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“How about Asylum Seekers who are Homeless?” The Racialised Logics Behind State Designed Strategies of Containment and Control During Covid-19 and Anti-Racist Alternatives: A Glasgow Case Study

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Abstract

This paper asks two questions: How has the Covid-19 pandemic been experienced by people seeking asylum who are subjected to United Kingdom (UK) State designed-in destitution? And what might be the alternatives to State produced destitution? To answer these questions, we draw on two case studies from Glasgow, a city unique in the UK for its long history of asylum dispersal and its deeply embedded ecology of third-sector support and asylum advocacy work. We argue that to understand the segregatory power of dispersal and tiered welfare provision as forms of violent migration governance, centring the racialised logics at play is imperative. This provides the framework for developing anti-racist approaches to supporting people made homeless through destitution by design. Using case studies, we explore how the UK Government’s use of ‘emergency hotel accommodation’ for people seeking asylum who are already homeless or are at risk of homelessness, are becoming normalised strategies of containment for racialised others and an extension of the distributed violence of dispersal accommodation that long pre-dates the pandemic. We offer an alternative advocacy-led and rights-based approach to secure refuge for people made homeless by the State.

Keywords

Destitution by design; emergency accommodation; dispersal and asylum; racialised logics, containment and control, anti-racist praxis

Introduction

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) Pandemic has amplified the long embedded and harshly endured locked-out effects of State designed-in destitution faced by people seeking asylum in the UK. Dispersal is the UK Government’s approach used to allocate accommodation for people seeking asylum while they wait for a decision on their application for refugee status and subsequent right to remain. Since its introduction in the 1999 Immigration

and Asylum Act, compulsory dispersal as a housing response has been both coercive and restrictive, provided by the State on a no-choice basis, with refusal being an act of intentional homelessness. Darling (2022a) describes this dispersal as a ‘system of suffering’, of distributed violence, one that is both slow and extensive and that reaches across and draws in individuals from local government and private contractors to support services and community organisations.

The UK asylum system was already in a state of fragility prior to the pandemic and Covid-19 exposed, and in some instances, has perpetuated systemic failures which remain intact today. These include the lack of support in well-being and mental health, people not having access to bank accounts, the inability to work, which sustains poverty, and the extended decision-making process on asylum claims, all of which contribute significantly to social isolation and exclusion. There is growing interest and understanding about the specific consequences of Covid-19 pandemic responses for people seeking asylum and those with no recourse to public funds (Spiritus-Beerden et al., 2021), and we are beginning to learn more about the increased stigmatisation and racism during the pandemic which will have impacted their access to support services, including healthcare (Finley et al., 2022; Guma et al., 2022; World Health Organisation [WHO], 2021).

This paper focuses on two questions: How have people seeking asylum who are subject to UK State designed destitution experienced the Covid-19 pandemic? And what might be the alternatives to State produced destitution within the pandemic context but also post-pandemic? Drawing on two case studies, we will explore how the UK Government's response to homelessness - the use of 'emergency hotel accommodation' - is an extension of the kind of distributed violence of dispersal accommodation that pre-dates the pandemic. Central to our analysis are the racialized logics underpinning the categorization of people seeking refuge into different statuses attached to the process of application and recognition of asylum, which produces a hierarchical order, one that Rodríguez (2018) describes as "*reminiscent of the orientalist and racialized practices of European colonialism and imperialism.*" This paper's contribution to the literature on asylum destitution and homelessness is threefold: we will (1) apply a racialised logic analysis to asylum housing and welfare provision in the UK, (2) examine hotel accommodation as a form of detention by stealth that maps onto racialised strategies of containment of people at risk of destitution, and (3), following Brown et al. (2022), advance

understanding of how to provide restorative environments as an alternative to asylum homelessness, as anti-racist praxis.

To understand the present Covid-19 pandemic context, we must begin by looking back to how the UK Government has used and implemented asylum dispersal in the UK. This will demonstrate how the policy responses created by the UK Government, which managed people seeking asylum during the pandemic, are entrenched in longstanding practices of neglect and violence that predate Covid-19.

Dispersal as a Central Asylum Policy and What It Means for Housing and Homelessness

Dispersal, the immigration policy of enforced placement of people seeking asylum across the UK with varying degrees of rights and entitlements, has a long history in UK immigration legislation. Alongside detention and deportation, it has tended to be used in response to events or perceived 'crises', such as wartime concerns over alien 'spies' or the arrival of a significant number of refugees fleeing conflict or political upheavals (Bloch & Schuster, 2005; ICAR, 2005; Robinson & Coleman, 2000; Robinson, 2003; Schuster, 2004). The UK Government implemented dispersal programmes for quota refugees for Ugandan Asians and Vietnamese in the 1970s and Bosnians and Kosovars in the 1990s. These programmes of refugee resettlement share several characteristics: first, these were mainly mono-national groups, although they were, of course, internally diverse. Second, dispersal was used in response to specific geopolitical events or 'crises' and connected to quota programmes, and so was an occasional tool of refugee resettlement. Third, these cohorts were already categorized as refugees at the point of arrival in the UK, allowing them to work, study and move on if they chose. Most recently, we have seen versions of tightly controlled dispersal of quota refugee resettlement with Congolese families in Motherwell in 2005 via the Gateway Protection Programme (Piacentini, 2018), Syrian refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) in 2017, and Afghan Resettlement Schemes¹ (ACRS and ARAP) in

¹ [Afghan citizens resettlement scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) and [Afghan Relocations and Assistance](#)

[Policy: further information on eligibility criteria, offer details and how to apply - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

2021. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 forced millions of Ukrainians to flee for safety. The UK Government announced the Ukraine Family Scheme,² a complex and poorly devised programme subject to wide criticism on the grounds of safeguarding and processing times, allowing applicants to join family members or extend their stay in the UK for up to three years, with the right to live, work and study in the UK and have access to public funds. It has also introduced the Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme³ for Ukrainian nationals and their family members to come to the UK if they have a named sponsor. It is worth noting that in every iteration of dispersal since the 1990s, the UK Government has and continues to rely heavily upon the voluntary sector for much of the resettlement work of dispersed programme refugees (Darling, 2022a, 2022b; Joly, 1996; Wren, 2004).

However, to understand the dispersal of people seeking asylum (via what has been described by Burns et al. (2022) as 'dispersal pathway'), we need to go back to the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. This is where dispersal as a migration management tool shifted from the margins to the centre of asylum policy. The legislative intention was that by the distribution of people on a no-choice basis across the country, no area (or its housing) would be 'overburdened' by the obligation of supporting people seeking asylum, but also that people would not be 'pulled' by already existing social networks. At its core, dispersal is anti-integration (Burns et al., 2022). People are first moved to initial accommodation while their application for asylum support is processed. People are moved on to dispersal accommodation if an application is processed and approved. The 1999 Act was particularly distinctive in its corrosive nature of rights and entitlements, creating a multi-tiered asylum provision system. As Liza Schuster put it: *"deportation, detention, dispersal, and destitution have historically been used in different combinations and at different times when thought necessary to control or manage immigrants. What links all four strategies is their exclusionary nature"* (2005, p. 608). Dispersal has always been driven by a national trend of housing-led 'resettlement' in primarily vacant, substandard high-rise accommodation in

areas of multiple deprivations (Anie et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2022; Hynes, 2011; Robinson, 2003; Schuster, 2005; Wren, 2004, 2007). Dispersed people have continuously been met with the harsh reality of living in poor-quality housing, riddled with dampness, infestations, second-hand appliances and inadequate heating (Anie et al., 2005; Armstrong et al., 2020). Local authorities played a key role in asylum housing until 2012, when housing was contracted exclusively to private providers, including Serco, G4S, and Mears in Scotland. Since 2014, private housing providers have found it increasingly difficult to meet dispersal demand (Darling, 2022a, 2022b). One consequence of this has been a growing use of temporary accommodation in hotels until dispersal accommodation is available, and as a result, local authorities had much less influence over housing conditions. Housing continues to be outsourced to the private sector and has become a multi-million-pound profit-making business, despite considerable reporting on the uninhabitable housing conditions (investigative journalist Clare Sambrook (for example, Sambrook, 2014) has written extensively on asylum housing and see Brown et al. (2022) for an extensive evidence synthesis on housing for refugees).

Welfare provision in the 1999 Act removed the right to work and states that a person 'subject to immigration control' - undocumented people and most migrants with time-limited visas in the UK - shall have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). The NRPF condition prohibits access to most mainstream benefits, such as Universal Credit and child tax credits, as well as local authority housing assistance. The 1999 Act also removed all remaining mainstream welfare benefit entitlement from all asylum applicants (maintenance is provided at 70% of standard benefit levels). At present, it amounts to £40.85 per single person weekly, an amount that has had an uplift in pennies since 2000 and a pandemic-related uplift of twenty-six pence. Welfare support has been implemented in multiple ways since 1999, including cash benefits with a luncheon voucher system (which was repealed for most people seeking asylum because of campaigning efforts in 2001, although low levels

² [Apply for a Ukraine Family Scheme visa - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

³ [Apply for a visa under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme \(Homes for Ukraine\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

of financial support continue) to the reintroduction of vouchers as to the current use of cashless credit with pre-loaded payment cards (Hynes 2011; Schuster 2004).

Destitution is legally defined within Immigration Law as circumstances wherein a person does not have adequate accommodation or means of obtaining it, regardless of whether living needs are met by the State. Destitution also includes circumstances where a person does have adequate accommodation or means of obtaining it but cannot meet other essential living needs (Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999). The above discussion demonstrates that the violence imposed by destitution - through the twin policies of dispersal and segregated welfare support - is designed into asylum policy. Moreover, the pandemic context has amplified the already abject experience of people purposefully made vulnerable by the State who are trying to survive the asylum process. For many, pandemic-related lockdown meant a continuation and amplification of prior forms of exclusion (Armstrong et al., 2020). All these asylum migration management mechanisms taken together have achieved their central aim of segregation designed in and integration designed out (Burns et al., 2022) via the creation of a two-tiered welfare support system between UK citizens and people seeking refuge, which the UK government argues, acts as a deterrent. Dispersal is a violent imposition (Darling, 2022a), and its accompanying welfare system has been subject to judicial review⁴ as well as criticism by statutory regulators⁵, parliamentary committees⁶, devolved governments⁷, refugee rights NGOs⁸ and extensively in public interest journalism⁹.

The Racialised Logic of Dispersal: Segregation, Confinement, and Destitution by Design

The multiple outcomes and effects of this dispersal-centred approach to managing asylum has been widely studied across disciplines, including analyses of connections between dispersal, racism and xenophobia, social exclusion, healthcare, destitution, legal rights, and access to supports, indeed all areas of life that shape ones' experience of making a new place home. Following Finney et al. (2019), it is our contention that central to understanding the segregatory power of dispersal and tiered welfare provision as forms of violent migration governance, we need to understand the racialised logics at play in four distinct but overlapping ways.

First, the use of dispersal as an integral 'migrant management' tool for people seeking asylum (and not, significantly, refugees) constructs the "asylum seeker" as a distinct type of racialised migrant and 'burden' requiring a separate set of solutions. It is worth noting Antoine Pécoud's work, which suggests that in the daily rational-technocratic discourses of migration governance and management that has emerged post-Cold War and 'created to orient a policy-minded audience to migration as a problem that can be catalogued and then solved', there is hardly a reference to the colonial roots that have shaped contemporary migration patterns (Pécoud, 2015, p.vii). Dispersal has become a keyword of asylum governance-speak focused on ordering and sorting and resolving. It is ultimately a two-pronged strategy of *containment* imposed on racially minoritized people who migrate outside of refugee resettlement quota regimes (Bloch et al., 2013) and of *control* over 'national resources'

⁴ *Asylum Support Rates - The Migrants' Law Project*. (2020, February 12). The Migrants' Law Project. <https://themigrantslawproject.org/case/asylum-support-rates-refugee-action/>

⁵ *COMPASS contracts for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers*, National Audit Office, 20 December 2013. [10287-001-accommodation-for-asylum-seekers-Book.pdf](https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/10287-001-accommodation-for-asylum-seekers-Book.pdf) ([nao.org.uk](https://www.nao.org.uk))

⁶ *Asylum accommodation*. Twelfth Report of Session 2016-17. Report, House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Asylum 17 January 2017, [Asylum accommodation](https://www.parliament.uk/publications/54240/1/asylum-accommodation) ([parliament.uk](https://www.parliament.uk))

⁷ *A broken asylum system*. The Scottish Government. (20 April 2017). <https://www.gov.scot/news/a-broken-asylum-system/>

⁸ *Written evidence to the Inquiry into destitution, asylum and insecure immigration status in Scotland*, conducted by the Equalities and Human Rights Committee of the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Refugee Council March 2017. Scottish Refugee Council. [scottish-refugee-council.pdf](https://www.scottish-refugee-council.org/parliament-scot) ([parliament.scot](https://www.parliament.scot)). https://archive2021.parliament.scot/S5_Equal_Opps/General_Documents/scottish_refugee_council.pdf

⁹ Asylum seekers forced into homelessness by paperwork delays, study finds. K. Lyons, *The Guardian*. 9 July 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/10/asylum-seekers-forced-into-homelessness-support-applications>

and the so-called relationship between housing crisis and migration (amongst other 'national resources') which obfuscates economic deregulation, welfare retrenchment and housing commodification (Powell & Robinson, 2019). Many of the arguments for segregated welfare provision have been rationalised by the UK Government's position that people seeking asylum are really 'economic migrants in disguise' (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018), chasing economic betterment by accessing provisions of British welfare state, although there is no evidence of this (Mayblin, 2019; Mayblin et al., 2020). As such, racialised logics takes on a 'common sense' approach to managing (or 'protecting') national resources. Consequently, and despite a segregated welfare regime that is ruled by "*the governance of migration based on a range of economic interests and cultural dynamics rooted in the history of the production of the racialized Other*" (Rodríguez, 2018, p.20), the asylum questions come to be depoliticised and deracialised. In this paper, we explore the 'emergency use' of hotels as holding facilities to contain certain racialised people in specific places. Hotel accommodation in this case functions under the same logic as dispersal housing, to confine and control, but in a less apparent way. In this sense it can be described as detention by stealth.

Second, opportunities for 'rooting in' are heavily shaped by 'routes in.' There is a racialised spatial politics of dispersal housing at play demonstrated by the high numbers of people located into what can be described as 'dispersal neighbourhoods' that take on a further logic of territorial stigmatization (Wacquant et al., 2014). The context of reception facing particular migrant populations cannot be separated from the context of austerity, they are both designed to exclude, intimidate and dehumanise. Where resources are stretched or even non-existent, this provides fertile ground for racially fuelled antagonisms, further flamed by a housing crisis and socio-spatial concentrations of poverty. In this context, narratives of entitlement position different social groups as competing for resources. Through the coincidence of being 'a racialized other' with racialized immigration status and being subject to forced dispersal to socio-economically deprived areas, people seeking asylum are constructed - and then reinforced in public and media narratives - as a specific migrant other

taking 'available housing', where housing provision is heavily coded by wider debates around deservedness, belonging and entitlement. This in turns provides the 'rationale' for further exclusionary policies. Such controls on housing, when provided on a no-choice basis - an extension of border control and bordering in everyday life - are coercive and highly restrictive (Hill et al., 2021). Dispersal not only effectively influences and forces the socio-spatial distribution of this distinct, racialised migrant group, it is also used to curtail and restrict the onward movement of refugees. It achieves this through legislation that requires a 'local connection' to be established for onward movement, thus inhibiting possibilities to apply for social housing in other areas of the UK. This may also be described as a practice of containment 'by stealth'. Such restrictions on both emplacement and onward movement evidence the extensive nature of violence of dispersal and raise questions about effective and appropriate support and services, but also about belonging and long-term settlement.

Third, dispersal affects all aspects of social, political, and cultural life and experiences of inclusion and exclusion, most recently described as a system of suffering (Darling, 2022a). Hynes (2011) identified a significant relationship between dispersal locations and the tensions of the structure and process of implementing dispersal, which results in a system that maintains people in the asylum system in a state of limbo. In this sense, dispersal is central to understanding how a context of racialized othering and *non-settlement* (Piacentini, 2012) not only arises but is also maintained by the State as a desirable, if not explicit, outcome of contemporary asylum incorporation regimes. Dispersal then serves as an additional function, namely a controlling mechanism by which the State seeks to restrict advocacy and support work, by undermining opportunities for people to make connections locally, the kinds of 'social bonds' and 'bridges' the Home Office's own commissioned research on indicators of integration has identified as central for refugee settlement (Home Office, 2019). The role of such networks for racialised migrants as integral to successful 'settlement' outcomes has long dominated migration studies literature (Massey et al., 1998; Joly, 1996; Piacentini, 2018; Portes &

Rumbaut, 1990; Wren, 2007; Zetter & Pearl, 2000). Yet, the use of dispersal as a central policy tool to manage migrant numbers suggests that networks are also seen as inherently problematic and damaging in some way, considered by the UK Government as a ‘pull’ for further asylum migration. This produces the following paradox: the State puts mechanisms in place to disrupt networks, whilst relying heavily upon networks to provide essential social, welfare, cultural, emotional, and practical support (see Home Office, 2019).

Finally, the study of racial disparities in housing stretch back to the 1960s (Brown et al., 2022; Neal, 2015; Netto, 2018), and understanding the interrelation between housing and asylum processes exposes the structural racism in housing governance through practices of overcrowding, poor sanitation, and inadequate resources (Powell & Robinson, 2019). The politics of dispersal is therefore connected to a wider series of social justice concerns around housing, inequality, and racialised disadvantage in the UK (Darling, 2022a). Here we can consider how institutional racism operates within the public sector and private third-party institutions offering social support, as many housing services in the asylum system have been privatised. Institutional, systemic racism has equally played a continuing role in perpetuating racial disparities in housing (see Brown et al., 2022). A recent Scottish Government report on the housing needs and experiences of minority ethnic groups in Scotland found that those groups specifically categorised as African, White Other, and Other Ethnic, were much more likely to be living in the most deprived areas of Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021). Moreover, this report recognised that the risk of facing homelessness may be higher for some of the identified minority ethnic groups and that this is caused by recent arrival in the country. Experiences and fear of racial harassment in the social rental sector were identified in this Scottish Government report as barriers to finding safe and secure housing, as minority ethnic groups struggled to secure private rental accommodation in areas perceived as having a

lower level of racial harassment. Limited awareness of housing services and the support available were also found to be significant barriers to safe housing, exacerbated by poor information and language difficulties.

Pandemic Responses to Destitution and Asylum: Strategies of Containment and Control, and Anti-Racist Alternatives

Covid-19 and pandemic-related public health responses have undoubtedly brought new challenges for safely housing people in the asylum process and those with no recourse to public funds. We turn now to two case studies that firstly evidence the violent imposition of UK government public health strategy - hotel accommodation - and secondly offer an alternative solution - 24/7 advocacy-based holistic care. The first case study explores the impacts of the UK Government response to use hotels as a form of ‘emergency accommodation’ and draws from a research study conducted from May to December 2020 on the social impacts of Covid-19 conducted with colleagues from the Scotland in Lockdown research project¹⁰, and several project partners, including Maryhill Integration Network and Safe in Scotland. Our second case study focuses on alternatives to asylum destitution and hotel accommodation as a form of anti-racist praxis. Both case studies focus on the experiences of dispersal pathway refugees. Despite relentless efforts by the State to disrupt settlement practices across the UK, in Glasgow, resistance to the segregatory nature of dispersal is evidenced by the deeply embedded and extensive third-sector local expertise where networks have a long history in the city of providing unwavering support, information, human rights advocacy and campaigning since dispersal was introduced in 2000 (Mainwaring et al., 2020; Wren, 2004). By presenting these two case studies we hope to show how things are and how things could be for people made vulnerable by the State.

¹⁰ “Health and social impacts of Covid-19 in Scotland” study is also known as Scotland in Lockdown. It was funded by the [Chief Scientist Office \(Scottish Government\)](#) and conducted

by researchers at Glasgow University and a range of project partners

Case Study: Pandemic-related Hotel Accommodation as a New Strategy of Containment

This case study draws from findings from Scotland in Lockdown, 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 in the criminal justice system; refugees and people seeking asylum, all in Glasgow via the dispersal pathway, who were at risk of destitution and people surviving domestic abuse or sexual violence. Using multiple methods, the study sought to find out about what their experiences, access to services and information were like and how they were affected by Covid-19 response in Scotland (Armstrong et al., 2020). The empirical data and discussion in this paper draw from our sample of twenty-seven interviews (with an even gender division) with people at various stages of the asylum process and four interviews with project partner organisations in the Third Sector. The case study also draws on the ongoing campaigning and advocacy work of Maryhill Integration Network (MIN), one of the research study project partners.

In March 2020, the UK Home Office, working with the private housing provider MEARS, introduced a contingency housing 'solution'; the use of hotels in Glasgow as a form of temporary accommodation for people recently dispersed to Glasgow in shared community housing or who are considered appeals rights exhausted (ARE) and destitute. People were moved to hotels at short notice and given as little as 30 minutes to pack their belongings without being told where they will be going. People accommodated in hotels had no sense of how long this housing would persist. They were provided with 'full board', which meant reliance on basic hotel food, and meagre financial support was removed. This control directly shaped people's experience of surviving asylum and the pandemic in any dignified way, as these words from people seeking asylum in hotel accommodation show:

"I use the Wi-Fi from the library. The library itself is closed but the Wi-Fi is 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"

"We are asylum seekers, and we don't have enough money to buy masks. It is very humiliating."

"Yes, 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"

It is no surprise hotel accommodation was associated with specific negative impacts on mental health, often experienced as a form of detention. The people seeking asylum we spoke to likened hotel accommodation - as a migration governance strategy of racialised containment and control (Pécoud, 2015) - to prison due to feelings of surveillance and the cramped and confined space.

"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, it was, like, all you need to do is just pray to God to save us and help us through the process"

Fixed mealtimes, loss of autonomy, loss of personal space, controlled and surveilled food access, with life-choices severely constrained contributed to feelings of institutionalisation and of being unofficially 'detained'. Social distancing was almost impossible to observe, and there was little access to Covid testing. In the UK and elsewhere, people detained in hostels and hotels have been routinely placed at greater vulnerability of virus transmission due to lack of sanitation, access to water and 'squalid' living conditions (Finlay et al., 2021; Heller, 2021; Taylor, 2021). Not knowing how long this containment in hotel accommodation would last increased feelings of uncertainty, and created more anxiety, stress, and hopelessness, as this interviewee explained:

"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?"

Participants felt ignored, neglected, and marginalised. For people in the asylum process, pandemic-related lockdown is another form of

life in limbo, where people are unseen and unheard, forgotten and neglected in ways that were different to the wider population. This also bears out in other studies on the impacts of Covid-19 on people in the asylum system (see for example, Finlay et al., 2021). On a profound level for many the crucial experience of feeling forgotten as people who *can* be ignored had not changed, Covid-19 had amplified these forms of abandonment and other forms of inequalities. Brown et al. (2022, p.5) explain “*housing is critical as it provides shelter and security, and a base from which both community and social connections are made, education and employment links are secured, and from which wellbeing grows*”. This not only invisibilises their plight but also obfuscates the racism that rationalises the uprooting of particular people not deemed entitled to security, a base or indeed the wellbeing that is derived from being part of a connected community and from a sense of belonging.

Deprivation of freedom has become a key feature of government responses in the UK, and elsewhere, to providing contained housing ‘solutions’ for people in the asylum system. For example, Crouzet et al. (2022)’s study of how people in France who were previously excluded from sheltered accommodation were offered shelter in empty buildings and hotel accommodation found that people actively avoided communal spaces due to fear of contagion, worsening mental health and disrupting important social networks. The UK Government also increasingly looks to provision via ‘short-term holding facilities’ on a no-choice basis that are not fit for purpose (hotels, army barracks, and a designated ‘Mother and Baby Unit’ that has since been forced to close following a damning report on its cramped and unsafe conditions), but which ‘contain’ the racialised ‘asylum seeker other’.

Hotel detention has also had fatal consequences. At the time of writing, Glasgow City Council’s pause on dispersal is likely linked to a terrible tragedy in June 2020⁷. The use of the Park Inn Hotel in Glasgow as contingency

asylum accommodation resulted in the death of 28-year-old Badreddin Abadlla Adam and multiple injuries to other residents. It was recently reported that he had contacted the Home Office, the housing and social care provider Mears, and the telephone charity Migrant Help seventy-two times about his health¹¹. His cries for help were ignored. One month earlier, on 5 May 2020, a 30-year-old refugee from Syria, Adnan Olbeh, took his own life in another hotel used as emergency accommodation in Glasgow (Burns et al., 2022). His mental health had drastically deteriorated because of hotel accommodation (Akhtar, 2020).

Framed at the time as a ‘public health informed’ approach (Home Office, 2020), hotel accommodation has had devastating consequences. Furthermore, in this current period of lockdown easing, it looks set to remain an embedded strategy of ‘migration management’ across the UK. This is not solely for people seeking asylum but is also heavily used in resettlement pathway schemes, for example, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), and the Home for Ukrainian and Ukrainian Sponsorship schemes. At the time of writing this paper, an amendment to UK homelessness laws states the six-week limit homeless families can spend in B&B accommodation will no longer apply to refugees who have fled from Ukraine and Afghanistan¹². As these new resettlement schemes unfold with tiered levels of support for different refugees, it becomes increasingly difficult to disavow the racialised logics shaping not only governmental but also media and public responses to supporting people in the asylum system who are at risk of homelessness but are deemed less deserving (Brown et al., 2022).

¹¹ *Asylum seeker who stabbed six people in Glasgow “made 72 phone calls before attack.”* K.H. Bradley, (12 April 2022). The Scotsman. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/crime/asylum-seeker-who-stabbed-six-people-in-glasgow-made-72-phone-calls-before-attack-3650878>

¹² *Ukrainian refugees may be housed in B&Bs indefinitely under new laws quietly passed by the government.* M. Bulman, (15 May 2022). The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/ukraine-refugees-afghan-b-b-homeless-uk-b2077849.html>

Case Study: Safe in Scotland and an Alternative Anti-Racist Informed and Rights-Based Approach to Asylum Destitution

As the UK Home Office's largest dispersal area, Glasgow has a unique ecology of grass roots organisations and third sector services. It has developed from a powerful activist scene that draws on lived and learned experiences of immigration control in direct response to the failures of the statutory system and public bodies to support people seeking asylum (see for example, Mainwaring et al., 2020; Wren, 2004). When the Home Office refuses someone's asylum claim, a brutal 'end of process' plays out: negative decisions are communicated, financial support ends abruptly, and vulnerable people are made homeless and destitute, with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Because immigration is reserved for Westminster, the Scottish Government cannot intervene despite homelessness being a devolved matter. In a city like Glasgow, given its activist history, what are community responses to this dire situation?

Homelessness in the asylum community has been largely ignored by the State despite the growing population with NRPF (the effects of which are evidenced in the thirty-seven UK-based third-sector reports on the harmful impacts of asylum destitution since 2003). It was not until 2017 that the Scottish Government's first Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) identified people with NRPF in a strategy to prevent and end homelessness in Scotland. However, community interventions on supporting asylum destitution have been in place for several years prior to this in the city. Safe in Scotland, formerly the Glasgow Night Shelter for Destitute Asylum Seekers, has been supporting people facing asylum destitution since 2011 when activists identified that people were being prevented from accessing the city's emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness and were being forced to sleep rough and make other dangerous survival decisions. Their response was to set up a rudimentary one-room night shelter, open all year round from 8 pm to 8 am, run by volunteers. Despite evidence (see Keenan et al., 2021), and experience pointing clearly at the need to end the use of night shelters due to their lack of dignity, privacy, and associated hardship, the lack of any

alternative has meant that Safe in Scotland has consistently operated at capacity with a waiting list.

In January 2020, Safe in Scotland reached a peppercorn (negligible rent) lease agreement with a housing association enabling the organisation to pilot a 24/7 centre with safe, private, dignified accommodation, hot meals, and spaces for socialising. However, by March 2020 planning was disrupted by the rising threat of Covid-19 and related constraints and measures, including the closure of many frontline services and public buildings, almost overnight.

"How about asylum seekers as well who are homeless? [...] they're not receiving anything from the Home Office. All they have is where to sleep, you know, in the next shelter [...] 7 o'clock, everybody supposed to be out. Where you get your food, that's your problem" (Person seeking asylum, October 2020)

Destitute people with NRPF faced critical obstacles to the 'stay home, keep safe' advice: you cannot wash your hands when public spaces are closed, you cannot distance in a dormitory, and you cannot stay at home if the place you stay is closed during the day (Armstrong et al., 2020). With casual spaces and informal accommodations closed, this once invisible population had become visible. In March 2020, with lockdown imminent, Safe in Scotland set up an alternative, specialist, and envisioned as - short-term, housing solution also using vacant hotel rooms, funded through the Scottish Government under public health legislation. Beginning with twenty-five hotel rooms, this was quickly extended to two full floors with 48 guests and a fully operational support hub. Guests included people from the Safe in Scotland waiting list and the city's Winter Night Shelter (run by homeless charity Glasgow City Mission), and others facing street homelessness. Simon Community Scotland joined Safe in Scotland to provide accommodation and support for other people experiencing homelessness in the city from the same base:

"We were running two parallel homelessness services, and we looked to them (Simon community) for a lot of like good practice around just working with people in that really different setting because the team had never worked in a building that had rooms. So, they were worried

about people being in their rooms and how to kind of keep connection and how to not be too like chapping on doors too much but also making sure that we did know that people were okay. [...] We provided additional cleaning materials for the men as well [...] Refuweege (a Glasgow based community organisation) gave us a pack for everyone, like a kind of sanitation pack so they got that when they moved in and a mobile phone, if people didn't have a mobile phone" (Third Sector interviewee, November 2020)

From 23rd March until 1st December 2020, Safe in Scotland accommodated and supported 177 people experiencing homelessness with NRPF, having shaped an advocacy-led and rights-based model that went significantly beyond accommodation and was embedded by its anti-racist and social justice approach to homelessness support with dignity. Phones and laptops, private rooms with en-suite toilets, and when public health measures permitted, a shared, open kitchen for safe food preparation and storage, and careful attention to ways of keeping connected whilst avoiding replicating a Home Office / MEARS surveillance approach were all key features of this model. Where Home Office hotel accommodation with monitored mealtimes and food provision removes agency and infantilised people, reducing them to dependent aid recipients (Armstrong et al., 2020; Guma et al., 2022; Vogl et al., 2021), Safe in Scotland provided spaces for autonomy and independence. Where the Home Office removed people from communities into isolated hotel rooms cut off from community support with stigmatizing effects (Guma et al., 2022; Wacquant et al., 2014), Safe in Scotland developed and delivered a face-to-face, person-centered, holistic 24/7 wraparound service. This was focused on access to appropriate legal supports, mental health services, and case-work support that sought to re-embed people who have been located by the State at the very edges of society. Because these wider services switched to online care as city centre offices closed in line with Covid-19 guidance, everyone being supported was given access to digital devices, and fast, secure Wi-Fi in situ, which also provided an opportunity for guests to talk to friends and family.

"We knew if we couldn't get hold of people, we couldn't pass on information to them but also there was that the physical community that existed around the old shelter and those social connections, [...] and people just knowing where everyone is and all that kind of stuff, once that gets disrupted or your letter doesn't come from the Home Office because it's gone to somewhere else ...we didn't know when we got the mobile phones at the beginning when we asked for them, we didn't know that everything would be online. We didn't know that the tribunal would go online, we didn't know that casework would be done by Zoom. We didn't know that lawyers' meetings would happen like that" (Third Sector interviewee, November 2020)

As Scotland's main provider of emergency and temporary accommodation to people with NRPF, Safe in Scotland's approach has found ways to get through the cracks of the racialised logics of containment, control and curtailment of freedoms and create alternative, restorative spaces of support, connection, safety and belonging. In August 2020, Safe in Scotland secured funding for an initial one-year pilot, opening individual accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping, to protect people's health and reduce wider transmission of Covid-19. It is important to note that every person using Safe in Scotland accommodation has casework support in preparation for a fresh claim or a decision pending after making fresh submissions. From April 2021 to March 2022, the most common outcome for many of its guests has been the preparation of a fresh claim and the provision of Home Office Accommodation under Section 4. This is where the Home Office provides housing and financial support to a person who becomes appeal rights exhausted (ARE) when their asylum claim is unsuccessful if they do not have accommodation and/or cannot afford to meet their essential living needs. This is a state acknowledgment that they require support to avoid a breach of their human rights, having made further submissions to the Home Office for a fresh asylum claim. What this does is reveal something that is very important about the social justice underpinning dignified housing alternatives for people facing asylum destitution: namely, there is a high success rate for people considered ARE of re-entering the asylum system

once support, time, and space is made available that enables them to gather new evidence, make fresh claims to the Home Office, and improve their wellbeing and resilience to cope with the brutalities of the asylum process. It is in practice a restorative environment (Brown et al., 2022). The strongest indicator of success available is that in 2020 no guests were re-referred to Safe in Scotland. This housing alternative is not limited to dignified shelter but extends to supporting people to find a dignified life. It works to hold the racialised asylum regime, with its normalised systems of suffering (Darling, 2022a) and its flawed ordering and sorting (Pécoud, 2015) and non-integrative norms (Piacentini, 2018), to account. Through coherent partnerships and referral mechanisms between third sector organisations and public bodies, along with modest funding, the disruption caused by Covid-19 demonstrated that it is possible to firstly, end the use of night shelters, even for a population who are usually prohibited from accessing these services, and secondly, create a dignified, restorative alternative. Confronting head on the racialised logics of asylum housing has also shown that once a person has some security and somewhere safe to stay, accessing human rights and resolving complex immigration cases is possible. This can be summarised succinctly, people can access human rights through securing refuge, and secure refuge helps many secure refugee status.

Concluding Comments

The UK mantra of ‘stay home, stay safe’ during the Covid-19 pandemic was tailored to a specific audience which does not include people made to suffer the UK asylum regime, for whom lockdown compounded the deeply felt hostilities and violence of the immigration system. The Covid-19 pandemic sits alongside pre-existing and profound hardship, and Covid-related exclusions add another layer to the many longstanding ways people in the asylum process are made vulnerable by State systems of suffering. One of the most striking things about lockdown experiences for refugees and those in the asylum system is that they are marked in many ways by continuities which further reduce the already limited opportunities for participation in local life (Burns et al., 2022).

Access to safe and secure housing is central to a dignified life. Housing is also central to settlement and making a place feel like home. For people in the asylum process, housing, and the ever-present threat of homelessness through designed-in destitution are issues that have long predated the pandemic and will exist long after. We also know that secure refuge helps people secure refugee status. Poor quality housing, which is continuously decreasing in both availability and accessibility, remains a central issue, and dispersal continues to be characterized by spatial control and implicit surveillance (Darling, 2022a, 2022b; Hill et al., 2021). In this context, strategies of containment imposed on racially minoritised residents and racialised migrants via tightly controlled housing allocations in designated neighbourhoods cannot be bracketed off from the racialized logic of housing policies (Finney et al., 2019).

The UK Government has extended the use of hotel detention across Scotland, despite it being presented as an emergency measure by the Home Office. The implementing contractor, Mears, now uses hotels in Falkirk, Aberdeen, and Perth, with hotel accommodation normalised as an acceptable and embedded form of state bordering practice for people subject to the asylum regime. These specific kinds of containment and control are highly effective at removing people from contributing to and receiving support from their communities, strengthening the disintegrative norm and segregatory power of dispersal. We can see the racialised logic behind the warehousing of people seeking asylum in hotels, if they are indeed housed, being normalised in new ways under new racist policy guises. Another question that goes below the radar is the profiteering from asylum housing (Darling, 2022a) and concerningly, what passes as acceptable for people in the asylum process is becoming deemed appropriate for those arriving through resettlement pathways, with Bed & Breakfast accommodation used to “*help local authorities manage an increase in homelessness pressures as a*

result of two new humanitarian crises”¹³. Racialised logics come to be “rooted in a simplistic, common-sense notion: there is not enough housing to go round” (Powell & Robinson, 2019, p. 6). We question the impact this may have in the long-term for community engagement and integration: is hotel detention contributing to further discrimination faced by asylum and refugee communities? How might this create new forms of destitution?

All this is happening against the backdrop of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, arguably the most regressive and punitive legislation since the 2014 Immigration Act. The UK Government is seeking in this Act to not only overhaul asylum, but dismantle it, and this will include how it ‘processes’ non quota asylum claims via the dispersal pathway. The UNHCR has stated that the legislation could cause unnecessary suffering to people seeking asylum in the UK, impeding integration, and increasing costs to the UK asylum system, and that fundamentally it does not meet the stated aim of improving protection to those at risk of persecution (UNHCR, 2022). Moreover, after a crisis, studies have found an increase of reported discrimination in society towards those that are particularly affected and stigmatised (Guadagno, 2020). This may suggest that there will be a further increase in structural destitution in the coming years. Our ever-present concern is that because the Home Office and local authorities are no longer obliged to accommodate those that the public health imperative forces them to support, there will be a sharp upswing in rough sleeping and a return to survival decisions among people subjected to violent asylum policies and made destitute by the State. The outlook is bleak, and this raises a further question: Can we hope for alternatives to the regressive destitution and impoverishment of people seeking refuge? We believe we can.

Street homelessness has been temporarily eradicated by the unexpected opportunism of a pandemic alongside the achievements of charities and activists. According to Fitzpatrick et al. (2021, p.2) “in Glasgow there was overwhelming qualitative evidence that the goal to drive down city

centre rough sleeping by 75% had been achieved (to fewer than seven people at any one time)”. There is still no funded plan to sustain this transformation and the onus to avert the crisis sits squarely with charities, such as Safe in Scotland. Even within the limits of devolution, the Scottish Government and the UK government must not decrease current funding to inadequate accommodation under the guise of ‘doing something’. Our hope lies in an alternative model, such as the one created by Safe in Scotland, that re-envisioned dignified housing as a restorative environment (Brown et al., 2022) for people considered appeals rights exhausted. This suggests an accommodation solution that shows there is enough to go round and shows what a crucial and progressive alternative to the debilitating environment created by the Home Office can look like. Our hope lies in the space for connected working, and campaigning and advocacy work between organizations sharing good practice, experience, and expertise to create time, space, and personalised support to support a social justice informed and rights-based approach to homelessness. Our hope also lies with a Scottish Government commitment at a policy level to an anti-destitution strategy to prevent and mitigate homelessness among those with no recourse to public funds. This includes asylum destitution, now embedded into its Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan and the Ending Destitution together strategy¹⁴, both providing national vehicles for understanding the social impact and costs of destitution. The consequences of pandemic responses for people seeking asylum and how related policies of destitution by design must be further understood in terms of the racialised violence they perpetuate at both an individual and societal level. Finally, our hope lies in the imperative of anti-racist praxis that informs how we develop the targeted systems and supports needed for people seeking asylum not just in Scotland, but potentially elsewhere.

¹³ *Cold Welcome: Ukrainian Refugees Homeless In The U.K.* The Organization for World Peace. (4 July 2022) <https://theowp.org/reports/cold-welcome-ukrainian-refugees-homeless-in-the-uk>.

¹⁴ The Scottish Government. (27 January 2020). *Ending homelessness action plan: annual report*. gov.scot.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-homelessness-together-action-plan-annual-report-parliament/> and The Scottish Government. (12 April 2021). *Ending destitution together: strategy*. gov.scot. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-destitution-together/>

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