as it separates desecuritisation as an outcome/goal (termination of institutional facts) from desecuritisation as a modality of contestation with a specific strategy and focus. In addition, the problematic nature of a single-modality approach is again evident. Resistance, for example, could not – and indeed by nature is ill-equipped to – 'see' the Right to Vote Campaign, meaning that the 'vision' of the security world which would have been produced through the single lens of resistance would have been not so much 'different', in the words of Hansen, as less complete.

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[103] Scottish Government, 'New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy, 2018-22', available: {https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2018-2022/}, accessed 2 November 2021.

As a final point, the above analysis related to the legislation and policy category highlights the problematic nature of conceiving of 'UK' asylum and refugee politics and having a narrow conceptualisation of policies relevant to immigration. The *New Scots* strategy, for example, draws upon a series of devolved powers to attempt to craft a different politics to that of Westminster's central 'hostile' policy thrust.

5.4. Indirect: Discourse, narratives and public opinion

The final category centres on explicit engagement with the discursive environment and public attitudes. This can broadly be conceptualised as 'public knowledge' and 'narrative' work (although both overlap considerably), which aims to delegitimise the hostile security-migration nexus.

On 'public knowledge', several organisations produce fact-centred blogs and press releases to challenge (mis)perceptions and ensure the asylum and refugee debate in Scotland and the UK is based on accurate data. There is, however, important overlap with other areas of activity, with this fact-based work, for example, coupling with research activities and feeding into legislation and policy debates. On 'narratives', organisations can garner (contextually dependent) broad media reach, with certain campaigns reaping substantial media attention. The SLCEC campaign, for instance, curried over 60 'broadly sympathetic' media articles between August and December 2019.[104] This media impact supplements their own social media outreach, which is not insignificant.[105] Beyond broad media work, the annual Scottish Refugee Festival (SRF) sits as a key example of narrative-shaping practice. Produced and coordinated by SRC, the festivities span two weeks in June, with events taking place across Scotland. The festival celebrates the contribution of asylum seekers and refugees and aims to facilitate cultural knowledge exchange and build bridges between communities via art, dance, food and the sharing of ideas. Thus, '[i]t is not only a festival, it is a campaign for a fair and just asylum system and a movement of people dedicated to making Scotland a welcoming and peaceful place to live'.[106] In 2018-19 there were over 10,000 participants and attendees involved.[107]

The SRF is neat example to conclude the empirical analysis for two reasons. First, the festival, and discourse/narrative-facing activity more broadly, captures the challenges of separating out the modalities of contestation, thus demonstrating the importance of a comparative approach. True, a major goal of the discursive work is to challenge exclusive, hostile narratives and opinion, in other words, to reconstitute the political community in the vein of desecuritisation (the SRF epitomising this as a strategy). Yet, other discursive interventions were not 'seen' or usefully understood by the desecuritisation modality. Instead, certain discursive interventions were identified and understood through the emancipation, resilience and resistance modalities, particularly when their purpose was to amplify certain activity. The media coverage of the resistance-focused SLCE campaign is case in point. Again, therefore, a single modality approach is likely to produce a less complete, skewed vision of the contestation terrain. And once more, had a desecuritisation (as termination) framework been utilised, then this broader narrative work and practices such as the SRF would have been ignored or deemed to have been unsuccessful.

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[104] SLCEC, 'A Site of Resistance'.

[105] SRC, for example, have over 25,000 followers on twitter (for context, the largest opposition party, the Scottish Conservatives have 45,000).

[106] Refugee Festival Scotland, 'About', available: {https://www.refugeefestivalscotland.co.uk/about/}, accessed 2 November 2020.

[107] SRC, 'Annual Impact Report'.

5.5. Contesting security: Multiple modalities, situating success

To round off the empirical analysis, it is necessary to briefly reflect upon the value of the comparative design as well as notions of impact and 'success' in the context of contestation. First, taking up Hansen's call and using all four modalities of contestation to approach the same empirical phenomenon was a revealing and valuable exercise. By applying this 'comparative' design, the significance of selecting one modality (or the other) is clear. Adopting a single modality framework to guide the analysis – absent the 'first step' taken in this article to enable the four-way application of modalities to the *same* empirical material – certain activity and practice would have been missed and misunderstood. The former due to the fact certain activities were not readily 'seen' by all lenses, the latter because some modalities offered more helpful ways of interpreting and understanding the activities and practice.

The comparative approach also revealed some key relationships between the modalities, namely that emancipation does appear to require a bedrock of resistance, perhaps particularly when securitisations are institutionalised. Additionally, and most intriguingly, are instances of activity and practice which are broad in scope, such as the *New Scots* strategy, where the politics of all modalities are visible simultaneously. In short, actors in the sector do not operate within the logical and strategic confines of one single modality. Indeed, the diverse activity and practice revealed in the above four broad categories of contestation that is being pursued by asylum and refugee sector NGOs, demonstrates clearly that many different logics and strategies are in play. Further multi-modality studies across issue and context are an essential next step to build on this initial foray as it is plausible these combinations are potent strategically, yet, potentially, activity and practices tied to one modality may undercut or work at cross purposes with another.

This complexity also has implications for how we think about impact and 'success' regarding contestation. A simple means to assess impact is to take seriously the counter-factual: if the organisations under study did not exist and operate, how would the lives of persons of asylum seeking and refugee background have been affected? What would the legislative frameworks and policy terrain look like in Scotland? How would public discourse on asylum and refugees shape up? With the empirical analysis demonstrating that diverse contestation activity is occurring and making tangible impacts, the answer across all three questions appears to be, 'less favourable'. With securitisation research increasingly demonstrating the often iterative, non-decisive nature of securitisation, taking seriously the iterative, non-decisive contestation of these discursive, and especially non-discursive, processes, is imperative. More plainly, had the author not approached the phenomena through a general framework of contestation, and had instead been looking for desecuritisation, that is the full-scale termination of securitising policies and structures, much of this vital activity would have been overlooked or viewed as unsuccessful. Thus, the question of how to conceptualise 'success', both in securitisation studies more broadly, as well as in the particular study of contestation involving non-state, non-elite and/or atypical actors in security processes, requires greater refinement. One path forward may be to follow a key distinction between (de)securitisation moves and (de)securitisation itself[108], where *contestation moves* capture attempts to contest, whilst the *success* of contestation, can take myriad forms. A starting point therefore may be to approach success in a context-specific, modality-specific way, with in-depth, fine-grained empirical analyses being required to unpack the extent of the success (or otherwise) of contestation moves.

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[108] See Buzan et al., *Security*, p. 25; Vuori, 'Religion bites', p. 191.

6. Conclusion

This article aimed to explore the other side of the coin with regards to the security-migration nexus, to sharpen the theorisation of contestation of the securitisation of migration in particular, and of security politics in general, unpacking fundamental questions of who can and does contest, what contestation looks like, and what impact contestation may and does have. Using the UK-Scottish context of the hostile environment as an illustrative case study, the article zeroed in on asylum and refugee sector NGOs as a set of non-state actors engaging in a context of institutional securitisation. Focussing in on asylum and refugee politics, the first step of the empirical analysis demonstrated that asylum and refugee sector NGOs are engaged in work that can be conceived as contesting the hostile environment across four broad categories: Direct – Surviving; Direct – Thriving; Indirect – Legislation and Policy; Indirect – Discourse, Narratives, and Public Opinion. Beyond revealing the variety and scope of the activity, the analysis demonstrated meaningful, tangible impacts at the level of the individual and the broader policy environment. The article then applied a comparative design, taking up Hansen's call to approach the same empirical phenomenon with all four modalities of contestation. By mapping the contestation terrain, and deploying all four modalities, three central implications emerge.

First, the article has contributed to refining the theorisation of contesting security in two principal ways. On the one hand, the empirical analysis demonstrated that adopting a general contestation framework – and moving beyond studies looking for ‘desecuritisation’ – is essential. Whilst full scale dissolutions of securitisations are unlikely to occur frequently (especially where securitisations are institutionalised), this does not mean that securitisations are fixed, unchanging and uncontested. Thus, a contestation approach can reveal important political dynamics which may, if looking for desecuritisation as an outcome/goal, be missed, ignored or (mis)classified as unsuccessful. On the other hand, applying Hansen’s ‘comparative’ design revealed that modalities can and do provide different visions of the security world in that, depending on the precise empirical activity or practice under examination, certain modalities are less equipped to ‘see’ or offer a helpful framework for interpretation and understanding. The diversity of contestation activity and practice identified by the first step in the analytical process makes clear that single-modality studies will neglect vital contestation dynamics, underlining the high-stakes of adopting one modality or the other. Further studies using the comparative design, across issue and context, are a critical next move to build on this initial foray to generate deeper insights into the empirical phenomena under investigation and gain a more complete picture of the relationships between modalities.

The second implication cuts across theory and methodology. The empirical analysis has demonstrated the value in adopting a predominant focus on non-discursive mechanisms (which formed the majority of NGO activity and practice) as well as attending to non-state actors who are well placed to, and perhaps most likely to, engage in contestation. Focussing on non-discursive mechanisms of securitisation in addition to discursive moves has had a profound impact on securitisation studies, providing a more holistic theory, highlighting the iterative nature of security construction and showcasing the importance of non-exceptional legal instruments, bureaucracy and routines. Bringing these two insights to bear on studies of contestation will ultimately help to rectify the imbalance of attention in securitisation studies between *constructing* security and *contesting* security, especially in contexts where actors lack the power and privilege to speak and directly enact policy, and whereby everyday, direct action forms a central pillar of their work. With the focus on NGOs in this article undermining simplistic notions of securitisations as wholly fixed, and thus providing a more holistic picture of the security-migration nexus in the 'UK', considering which actors are best placed to engage in impactful contestation is key to future research.

Finally, this article makes an important contribution to the understanding of UK asylum and refugee politics, with implications far beyond UK shores. Previous scholarship has obscured the complexity of the picture by making two assumptions. First, by conceptualising impact solely with regards to policymaking, and second, conceiving Westminster policies as capturing 'UK' asylum and refugee politics. As analysis of the Scottish case has shown, both are problematic. The former assumption fails to account for direct, everyday contestation activity and practice by non-state actors, cloaking important work which is having tangible effects. Rectifying this narrow approach is therefore critical to provide more comprehensive understandings of security-migration politics throughout the UK (and beyond). The latter assumption overlooks the fact that in multi-level political systems, where policy areas that impact on broader asylum and refugee politics are devolved, there can be meaningful, considerable deviation from the central policy direction of state governments. As such, disaggregating 'UK' analyses of migration is a fruitful direction of travel; a lesson equally valuable beyond the UK context. In short, a productive pathway forward exists for scholars to zoom in on multi-level governance structures, identify which policy levers are available to devolved administrations that impact on elements of 'migration' policy (widely understood), explore whether and how these levers are being used to contest (or introduce/reinforce) securitisations, and unpack what role NGOs and other civil society organisations are playing in exploiting opportunities to impact on securitisation processes. Powerful sub-state governments and states with federal systems are an obvious starting point, yet that is not to say that non-federal states with regional or city-level devolution will not also hold certain relevant policy levers. Country and regional specialists employing fine-grained analyses will thus prove fruitful in providing more comprehensive understandings of securitisation processes. In a context of hostile migration politics globally, the demonstrated capacity of NGOs to work effectively with a sympathetic devolved administration to contest and create a more inclusive migration politics offers an encouraging template for broader change.

	Direct: Surviving	**Direct: Thriving**	**Indirect: Legislation and Policy**	**Indirect: Discourse, Narratives and Public Opinion**
Purpose	Support basic human needs	Support agency/flourishing	Support basic human needs; agency/flourishing	Support basic human needs; agency/flourishing
Means	Direct provision of services	Direct provision of services	Influence policy levers; legal tools	Public engagement
Examples	• Destitution support (DASS) • Case work support	• Social connections (social groups, befriending) • Skill development (internship programmes; education/employment grants) • Integration support (Integration Service; Family Key Work Service)	• *New Scots* Strategy • Right to Vote campaign • Public reports, parliamentary evidence, lobbying	• Scottish Refugee Festival • Public reports • *New Scots* Strategy

Table 1. Four categories of contestation activity by Scottish asylum and refugee sector NGOs.