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Cities of Sanctuary in Environments of Hostility: Competing and Contrasting Migration Infrastructures

Aidan Mosselson

Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK, aidan.mosselson@ed.ac.uk

Abstract: This paper analyses the tensions, contradictions and overlaps between supportive migration infrastructures and the generalised anti-migrant atmosphere created by the UK government. It utilises infrastructural perspectives to show how the hostile environment has become an everyday reality that forced migrants have to constantly endure and navigate. As an everyday reality, the hostile environment inheres and comes to life in various settings, spaces, infrastructures and affects. Specifically, this paper documents how government buildings, urban landscapes and houses provided to forced migrants are all conduits through which anti-migrant hostility is encountered and reproduced. It also demonstrates how the hostile environment permeates infrastructures designed to provide support to forced migrants, creating divisions between those providing care and those being cared for, thus recreating affective and interpersonal borders. At the same time, the paper shows how anti-migrant infrastructures are contested and repurposed by activists, demonstrating the processual and always in-the-making nature of infrastructures.

Keywords: migration infrastructures, forced migration, hostile environment, City of Sanctuary, everyday bordering, affect

Introduction

This paper examines the everyday unfolding of the Hostile Environment in the context of Sheffield. It analyses the tensions, contradictions and overlaps between supportive infrastructures and the generalised atmosphere of anti-migrant hostility. A range of supportive infrastructures have been developed in Sheffield that attempt to mitigate the effects of the hostile environment and create a welcoming, supportive city that is open to (forced) migration. Whilst these infrastructures have had some success and help refugees and asylum seekers navigate an overtly hostile and antagonistic setting, the paper also reveals the ways in which the hostile environment and racialised hierarchies intrude into spaces and systems designed to care for forced migrants. It thus contributes to scholarship on Cities of Sanctuary by highlighting the ways in which statist anti-migration practices disrupt spaces and practices of sanctuary. The paper also extends analyses of the hostile environment and everyday bordering practices (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018,

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2019) by drawing explicit attention to the spatial, infrastructural and affective processes that underpin them.

The paper is structured as follows: the first two sections discuss methodology and terminology. Following this, research findings are presented in four substantive sections. The first draws attention to the ways in which pervasive anti-immigration practices are spatialised, forcing migrants to navigate through relentless urban atmospheres of discomfort, fear and anxiety. However, as the following section demonstrates, supportive infrastructures in Sheffield attempt to disrupt the hostile environment and create everyday geographies and affects based on solidarity. Next, the paper examines the contested infrastructures of housing provided to asylum seekers in Sheffield and the wider Yorkshire region. Houses provided to asylum seekers are material expressions of the hostile environment, ensuring that people are never able to settle or feel at ease. However, local activists have challenged the inadequacy of housing arrangements, adopting and creating confrontational infrastructures that ameliorate (although they do not end) the suffering inflicted on asylum seekers. Lastly, the paper highlights the ways in which the hostile environment and systemic harm and violence intrude into and disrupt spaces and infrastructural systems designed to offer care and support to forced migrants. The ways in which racial hierarchies and colonial relations are enacted and reproduced in these spaces further undermines efforts to provide care, again demonstrating how borders intrude into and are actively remade in different social settings. In sum, the paper demonstrates how the hostile environment exceeds a set of policies and government positions, becoming an everyday reality through which life unfolds, even in a City of Sanctuary.

Notes on Methodology and Terminology

This paper grew out of 12 months of research carried out in Sheffield and the wider Yorkshire region. The research was focused on the experiences of refugees engaged in infrastructural labour. The primary data collection method was in-depth, semi-structured interviews and participatory mapping exercises with people who have gained refugee status. I also undertook a period of participatory observation and action research that supplemented these interviews and allowed me to gain a better understanding of processes of securing refugee status and the challenges faced by forced migrants. I volunteered with a charity and spent time in spaces catering to forced migrants, including attending a weekly conversation club and various activist meetings and protests. These activities were also driven by the desire to show solidarity with vulnerable people and engage with the political realities of the research I was pursuing.

Whilst volunteering, I was careful to focus on my role as a volunteer, and was preoccupied with fulfilling my responsibilities, rather than conducting research. Once a month, I slept in a church hall providing emergency accommodation for forced migrants. I was responsible for welcoming people sleeping there, updating the register of attendees, locking the front door once everyone had arrived and switching off the lights. In the mornings I had to ensure that everyone left the building by 08:00 and that the hall was locked and the alarm was switched on.

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Working at a weekly drop-in centre, I provided sign-posting information and advised people about support services available in Sheffield, helped with referrals to local foodbanks and emergency accommodation and distributed emergency cash. When volunteering, I did not take down notes or engage in discussion that was not relevant to the task at hand. In some cases the discussion strayed into areas that were relevant to my research concerns, as this paper shows, but this was never at my instigation. At all times, confidentiality has been maintained and no revealing or sensitive identifying information is included in this piece.

During my research I encountered and learnt from people with different legal statuses, including those who have been recognised as refugees, some with pending asylum applications, and some whose claims have been refused. Although I am sympathetic to those who use "migrant" as a collective term for people who have moved for numerous reasons, including violence, need and/or desire (Georgiou et al. 2020), I persist in distinguishing between people with different statuses, where relevant. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of these terms and the role they play in categorising, governing and separating people, I am painfully aware of the ways in which labels such as "asylum seeker", "refugee", "refused asylum seeker" and "irregular migrant" structure people's relationships to the state and grant them differential access to security, the means of subsistence and abilities to survive. Thus, when these different statuses come into play, I maintain them as ways of situating people in the analysis.

At the same time, these labels and conditions are not fixed. People who have gained refugee status have previously been asylum seekers, and refused asylum seekers are sometimes able to muster enough evidence to make fresh claims, and thus move into a slightly more secure category, at least for a period of time. They are thus all caught up in and regulated by the same processes, and share conditions of vulnerability, deportability and marginalisation with countless other racialised migrants across Europe and the United States (De Genova and Roy 2020). Collectively, then, I refer to people as "forced migrants", again aware that their movements, whilst primarily driven by conflict or threats of violence, are also shaped by aspirations and desires for better lives, and thus are never simply "forced" and without agency.

The choice of the term "forced migrants" is also a reflection of the selective way in which race and migration are engaged with in Sheffield, particularly within the City of Sanctuary movement. Groups working to support refugees and asylum seekers explicitly highlight these people as those whose movement and well-being is of concern to them (Darling 2010). In doing so, although they single out people with particular vulnerabilities and needs, they also neglect other forms of migration and their roles in shaping the city. This, as will become clear in later sections, fits into and reproduces racialised hierarchies where vulnerable migrants are embraced by established (white) communities as subjects in need of care, whilst other forms of migration and inequity are overlooked. The term "forced migrants" is therefore used as a reminder that established groups and citizens choose which types of migrants matter, and whose lives are worthy of consideration (De Genova 2018).

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The Hostile Environment, Everyday Bordering, and Generalised Anti-Migrant Atmospheres

This paper contributes to existing scholarship by highlighting the ways in which the hostile environment manifests in different spaces, infrastructures and affective states. It consequently shows how anti-migration politics intrude into settings dedicated to providing solidarity, support and care to forced migrants. The term "hostile environment" is used in this paper to denote a generalised atmosphere of racialised antipathy towards migrants (forced and others). It has its roots in national policy, but also takes on the form of a specific urban reality in Sheffield (and other cities around the country), as it is enacted and encountered through various practices, experiences and affective relations. Together, they constitute an everyday reality in which migrants are never settled or at peace, but are constantly made to feel uncomfortable, isolated and unwanted.

The hostile environment is generally used as shorthand for a set of policies and pieces of legislation that translate into everyday practices. The combined effect of these policies and the actions they give rise to is the creation of an everyday atmosphere that restricts migration and calls particular groups of people's presence in the UK into question. The legislation that brought the hostile environment into being was explicitly designed to make life in the UK untenable for people deemed to be "irregular migrants", but has since taken on a dynamic of its own, extending harm and hostility to all racialised groups. The term has also become part of everyday parlance and is now widely used to describe immigration policy in the UK.

After the Coalition Government's intentions to "create a really hostile environment" were announced in 2012 (Goodfellow 2019:2), legislation was enacted stipulating that people lacking the necessary migration status would be prevented from working, opening bank accounts, renting properties, obtaining driving licenses and accessing welfare support. The announcement of the hostile environment was accompanied by high profile, public demonstrations of the government's intention to target irregular migrants. Vans emblazoned with the phrase "In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest" were driven through areas with high concentrations of Black and Ethnic Minority (BAME) populations. Whilst the vans have been parked (for now), the hostile environment has been rolled out through more stealthy, pervasive, and arguably more effective and damaging, practices.

A vast array of citizens and everyday interactions have all been enrolled in the UK's border enforcement infrastructure. Members of the public, including bank employees, employers, landlords, medical treatment providers and university and college personnel, are all legally required to check on the immigration status of people attempting to access their services. Those who fail to conduct the necessary checks can be fined, meaning that the general population now has a stake in enforcing the government's migration policies and divisions between citizens and non-citizens are ever-present (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018).

This expansion of bordering practices has affected people beyond those initially targeted by the legislation. This is encapsulated by the way members of the Windrush Generation—people from Caribbean nations who moved to the UK as citizens of the Commonwealth—have been treated. Although they arrived and

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settled as citizens entitled to all the benefits and protections this confers, people whose immigration status has been disputed and who have been deemed to possess insufficient documentary evidence to prove their lives in the UK are legitimate have been denied medical treatment, cut off from social services, lost their jobs, been left homeless and even deported to countries they have no ties with and left when they were children (Gentleman 2019). This ongoing episode demonstrates that the hostile environment has exceeded the original intentions of its creators and is something that people of colour—migrants and British citizens alike—live with and navigate on an everyday basis (Danewid 2020).

The hostile environment, then, is a contemporary expression of the UK's historic antipathy towards migration and people of colour (see Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010; Mayblin 2014). It does not stand alone, but is part of a wider politics and series of policies and practices that do damage to migrants. Since the 1990s, forced migrants in particular have been targeted by a range of policies that are intended to deter them from seeking asylum in the UK or persuade them that they are better off elsewhere, if they do succeed in arriving and making claims.

Starting in the 1990s, generalised antipathy towards migration in all varieties became embodied in the figure of the "bogus asylum seeker", who came to be the target of public vitriol and governmental regulation (Mulvey 2010). Steadily, successive governments increased the restrictions on people claiming asylum in the country. Governments led by Labour (1997–2010), a coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats (2010–2015) and the Conservatives (2015 onwards) all pursued agendas that targeted asylum seekers and stripped away entitlements to public support, made their living conditions increasingly difficult, barred them from working and sought to restrict the numbers arriving in the UK (Mayblin 2019). The fact that this agenda was shared by all the main political parties demonstrates that anti-migrant politics and attitudes are not confined to one spectrum of society, but cross ideological and class divides.

Outside of specific pieces of legislation, there is also a general public acceptance or endorsement of anti-migrant rhetoric. Declining living standards, increased unemployment, failures in public health systems and fears of crime and violence are all blamed on increased migration, making new arrivals in the country, no matter their status or place of origin, legitimate scapegoats for public resentments (Danewid 2020; Virdee and McGeever 2018). Understood in this context, the hostile environment is a generalised atmosphere of antipathy towards racialised groups (migrants and UK citizens alike). It describes an everyday reality in which movement is restricted and criminalised, proactive steps are taken to make migrants' lives in the UK untenable, migrants' presence in the country is constantly questioned and people are subjected to relentless scrutiny and made to feel isolated and in states of unease.

Navigating the Hostile City

As an everyday reality, the hostile environment takes on and is reinforced through spatial and material processes. It is thus a central aspect of the "arrival infrastructure" that permeates UK society. Meeus et al. (2019) use an infrastructural

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approach to argue that processes of arrival are ongoing, rather than temporally fixed. Arrival, like infrastructural systems, is processual, and works through continuous and manifold practices, agencies, materialities and relations. Similarly, the hostile environment isn't static, but is constantly enacted through practices, objects, governance frameworks and spaces. The infrastructural reading of migration also emphasises the materiality, corporeality and sociality of human movement (Lin et al. 2017; Sheller 2014). People do not move through empty space; the spaces in and through which movement takes place are populated by machinery, ICT networks and devices, offices, detention facilities, electronic and paper documents, transport systems and other people, which all combine to facilitate and/or hinder movement. These physical spaces are also filled by governmental and biopolitical systems, ideologies and discourses that come to life through material arrangements and processes (Lindquist 2017; Xiang and Lindquist 2014).

Urban spaces and landmarks can also be considered part of the infrastructures that shape and govern mobility. A building named Vulcan House sits at the centre of the migration infrastructure operating in Sheffield. A large yet inconspicuous glass-fronted office block, Vulcan House is located in West Bar—a redeveloped former industrial quarter of the city, situated on the banks of the River Don. The building is unobtrusive to those who are unaware of its function, and is surrounded by renovated luxury apartment blocks. On several occasions when protestors gathered outside Vulcan House, curious, concerned or confused neighbours looked anxiously out from their windows and balconies at the scenes unfolding below.

To those who are aware of its function, Vulcan House is a site of anger, fear and dread, as it is the Sheffield headquarters of the Home Office Visa and Immigration Service. People registered as asylum seekers have to report regularly to the Home Office at Vulcan House. The frequency of mandated visits varies, from fortnightly, to monthly, to every six months and even only once a year, depending on individual cases. No matter their frequency, these visits are fraught and marked with anxiety. In numerous cases, people have reported to Vulcan House, which has cells inside the building, and have been detained.

Various strategies have been developed to help people deal with the anxiety of going to report. For instance, parents are advised not to take their children with them when attending their appointments, as the Home Office cannot detain people if they have children in need of care. One local charity provides accompaniers who go along with asylum seekers when they are reporting. They cannot prevent detentions but can alert networks of activists and legal representatives to promptly begin campaigning for people's release. During the course of my research, several people with pending asylum claims were detained at Vulcan House, but were eventually released after protests, media campaigns and concerted lobbying. Accompaniers also help people keep track of their appointments. This is crucial as missing a mandated signing is considered a violation of the terms of asylum and can lead to people becoming eligible for removal. Accompaniers also help people navigate an unknown urban terrain, not only helping people find Vulcan House, but also showing them to the clinic and various sites around the city where they can receive support if they require it.

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Through these practices, accompaniers challenge the hostile environment and everyday bordering regime that makes urban space unwelcoming and creates suspicion, division and conflict between citizens and non-citizens. Instead, the support system utilises infrastructural arrangements to enact a politics of presence and protect people's abilities to remain in the UK (Darling 2017). It also provides companionship and care that counter efforts to isolate migrants from the rest of society (Squire and Bagelman 2012) and ensures that reporting processes and navigating the hostile city, rather than being individualising and stigmatising, are opportunities for solidarity.

Dawit, a refugee from Eritrea, vividly describes the damage that can occur when solidarity and support are absent as people move across the city. He recalls riding on a bus when people started verbally abusing him and two young women who were seated in front of him. Whilst he dismisses the abuse as "nothing" or "easy", what disturbed him most was the fact that none of the other passengers intervened or offered the young women any support or comfort. He was new in the country and didn't feel his English was good enough to speak out, making his isolation and powerlessness more severe. With sadness, he recalls:

> They laugh on us. For me it's nothing, it's easy. But I want to give them [two young women] advice. Everyone ignored, they went normal, like casually. I expect some natives at least, they sit near them to protecting or advise them, just to advise them, but they didn't. I feel so sad about that.

In this case, he demonstrates how everyday infrastructures can very quickly become imbued with hostility and serve as conduits through which bordering processes take hold. Division, isolation and the feeling of being unwanted are conveyed through the systems that people use every day, as well as the actions of others who make use of those systems alongside them.

Similarly to Dawit, Samuel, a refugee from Cameroon, describes how attempting to report at Vulcan House alone can be a traumatic, isolating experience. A period of heavy snowfall coincided with the time he was mandated to report. Most of the city was shut down and there was no public transport available. He was unsure if Vulcan House would be open or not, and had no way of finding out, as his phone calls went unanswered. Not wanting to risk missing his appointment, and thus placing himself in jeopardy, he made the two-mile journey through the snow on foot, only to find that the office was closed. He recalls how this induced more panic in him, as he had no way of recording his attempt to fulfil his reporting obligation and was worried about repercussions. As he recalls:

> The worst bit was coming to the Home Office every week to sign. Even when it was snowing. The Home Office doesn't have a means of contacting you, and I would walk all the way from Page Hall [over two miles], until Vulcan House, and Vulcan House is shut, and I'd be like "What should I do?! Are they going to say I wasn't here?!" and you just get confused. I started crying because you don't know what will happen.

This powerful recollection shows how the hostile environment is embodied and spatialised. It is not only the formal interaction with officials inside the building, but the entire journey to attempt to report that constitutes his experience.

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Travelling through the city in harsh weather conditions, not being able to communicate to find out if the office is actually open, standing outside a locked building, anticipating disbelief and punishment, being scared and confused about one's fate—all of these moments are means through which asylum seekers' bodies are disciplined and the pernicious migration regime is absorbed into their identities. As Samuel admits, he still carries these experiences in his body and sense of self. He has established a viable life in Sheffield and is now studying at university. However, the traumas are still with him, and affect how he sees himself, particularly in relation to others. As he sombrely states:

> I see myself as an asylum seeker; it's a stigma that will be there for a very long time. Even when I go to the uni and I sit among people, I still see myself as below those people.

This statement makes it clear that he lives with and through "the hidden emotional politics of bordering" (Meier 2020:2). With this term, Meier draws attention to the ways in which the harm governments inflict on forced migrants creates intimate, emotional realities that people constantly have to navigate and live with. This again re-enforces the fact that the hostile environment operates as more than a set of government positions or legal stipulations; it is an everyday reality that continuously produces borders, subjects and identities and works through material infrastructures as well as affective relations.

Samuel does not see himself as "below" others simply because he is labelled an asylum seeker—he feels this way because of the series of experiences and encounters he has been through, all of which were made vividly real through various infrastructural interactions and experiences. Infrastructural perspectives thus help draw attention to the ways in which migration regimes are operationalised and function on a daily, continuous basis. To say an environment is "hostile" means one has to understand how everyday objects, systems, spaces, interactions and affects come into being and combine to create a set of feelings and identities.

Challenging and Disrupting Hostile Urban Infrastructures

Sheffield is the first City of Sanctuary (CoS) in the UK. Infrastructural systems and interactions bring the CoS and its "culture of welcome" to life. This culture exists through human infrastructures, such as the accompaniers described above, as well as an array of material infrastructures that provide for people's immediate needs. Although the movement attempts to be diffuse and shape the culture of the city in manifold ways (Darling and Squire 2012; Squire 2011), it has increasingly become anchored in designated spaces. A permanent space in the city centre called The Sanctuary is the hub of the CoS movement. It is used to host various activities, including workshops on mental health and wellbeing, English language classes, choir practice, legal services and sessions helping asylum seekers prepare for their interviews with the Home Office. It also provides people with a welcoming place to sit and relax, where they can use computers and enjoy free tea, coffee and warm meals.

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In addition to The Sanctuary, various spaces around the city provide support and care—a doctor's practice specialising in treating forced migrants sits around the corner from The Sanctuary, which is also very close to a church that houses a large charity supporting forced migrants and where a multi-purpose drop-in centre is held every Wednesday. Another church located nearby hosts weekly conversation club meetings. Various other sites around the city centre provide free meals during the week for homeless people (many of whom are forced migrants) and there is also a church hall that is used to house refused asylum seekers who have been left homeless, as well as a network of hosts who offer either long-term, weekend or emergency accommodation in their homes. Together, these spaces provide "mobile enclaves of sanctuary" (Squire and Bagelman 2012:155) and act as the moorings and material architecture on and through which care and solidarity are enacted. Just as the hostile environment is spatialised through infrastructures such as detention centres, border posts and certain houses, the City of Sanctuary takes form and comes to life through the spaces that have been adapted to cater to the needs of vulnerable migrant communities.

During interviews, refugees were asked to draw maps illustrating the places in Sheffield that they visit most frequently or regard as the most significant in their daily lives. The results of these activities illustrate how organisations providing specialist services to forced migrants, including language classes, sport and recreation activities and social support, are the vital infrastructures that make their sense of place and construct their geographies of the city. All the spaces listed above—The Sanctuary, churches hosting conversation clubs and drop-in services, the clinic specialising in treating forced migrants—featured recurrently, as did colleges providing ESOL classes and other places of worship.[1]

Refugees' maps demonstrate the importance of infrastructures and the ways in which they facilitate and sustain everyday life, but also how they animate socialities and affective relations. The politics of welcome enacted by the CoS and other charities would not endure without concrete spaces in which activities can be moored, and would also not be possible without providing for people's material and corporeal wellbeing, for instance through providing medical services, recreation and exercise facilities and food and clothing. At the same time, these material assemblages produce and reproduce relations, interactions, emotions and affect that directly shape people's experience of the city. For example, Sara, a refugee from Kenya, has had largely positive experiences in Sheffield, revelling in the support she has received. She relates that this makes her "proud" to call Sheffield home, exclaiming: "It's best, easy life in Sheffield!" Similarly, Ibrahim, a refugee from Sudan, who has made extensive use of the support available, reflects on how the kind treatment he has received has comforted him: "When someone takes care of you in a special way, like, treat you nicely, that makes you feel happier."

The support services and activities on offer, combined with forced migrants' agency and initiative, create alternative geographies that counter or act in opposition to the antagonistic spatialities engendered by the hostile environment. Together, they underscore how infrastructures made by and for migrants and those who show solidarity with them actively challenge the dominant narratives

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and experiences of cities and create alternative spaces, solidarities, urbanities and affects (Hall et al. 2017). However, these infrastructures also unfold against a backdrop of colonialism, exclusion and white supremacy. Rather than being broadly transformative, they can be regarded as subtly disruptive and offering temporary respite from a wider environment of hostility. The spaces of support and refugees' geographies, although crucially important, are largely hidden, shunted to the margins and revealed only to those who need or make the effort to discover them. Similarly, the solidarity performed by accompaniers is personal and is only experienced by those who directly engage in and benefit from it.

However, in some instances, the city's migration infrastructure has been directly challenged and visibly disrupted. Vulcan House, as much as it is a site of discipline and border enforcement, is also used by activists as a rallying point. During my time in Sheffield, protestors gathered outside of the building to demonstrate against the detention of several people from Zimbabwe (see Figure 1). Activists, including forced migrants, from the organisation These Walls Must Fall also staged a football match in the courtyard outside the building. Here, they were intending to disrupt the regulatory and disciplinary space and turn it into an infrastructure that staged solidarity, unity and inclusion instead. In both cases,

Figure 1: Protesters gathered outside Vulcan House (photograph by the author) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

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activists, like others around the UK (see Cassidy 2020), attempted to counter the pernicious migration infrastructure by creating alternative forms of publicness and solidarity. Whilst intermittent and ephemeral, they represent different forms of infrastructure and affect.

Contested Housing Infrastructures

It is clear then that, although there is a prevailing and often overwhelming state-sanctioned atmosphere of violence and antagonism, infrastructures do not have fixed or permanent meanings. They can be contested, disrupted and repurposed, even if these acts are often covert, symbolic or temporary (Baptista 2019; Lancione and McFarlane 2016). In this section, I draw attention to the role housing plays within the hostile migration infrastructure in Sheffield, as well as some of the ways activists mobilise around and contest it.

Forced migrants' access to housing is predicated on the dispersal system that the government uses to settle refugees and asylum seekers in various locations across the country. It was introduced in 1999 to "share the burden" of accommodating forced migrants across councils in the UK. The Yorkshire region, in which Sheffield is situated, has received the highest number of forced migrants in England, with 5258 asylum seekers being settled in the area as at March 2018. The dispersal strategy builds on anti-immigrant politics and practices by portraying forced migrants as drains on public resources. It also acts as an infrastructure that brings the hostile environment to life. Infrastructure should be understood "not just as a thing, a system or an output, but as a complex social and technological process that enables—or disables—particular kinds of action" (Graham and McFarlane 2015:1). As such, infrastructure is not the background against which life unfolds, but is an intimate and animated assemblage that shapes and conditions social processes. It is thus inherently social, and makes new systems, convivial relations and provisioning networks possible, whilst also creating lines of exclusion, reproducing animosities and perpetuating marginalisation (Pascucci 2017; Simone 2008).

Stewart (2012:26) makes the link between housing provided to asylum seekers and the UK's hostile migration infrastructure clear, arguing that housing forms "part of the apparatus of a restrictive immigration regime" and serves as an additional mechanism of exclusion and deterrence. Forced migrants are regularly settled in impoverished areas characterised by poor housing stock and high levels of deprivation. Social isolation and trauma are exacerbated as people are sent to live in areas in which they do not know anybody and there aren't appropriate services to meet their needs. Researchers have also documented how forced migrants have been exposed to racist harassment, crime and violence, but are unable to relocate (Bhatia 2020; Cassidy 2020). This situation is not only caused by poor bureaucracy, overburdened and ill-equipped local councils and a broader housing crisis—all important contributing factors (Cassidy 2020; Darling 2016; Georgiou et al. 2020)—but should be read as an infrastructure that animates and materialises the government's antipathy towards forced migrants. As such, it acts as a socio-material infrastructure, combining resources, administrative practices,

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policies and ideologies within a network of built, material objects and spaces. It thus plays an important role in placemaking and reproducing subject formations and identities (Burchardt and Höhne 2015).

In Sheffield, the housing which asylum seekers are confronted with is a clear indication of their "place" in the city and the hostility they are met with. Until the end of 2018, G4S, the multinational security conglomerate, was entrusted with a national contract to provide housing for forced migrants, including in Sheffield. G4S is part of a global private security industry that profits from detaining and imprisoning people and also operates checkpoints in Occupied Territories in Palestine, staffs prisons in the UK, and provides security at borders across the globe (Grayson 2016). In Yorkshire, G4S ran the Wakefield Initial Accommodation Centre, the first site forced migrants are housed in before being dispersed throughout the region. The facility has been criticised for unsanitary conditions, housing people in shared rooms where they lack privacy and being inadequately prepared to deal with the various issues and traumas many forced migrants endure, particularly mental health challenges (SYMAAG 2015).

Outside of Wakefield, G4S sub-contracted numerous private landlords to house forced migrants once they were dispersed into Sheffield. The houses provided by private landlords are often dire. Whilst research on everyday bordering has shown how exclusionary practices frequently result in migrants being denied access to housing (see Diatlova and Näre 2018; Yuval-Davis et al. 2018), it is also clear that everyday bordering determines the type of housing that *is* made available to migrant groups too. In this way, we can read everyday bordering not only as a system for denying people opportunities to claim space, but as a system that decides where the appropriate place for migrants is.

The experiences of one person who frequently sought help at the drop-in sessions at which I volunteered provide a clear example of how conditions in asylum seekers' houses communicate disdain and hostility. She is an elderly asylum seeker and has impaired mobility. She therefore requested a house that would suit her needs. Contractors duly provided her with a bedroom located on the ground floor. However, the other rooms in the flat she is housed in, including the bathroom and kitchen, are located up a flight of stairs that she is unable to navigate. She has tried on numerous occasions to be moved to a more suitable flat, but at the time of my writing has still not succeeded. Consequently, her abilities to construct feelings of home are inhibited by the infrastructural arrangements she is confronted with. Always wanting to move but never being able to, she, like other forced migrants around the world, lives in a state of prolonged unease, temporariness or suspension (Bagelman 2016; Squire and Bagelman 2012). Housing, then, not only in terms of where it is located and how it is allocated, but its actual physical state too, is a key apparatus of the hostile and restrictive migration infrastructure.

This infrastructure works on people's bodies and their state of mind and produces physical as well as affective discomfort. Border violence, then, is not only top-down or exercised through state policies and regulation. It is, rather, diffused throughout numerous spaces and settings. As in other cities in the UK, the houses provided to asylum seekers by sub-contractors are often in dreadful conditions. Lack of emergency exits, rodent and insect infestations, mould, sodden carpets,

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leaky ceilings, exposure to asbestos and debilitated and unsafe structures have all been documented (Grayson 2015, 2017; SYMAAG 2015). These are not short-term issues, but deficiencies that accumulate and intensify over time. They thus exemplify long-term patterns and processes of negligence and mistreatment. Whilst much attention focuses on the constant maintenance and repair that facilitates infrastructures (Graham and Thrift 2007), it becomes apparent that ongoing indifference or malicious neglect are also vital elements that animate people's experience of infrastructure. In this case, the hostile environment is materialised through the repair that does not take place, and the effects this has on the people who have to bear the consequences. It is part of the slow violence that the state and its agents exert on forced migrants, as they are made to feel as unwelcome, uncomfortable and unwanted as possible (Mayblin 2019).

Significantly, this deliberate, slow, infrastructural violence (Canning 2019; Mayblin 2019) is exerted in private, domestic spaces. It is off-site and hard to see, just as forced migrants themselves are pushed to the margins of society. However, activists have organised around these domestic infrastructures and sought to make them public. Several public demonstrations were organised in Sheffield to put pressure on the local council to end its association with G4S. Adopting the slogan "Don't let prison guards house asylum seekers" (SYMAAG 2019), campaigners sought to highlight the inappropriateness of allowing the same company that guards borders, runs prisons and (mis)manages detention facilities to also provide housing for vulnerable people who have lodged asylum claims. Activists have also documented the dreadful conditions of asylum seeker housing through numerous, publicly-accessible articles and reports.[2] They have thus created an infrastructure of visibility and legibility that allows the public to peer into carceral, hidden spaces (see Cassidy 2020). Like protestors who repurpose the space around Vulcan House, they turn a privatised, individualising infrastructure into a public one, and use this to gain leverage in their attempts to secure better housing situations for asylum seekers.

These efforts bore fruit when G4S's contract was terminated in 2019 and they were replaced by Mears, a specialist housing provider. However, Mears has inherited G4S's contracts with private landlords and the network of unsuitable homes in Sheffield (and across the country) remains intact, illustrating how material infrastructures have given the hostile environment a state of permanence. The Covid-19 pandemic has also revealed new failures on the part of housing providers. Mears has received scathing criticism for housing people in situations that make social distancing impossible and failing to provide adequate protective equipment and sanitary supplies. During periods of lockdown asylum seekers have also been stranded in private accommodation without Wi-Fi, leaving them isolated and unable to access news, medical information or the necessary materials for home schooling (SYMAAG 2020). Thus, the hostile housing infrastructure endures, and continues to create discomfort, misery and suffering.

Intrusive, Overlapping Infrastructures

Whilst it is spatialised and materialised in particular infrastructures, the hostile environment also exceeds these and permeates supportive, caring infrastructures

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too. This is because the alternative infrastructures, as much as they are sites of resistance, are also implicated in the divisions, inequalities and systemic racism that define British society. Like the hostile environment, this racism is the backdrop against which efforts to create cities of sanctuary and spaces of care unfold. The practices of the CoS movement, in Sheffield and elsewhere, frequently render asylum seekers as passive, marginalised subjects, there to be looked after (Bagelman 2016; Darling 2010; Darling and Squire 2012; Squire and Bagelman 2012). Distinctions between those being cared for and those doing the caring were actively recreated in the spaces in which I volunteered. For instance, in emergency accommodation, volunteers are given responsibility for even the most basic activities, such as switching lights on and locking doors. These rules and hierarchies reduce the agency of people who use the shelter and render them as passive subjects to be looked after, even in the space in which they sleep every night. They ensure that bordering processes and practices are maintained and re-enacted, even if inadvertently. So whilst the importance of care, conviviality and welcome cannot be underestimated, and many people deserve immense credit for their efforts in assisting vulnerable migrants and challenging the otherwise overwhelmingly hostile migration regime in the UK, critical reflection on implicit hierarchies and the ways in which these suffuse infrastructural practices is also necessary.

The above examples also point to the ways in which infrastructures are contradictory and intersect with other infrastructures in unexpected ways. The hostile environment regularly intrudes into spaces of support and shelter, particularly through the affective and psychological damage it inflicts on people. The idea of a hermetically sealed, sacred space of sanctuary has largely been abandoned in favour of a more diffuse, networked assemblage of spaces, practices and activities that signal welcome (Bagelman 2016). However, this also means that spaces and infrastructures devoted to welcome are porous, and are open to influence by external forces, currents, events and atmospheres. This is exemplified by emergency accommodation made available to forced migrants who have been made homeless.

Recalling earlier forms of sanctuary (see Bagelman 2016), emergency accommodation in Sheffield is provided in a church hall that has been made available to a local charity. It is a large, mostly empty hall that is also used for childcare, social groups and even Zumba and yoga classes during the day. Every weeknight at 21:45 a volunteer arrives to unlock the entrance and those who will be sleeping there for the night arrive. Upon arriving, each person goes to a cupboard and retrieves a foam mattress that he lays out on his chosen space on the floor.[3] They then go up a small flight of stairs in a corner of the hall to access a storage space where their bundles of bedding are stored. Each person has their own set of bedding and preferred sleeping spot. The most coveted spaces are close to electricity sockets so people can charge their mobile phones. Once lights are turned off at 23:00, each bed is illuminated by mobile phone screens, as people catch up with distant relatives and friends, get updates on the news, or entertain themselves watching videos and listening to music.

Whilst some people only use emergency accommodation on a short-term basis, others have been using it for months, sometimes even years. In the time I spent

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there, I watched as long-term residents adapted the space to make themselves more comfortable. For example, one person who used the shelter for over a year begun stacking chairs around his mattress to give himself some more privacy and personal space. People also had preferred sleeping spots that they would always return to, imbuing the space and their time in it with a sense of routine that is otherwise absent from their lives. All of these different practices emphasised the intimate relationship between material objects, physical space and the ways in which people construct feelings of comfort for themselves. They also show how temporary situations become permanent, and those who seek asylum are frequently left in suspended states (Bagelman 2013; Squire and Bagelman 2012). The charity with which I volunteered, and the CoS movement in general, implicitly extend these suspended states. Rather than directly challenging the processes that produce illegality and deportability, they confine themselves to providing people with the means and materials that allow them to survive.

Usually the mood in the hall was friendly; because it is the space that they sleep in, occupants make concerted efforts to get along with one another. At certain times, however, people's patience became frayed or they were agitated or tense. In one of my earlier visits to the shelter, trying to make conversation and get to know people better, I naïvely asked one of the residents how long he had been in the UK. This question was triggering for him and he became increasingly agitated and angry as he recounted that he had been in the country for 13 years and was still prevented from working, accessing housing or securing the right to remain. Although he was not threatening, his anger was disturbing to himself as well as others using the accommodation, and for the rest of the night people kept their distance from him. This incident served as a clear reminder of the ways in which the trauma induced by forced migration processes and the continuing belligerent stance of the government intrudes constantly into people's states of mind and can be a source of tension, distress and division between individuals and those around them (Meier 2020). It affirmed that the hostile environment is an ever-present emotional and material reality that people are forced to endure and that intrudes into numerous spaces, including those designed to support forced migrants.

Like other refused asylum seekers, the person described above lives in a perpetual grey zone or suspended state—a liminal state of being that enforces his position as outside of the accepted population (Bagelman 2016; Canning 2019; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019). His emotional response also shows how the borders demarcating the grey zone are not physical, but constantly move with people into different spaces and social situations. Whilst for Meeus et al. (2019) arrival infrastructures signal the perpetual motion and unfolding nature of settlement, it is also clear that the hostile environment creates conditions and categories that are immobilising and disturb or hinder processes of arrival. This was emphasised by the incident above, and repeatedly throughout my research.

During volunteering sessions, we would encourage people to attend social events, get involved with various volunteering activities and, most importantly, make use of free English language classes. However, it was rare that people whose asylum claims had been refused took up these offers. When presented with

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different options or ways to stay active, it was common for people to reply that they were too mentally exhausted and stressed. Being in a perpetual state of limbo rendered them stuck, not only in terms of their migration status, but in their abilities to live their lives and find ways to be part of broader society. The tactics employed and services provided by charitable organisations, no matter how well-meaning, are thus at odds with the difficult circumstances forced migrants often find themselves in. As Bagelman (2013, 2016) demonstrates, the expectation to remain productive and industrious, even whilst waiting, is unrealistic and oppressive. The hostile environment, and the suspension it subjects people to, thus overwhelms the efforts of supportive infrastructures, and succeeds in reinforcing borders between those who have been illegalised and rendered deportable and the organisations and people who seek to support them.

The overlaps between hostile and supportive infrastructures also extend into virtual space and online systems. The charity with which I volunteered operates an extensive database of clients and people who have accessed its services. This database forms part of the infrastructure, along with hosts' houses, church halls, offices and food and clothing banks, which facilitate its operations. The database is particularly important as it allows the charity to keep records of people and the support they have received, log their visits and keep track of any changes in their behaviour, legal situation and physical and emotional states.

The database is therefore an instrument of governmentality, keeping tabs on people, assigning each person a unique identification number and making their presence in Sheffield and state of being legible. It has some parallels with the databases and regulatory systems used by states to monitor people and populations. Being able to access the database confers a governmental gaze on volunteers and allows them to read up on people's histories, physical and emotional states and make notes about their behaviour. I am in no way suggesting that people ever misused this power, but it does clearly conform to and perpetuate the hierarchy between those who are cared for (in this case, people of colour from countries outside Europe, including former colonies) and those who administer care (almost exclusively white British people) that others draw attention to (Bagelman 2016; Darling and Squire 2012; Squire and Bagelman 2012). This again illustrates the ways in which infrastructures are not neutral, but are bound up in and reproduce the divisions, hierarchies and power asymmetries that define the societies that produce them.

The database also makes use of state technologies, identifying people through their government-issued ID cards and using these to establish people's eligibility to receive support. Regular users of the drop-in service knew to present their IDs immediately. They approached the desk with their IDs already in-hand and presented them as part of the standard greeting process. This shows that the use of identification, surveillance and sorting is part of normal life, and separates those who have secure rights to belong from those whose belonging is provisional, processual and contested (Bhatia 2020). In some instances, we were unable to provide emergency accommodation or extend financial support to people in need, as they did not bring any official documents with them and their status could not be verified.[4]

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The insistence on taking note of people's identification cards and recording details, whilst necessary for running the charity efficiently, managing scarce resources and keeping records, also created suspicion amongst some people who came to use the service. In several instances people had to be repeatedly reassured that their details were not being recorded to be shared with the Home Office or people not affiliated to the charity, and that none of the information they provided would be used against them. Some people actually chose to leave without engaging any support services, rather than present documentation they might have. Yuval-Davis et al. (2018) show how everyday bordering practices in the UK have created tensions within communities and caused landlords and employers to become increasingly suspicious of people with apparent immigrant backgrounds. Through the experiences and interactions my research revealed, it becomes apparent that suspicion and hostility also define the atmosphere in which practices of care and support unfold, creating borders that constantly re-occur, disrupt and intrude.

Conclusion

It is therefore clear that practices of support unfold against the backdrop of and are disrupted by pervasive anti-immigration policies and technologies, as well as structural hierarchies of belonging and racism. Forced migrants in the UK find themselves caught up in competing and contrasting infrastructures, and these play significant roles in shaping their lives. Supportive migration infrastructures are dynamic and agile—church halls are converted into shelters, public squares become stages for pro-migration politics and performances, buildings and detention centres becomes sites where solidarity is enacted and vulnerable migrants assert their political voice. But at the same time, the hostile environment is equally mobile and dynamic, following people in their daily lives, vesting in their homes and interrupting spaces of care.

The existing scholarship on Sanctuary Cities foregrounds state violence, showing how Sanctuary movements can both ameliorate as well as recreate and entrench difference and exclusion. In this paper, I have sought to draw attention to the overlaps between Sanctuary and infrastructures of repression. Sanctuary movements are not hermetically sealed, but are penetrated by the hostile environment. This means that border violence resurfaces and intrudes in unexpected places and in unforeseen times. It is, therefore, an everyday reality that is always negotiated—sometimes successfully, sometimes not—by forced migrants and activists alike.

Just as support for forced migrants is built and enacted through infrastructure, hostile migration infrastructure is also constituted through particular materialities, spatialities, affects and geographies. Whether it is the space of one's home, a church hall, or even the everyday geographies—streets, bus shelters, train stations, government offices, hills covered with snow—that bodies traverse, people carry emotional realities and experiences with them. These realities are made through and as infrastructure, as combinations of legislation, ideologies, governing practices, material objects, spaces and affective relations mark the contours of

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everyday life. Thus, the hostile environment, whilst being contested, challenged and resisted, is pervasive, shifting and ever-present.

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Endnotes

[1] Copies of these maps have not been included as they were often hard to read and became even more difficult to decipher when reproduced electronically.
[2] See John Grayson's (2018) work on *openDemocracy* as well as numerous reports at https://www.symaag.org.uk/ (e.g. SYMAAG 2016).
[3] Spaces in emergency accommodation are predominantly given to men. Women, particularly if they are accompanied by children, are given emergency shelter through the charity's hosting network, when the need arises. In the times I spent at the night shelter all the occupants were unaccompanied men, who varied in ages between approximately 20 and 45.
[4] Unfair as it may be, the charity has limited resources and restricts itself to only providing material assistance to refused, destitute asylum seekers. At drop-in sessions we provided advice, signposting services and compassionate listening to other people, but if they could not prove that their asylum claims had been refused or were under review, we could not offer any emergency financial support or hosting facilities.

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