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# **Multiply Vulnerable Populations: Mobilising a Politics of Compassion from the 'Capacity to Hurt'**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper reflects on the concept of insecurity defined as '*the capacity to hurt*'. It begins by considering asylum seekers and refugees as hyper-precarious groups that have experienced bodily, material, and psychological 'hurt' in the UK. At the same time, the paper considers how these hyper-precarious groups are perceived to have the capacity to hurt (bodily, materially, psychologically and spatially) the majority population. Having drawn out two understandings of the capacity to hurt – both the ability to *be or feel* hurt, and the act of *doing* hurt to others, we argue that a shared recognition of what it means to feel hurt (co-suffering or suffering together) - albeit to very different extremes and with very different consequences - and an understanding of the processes which drive this might be mobilised politically to challenge the doing of hurt to others. In doing so, we argue for a group politics of compassion to respond to increasingly insecure times.

**Key words:** insecurity; hurt; prejudice; asylum seekers; compassion

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### **Introduction: the capacity to hurt**

In making a case for the 2012 RGS-IBG Conference theme (security of geography/geography of security), Chris Philo (2011: 1) argues that geographers need to pay more attention to the concepts of security and insecurity given that they are “located at a range of spatial scales and/or traced across a host of different networks spread far and near across the globe”. In doing so, Philo identifies three strands of security studies within geographical inquiry: *carceral geographies*, *landscapes of defence* and *critical geopolitics* recognising the risk that, what he terms the ‘big-S’ security issues (e.g. global conflict), may become the dominant focus of geographical concern to the exclusion of more everyday embodied experiences and emotions of (in)security. This paper responds to this observation by focusing on what Philo (2011: 3) refers to as the ‘closest-in’ human geography of security.

Indeed, the one common sense response to the question how we can conceptualise security and insecurity is that insecurity is fundamentally about danger or a perceived threat to a person or group. But beyond this, is it a fundamental condition of human nature that we desire and yearn to exist in a state of security, both objectively felt and subjectively observable? Notably, it is psychology –the study of the human mind and behaviour -- which is the social science discipline that has paid most attention to-date to unpacking this concept. In particular, in the 1960s RD Laing wrote extensively on mental illness and he developed the notion of ‘ontological security’ (see also Bondi, this issue). In his 1960 book *The Divided Self* he postulated that individuals exist for others, who in turn exist for us. This *routinizing* of relationships (Mitzen 2006) allows individuals’ identities to be formed within stable cognitive environments. Laing referred to this

condition as one of 'being in the world'. Without this relational security, Laing says that an individual can suffer ontological *insecurity* as forms of uncertainty and disrupted relationships can threaten people's identity security.

In more recent globalised contexts this concept – previously applied only to individuals in terms of psychological analysis - has been reworked and extended by Anthony Giddens. Giddens has broadened the concept of ontological (in)security to think about societal insecurity in the face of widespread economic and social change wrought by the transition from modernity to late modernity with its characteristic processes of individualisation and de-traditionalisation. The rise of neo-liberalism and associated market related changes to production and consumption (Sennett 1998) have brought with them not only greater opportunities to chose between different lifestyles and identities but also enhanced feelings of precariousness, insecurity and consequent aversion to risk and uncertainty (Beck 1992). In this sense, as Bondi observes (this issue), feelings of insecurity are ordinary and unexceptional even among those who experience material security and privilege.

Ontological security in contemporary times refers to the “confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self identity and in the surrounding social and material environments of action” (Giddens 1990: 92) that enables individuals to be secure in one's own 'being in the world' (Dreyfus 1991). In other words, it is about a psychological need for a sense of predictability and continuity. In contrast, ontological *insecurity* refers to the incapacitating state of *not knowing* which dangers to confront and which to ignore; or not knowing how to get by in the world (Mitzen 2006) which may lead to a 'precariousness of being' (Young 1999). Of course late modernity is replete with many potential dangers, but Giddens takes Laing's idea of the *routinization* of relationships and applies this also to surrounding environments whose risks are made tolerable through knowing that they will be predictably reproduced in familiar forms. The

basic mechanism of this is therefore routinization which allows a regularisation of social life (Giddens 1991) through people being able to make sense of their world and hence feel agentic (Van Marle & Maruna 2010). Young (2007) comments that part of this desire to be agentic is about attempting to create a 'secure base' of one's own values as moral absolutes in more generic times of ontological insecurity and we would add precarious times.

These issues of 'knowability' of social life are particularly evident in relation to debates about mobility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the one hand, the global labour market and global conflicts have produced a context in which growing numbers of people are forced to leave their homelands in pursuit of both economic and political security. On the other hand, this movement also creates disruption and change to the communities in which they arrive provoking emotions of uncertainty and fear that manifest themselves in growing calls for security and stability to insulate *from* the perceived 'threat' of the new arrivals. One consequence of this perception of insecurity may be a series of defensive measures that include a heightened intolerance of difference, the desire for stricter (real and symbolic) boundaries and the possibility of scapegoating/demonization of certain groups in society (Young 2003, see also Noxolo this issue). A recent example of this punitive climate encouraging a xenophobic surveillance environment is a 2011 report by the UKBA Chief Inspector John Vine which reports that UKBA receives a substantial 2,100 allegations of potential immigration offences per week from members of the public; demonstrating significant appetite among a population fed on immigration fear to report perceived transgressors<sup>1</sup>. In this sense we understand the concept of insecurity to be about the 'capacity to hurt' in two ways; firstly, in terms of the ability *to be or feel* hurt, such as feeling uncertainty, fear, pain, anxiety and so on, but secondly; in terms of insecurity and the 'capacity to hurt' also being about the perceived ability of

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/independent-chief-inspector-publishes-report-on-intelligence/>

groups and individuals to *do* hurt to both selves and others (cf also Philo's 2005 essay outlining a critical geography of vulnerability through the lenses of both wounds and wounding).

We want to explore this understanding of insecurity as the capacity to hurt through the example of the experience of asylum seekers and refugees coming to the UK and the reactions of the majority communities into which they settle. The first section of this paper draws on an ESRC funded project '*Precarious Lives*' that focuses on asylum seekers and refugees experiences' of exploitative, unfree and forced labour in the UK. It presents this group's accounts of 'hurt' in their labouring experiences within the UK. Data collection for this project comprises 30 in-depth narrative interviews together with 20 front-line practitioner and public agencies interviews. Sampling for the narrative interviews was purposive around the 3 socio-legal categories of asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers and refugees with the resulting sample including men and women aged 22 to 58 from a range of nationalities and ethnicities; particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. The second section of the paper uses findings from an ERC funded project '*Living with Difference*' that is exploring people's attitudes to social difference in the contemporary context of super-mobility and super-diversity, and a pilot project which preceded this study. It involves 30 individual case studies (n=60 interviews) in the UK (as well as comparative work in Poland). Here, each case comprises a time-line, a life story interview, an audio-diary of everyday encounters, a semi-structured interview about attitudes towards difference, and an interview reflecting on the emerging findings. The participants for the main study were recruited from a survey about prejudice, and the pilot study participants by snowballing through gate-keepers. They were sampled to include those from a range of social backgrounds (in terms of socio-economic status, occupation, gender, ethnicity, religious/belief, sexual orientation and (dis)ability); whose personal circumstances and lifestyle affords them a

range of opportunities for/experiences of encountering 'difference'; and to reflect a range of attitudes towards difference.

### **Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Precarity: Experiences of Hurt**

There has been much research over the last decade or so attesting to the multiple vulnerabilities experienced by asylum seekers and refugees that manifests in, amongst other things, poverty, social exclusion and destitution (e.g. Bloch & Schuster 2005; Phillimore & Goodson 2006; Lewis 2007; Gill 2009; Squire 2009). Although not exclusively, some of these vulnerabilities are seen to emanate from the employment sphere as a consequence of migrant workers more broadly being seen as central to what the TUC has called the rise in 'vulnerable employment' (TUC 2008). Yet despite longstanding recognition of migrants' susceptibility to serious labour exploitation in the Global North (Piore 1979) and a growing evidence base for the UK (see Anderson and Rogaly 2005; Wills et al 2010), research into exploitation and forced labour among asylum seekers and refugees has so far been limited (Burnett and Whyte 2010). Before we focus on an explanation of forced labour and the particular vulnerabilities of asylum seekers and refugees to such practices –it is important first to explain the term 'precarity' in this context.

The word precarity literally refers to those who experience precariousness (Waite 2009), and is used by some writers to evoke a broad condition emerging from a generalised societal malaise. For example, Ettlinger (2007: 320) argues that precarity is, "an enduring feature of the human condition. It is not limited to a specific context in which precarity is imposed by global events or macrostructures". Butler (2004) similarly observes precariousness in 21st-century USA and links this to the fragility and powerlessness of human existence in the face of oppressive everyday governmentality. These broad understandings of the term precarity often highlight 'being unable to predict one's fate', and therefore precarity is also seen as part of ontological insecurity. Alex

Foti (2004), for example, describes precarity as being a 'worker on call' where your life and time is determined entirely by external forces, or as Butler (2009: 23) has more recently stated; precarity is 'the condition of being conditioned.'

Yet precarity is most commonly heralded, particularly in political economy and labour studies, not in relation to broad life-worlds but with respect to the specific conditions of labour markets, most especially those in advanced capitalist economies. Its increasing political and cultural circulation as a term has resulted from intensified processes of globalisation, neoliberalisation and the erosion of working class power with concomitant expanding insecure and flexible employment relations, particularly in the Global North. Such labour market experiences have motivated writers such as Ross (2008) and Standing (2011) to claim that groups working in highly temporary and insecure jobs are increasingly subjectified as the new 'precariat'. The precariat is said to habitually reside in the bottom portion of two-tier labour markets in Global North economies (Hardt and Negri 2009); with immigrants, young people, women, new entrants and unskilled workers being the paradigmatic precarious workers (Barbieri 2009).

Asylum seekers and refugees are intersected by at least one of these precariat group identities ('immigrant') – and this often combines with other vulnerable statuses (e.g. 'new entrant', 'unskilled worker'). It is for this reason that Lewis et al. (2013) have described the multiple insecurities invoked when this group's insecure immigration status combines with other insecurities as 'hyper-precarity'. Forced migrants' (those seeking asylum) hyper-precarity in this sense can be linked to the structured exclusion inherent in much UK immigration policy (Lewis et al 2012) that has resulted in asylum seekers and refugees being mired in a vast edifice of civic stratification created by the active managerialist approach to forced migrants by states (Kofman 2002, 2005; Mountz 2011). Three groups of asylum-related migrants are invoked here; each with



different socio-legal statuses: *asylum seekers*, *refused asylum seekers* and *refugees*.. Socio-legal statuses accrue to different migrants according to their particular state-defined immigration status and their specific rights to residence, work and welfare (Dwyer et al 2011).

*Asylum seekers* are structurally and intentionally excluded from the labour market, as, since 2003, they have no permission to work (except in exceptional circumstances when an initial decision takes longer than 12 months in which case they can apply to the Home Office for limited right to work). It is also important to note that while asylum seekers are eligible for asylum support, these payments are set at 70% of mainstream benefits (i.e. the calculated amount with which it is possible to live just above the breadline). *Refused asylum seekers* have no right to work or recourse to public funds. Many of those applying for asylum are refused and have their support removed (within 21 days), however a large portion of these are unable to leave the UK (Refugee Action 2006). Refused asylum seekers are therefore situated in a similar position to the well-known vulnerability of other types of undocumented or irregular migrants (e.g. McKay et al 2009, Valentine 2010). *Refugees*, in theory, do have access to full rights to work and welfare. However, refugees are known to experience high levels of unemployment and are particularly structurally disadvantaged in the labour market (Bloch 2004). English language proficiency, limited qualification/skills recognition, discrimination and widespread misunderstanding about rights to work and welfare on the part of employers and Jobcentre Plus staff all combine to constrain refugees' ability to access paid employment (Dwyer 2008). Indeed, refugees are thought to experience one of the highest rates of unemployment of any group in the UK (Bloch 2002).

It is clear, therefore, that immigrant stratification and socio-legal status combine to exclude certain groups of migrants from the right to work or access to social security. The result of this is asylum seekers and refugees being sucked into the informal and unregulated economy in order to

find an income (Community Links and Refugee Council 2011). It is within these unprotected lower echelons of the labour market that the spectre of exploitative and forced labour is a real possibility (Katungi *et al* 2006). It is suggested that statutory provisions for *asylum seekers* are failing to meet housing and financial needs of many meaning some may be drawn into forced labour; *refused asylum seekers* are prone to simply 'disappearing' to the margins of society where they are particularly susceptible to coerced labour practices; and for *refugees*, multiple barriers to 'decent' work mean they access the labour market in the most precarious and low paid sectors. Furthermore, highly coercive working arrangements previously entered into out of necessity may continue after refugee status has been secured (Refugee Action 2006). Research into forced labour in the UK over the last few years has uncovered intensive patterns of labour exploitation in sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, food processing, care and domestic work some justifiably carrying the tag of 'modern slavery' (Anderson and Rogaly 2005; Craig *et al* 2007; Allamby 2011; Lalani 2011; Kagan *et al* 2011; Scott *et al* 2012).

The evidence from the *Precarious Lives* project demonstrates the hurt felt by migrants at different stages of the labour process as a result of their experiences of forced labour as well as other highly exploitative forms of unfree labour (Phillips 2012). At the most basic level this is manifest as a sense of *bodily hurt* as a consequence of the physically demanding work they undertake often in uncomfortable and degrading sensory environments (e.g. hot/cold, wet, dirty, dark, noisy or odorous). Moreover, the project has also uncovered extensive evidence of migrants being forced to work very long hours with few or no breaks which leaves them physically and mentally exhausted. These research participants below describe the embodied consequences of their exploitative working conditions.

When we enter the warehouse it's very freeze one – fresh one, like inside a fridge they didn't have no equipment not even clothes at the time it was snowing. [...] some of the

team they went for killing [chickens] some of the team are for washing with the machine was and then it goes to the fridge we put in the fridge and then pack in the box and go to supermarket like Asda, Morrison then you can see every people doing it and not good pay.  
(male, asylum seeker from Africa, 30s)

“I was getting more tired and tired and at one point I thought I was going, I was about to die because I could feel my body was wearing out. And I was thinking.... how long was this thing going to go for? At one point I thought ok I think this is how God has made me to live my life. And I wonder again how can God leave me again to be suffering like this.” (Female, refused asylum seeker from Africa, 30s)

The project also uncovered evidence of extremely low pay levels. Participants described being forced to undertake periods of unpaid ‘training’ or ‘apprenticeships’ and of having their wages withheld, experiences which resonate with research in the context of the Global South (e.g. Bastia and McGrath 2011). Such experiences of exploitation result in *material hurt* with the asylum seekers who participated in the research recounting how they are forced to work in the informal economy to meet their basic needs because they are excluded from mainstream welfare provisions and do not have the right to work in the formal economy while their asylum claim is assessed. Indeed, the second participant quoted below suggests that destitution is a deliberate policy by the government to utilise cheap labour and encourage slavery – a way of governing and disciplining asylum seekers for the broader ‘good’ of society:

Interviewer: So what did you get paid?

Respondent: Actually from the first week they didn’t pay us. I work since six until 12 in evening in night, 12 in night only they give us £80. £80-£100

Interviewer: A week?

Respondent: A week.

Interviewer: But the first week, no pay. What did you say when they didn't pay you the first week?

Respondent: We keep quiet, we didn't say anything, they told us the first week the system in Britain no pay. So we will pay you the following week and we accepted [...] every day we keep doing the same job and it's not easy job [...] plenty plenty chickens. Imagine per minute you have to pack it very quick otherwise them, they come and shout at you as well if you not doing very well they shout you, they just treat you like something, you know  
(male, asylum seeker from Africa, 30s)

I'm just saying though, what I believe is maybe you are British person and you don't like to hear it, but I believe, before Great Britain went to India, Africa and brought here slaves by force [...], and exactly they are slaves like me. [...] They are the slaves, and they are paid less, so less, and it's good for situation and society of here. If I have a shop and I have three illegal workers my work is sweeping the floor, washing the dishes kind of job that English people don't like to do it. [...] And when I'm illegal instead of paying me £6 and a half for an hour, you know they are going to give me £3, then the cost of that shop, it's come down. And that shop can give you a cheaper food – that's good for this society. That's the slavery of this country (male, refused asylum seeker from Middle East, 20s).

The precarious socio-legal status of asylum seekers and refugees can expose them not only to bodily and material forms of hurt but also to psychological exploitation by unscrupulous employers who threaten to expose the fact they may be working or residing in the UK illegally. Here, research participants described this *psychological hurt* in terms of being haunted by a fear

of deportation given that this would be likely to result in their imprisonment, torture or death. This extreme anxiety in turn is a barrier which prevents many from accessing support and help, leaving them emotionally isolated and highly vulnerable.

She used to tell me sometimes – oh you \*\*\*\*ing African if you do anything I will call the immigration office and they will send you back to your country. You know swearing...Even sometimes I thought of ending off my life and then I thought I am trying to explain to the immigration office that I'm just – I love to be in my country but the thing is I can't go back to my country. You know [regime] can kill me and some of my family back home are in trouble. And then this girl she take that more advantage (Male, asylum seeker from Africa, 30s)

For some the threats extend beyond denunciation to actual violence and abuse. Although not speaking about asylum seekers specifically; Bauman's (2007: 9) pronouncement that "fear has settled inside saturating our daily routines" seems apposite for many of the participants in *Precarious Lives*.

Then I realised that after doing the delivery they were just making fun of me, they were ... So they were waiting for me to pay them back, I told them you never paid me, so they were asking for the money for the £20 they had already paid me, but I told them I don't even have the £20 with me. While I was speaking with these people there were other people staying outside on the steps and all of a sudden one of them kicked me in the face, kicked me in the mouth, the face. I was on my own and there were all together five people, three young men and two young women, so all of them attacked me and I thought I was dying. At that time I could see death with my eyes, and I could never believe I could survive.

The inability of many asylum seekers and refugees to escape their forced labour situations (conditioned by a mix of policy, institutional and organisational weaknesses across the state and non-governmental sector) and their immigration precarity closes down their ability to predict or plan their own futures. While for some this disembeddedness and uncertainty about the knowability of their futures produces a sense of anger and injustice which strengthens their self-identity and sense of moral absolutes (see slavery quotation above); for others it generates a sense of *ontological insecurity* in terms of a loss of confidence in the continuity of the self-identity ('I can't do anything', 'There is no future for me'. 'There is nothing I am thinking').

I don't know how to plan – my daily life. I don't know what to do, I can't make my mind, I can't, I can't, *I can't do anything*. I just live like, you know, I sleep wake up eat, go back to sleep and wake up. *There is no future for me. There is nothing that I am thinking* [emphasis added], oh tomorrow, I become like this... I become that. I just can't even think about it. And I never thought about anything. (Male, Middle East, 20s)

This section has demonstrated some of the ways that asylum seekers and refugees experience insecurity through the capacity to be or feel hurt. Neoliberalisation, deregulation and the consequences of austerity policies have combined to create a context in which asylum seekers and refugees have become highly precarious populations. As such, they have become subject to exploitation by other actors within the State (e.g. gangmasters, labour recruiters, unscrupulous employers). Notably, the *Precarious Lives* research has demonstrated how this group experience *bodily hurt* as a consequence of physically demanding work environments; *material hurt* as a consequence of financially exploitative terms of employment which often result in destitution; *psychological hurt* as a result of their fears of deportation and violence/abuse - an anxiety which is often deliberately mobilised by employers to subjugate them. For some this adds up to a sense of *ontological insecurity* (a sense of a loss of confidence in their self-identity). Yet, despite the extent

of the hurt experienced by the research participants some their accounts nonetheless also convey a sense of agency (see further discussion in Waite et al 2013). This is evident in terms of their ability to recognise and articulate the injustices they encounter and their implicit resilience in the face of precarity. For these research participants despite all the hardships and hurt they encounter they create a sense of routine and continuity in their social and material environments and remain secure in their own values and moral absolutes. In the following section we reflect on the response of the majority population to the presence of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK.

### **Majority Citizens: Perceptions of Hurt**

New modernity and processes of globalisation have not only brought insecurity and uncertainty to those who experience forced mobility such as, asylum seekers and refugees, but also to majority citizens. In the 1990s Galbraith (1992) suggested that contemporary western societies like the UK were characterised by a 'contented majority' – who were economically successful and secure had little in common with, or concern for, excluded minorities. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century Young (2007) argues that this culture of contentment is a myth. He points out that the rapid social and economic change that has characterised the recent past has made the world seem a less reliable or secure place for majority as well as minority communities. The global demand for flexible labour and the impact of the contemporary financial crisis have reverberated through the employment structure producing rising levels of redundancy, an increased emphasis on short term contracts and part-time work which in turn have created chronic job insecurity even amongst the professional middle class. Those lucky enough to have employment find themselves working harder and longer in what has been described as 'work intensification' (Burchell 1999). This insecurity about economic position has been exacerbated by a process of individualisation which has placed the emphasis on a process of self-actualisation in which individuals have greater choice about how to live their lives

but are also increasingly held responsible for managing the risks that ensue. At the same time de-traditionalisation and a growing awareness of the pluralism of values has meant old institutions of family community, and religion no longer offer the same levels of certainty. The modern family has become more unstable with rising levels of divorce and separation in which the economic necessity for dual career families and the repercussions of work intensification are likely to be contributory factors. In turn, the pressures of such economic and social transformations knock onto communities as well with population change and mobility and economic uncertainty all creating insecurities over competition for resources (Valentine and Harris 2013). Faced with these forces of change the once contented majority is also beset by a sense of precariousness.

This context however, has not produced a recognition of potential shared concerns about economic insecurity with minority groups but rather has created an anxiety about the threat such groups might pose to majority groups' ability to maintain and protect their privileged status and way of life (Sivanandan 2001). While there is evidence that established minority ethnic groups are increasingly accepted as part of a multi-cultural society, hostility to recently arrived immigrants and particularly asylum seekers is growing (Finney and Peach 2004). McGhee (2005) argues that the harsh new immigration and nationality laws brought into the UK by John Major at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – including the 1992 *Asylum Act*, 1996 *Asylum and Immigration Act* – followed by subsequent governments' philosophies of organising immigration policies around a principle of deterrence (Fekete 2001) have contributed to creating a climate of xeno-racism. The suspicion at state level about whether asylum seekers are genuine or economic migrants 'shopping around' for a European destination which will offer the optimum benefits/support has contributed to the stigmatisation of this group which has been fuelled by inaccurate and unbalanced national tabloid media representations of illegal immigrants living off the welfare state (Sivanandan 2001; Cohen 2002; Finney 2004; ICAR 2004). Such discourses of insecurity about the legitimacy of immigrants



to claim asylum and refugee status were evident in the narratives of some of the majority citizens who were interviewed for the *Living with Difference* pilot and project. In particular, 'folk tales' about so-called 'bogus' asylum seekers were drawn on to illustrate this uncertainty and to justify a desire for stricter regulation of immigration to exclude economic migrants who are perceived to be working illegally. In this sense, the research participants accounts suggest a *psychological hurt* - a fear of being 'cheated' or a sense of injustice.

...when children arrive on their own from war torn countries...if they're on their own, under age of 16, we have a duty to make sure those children are cared for. But there's been several occasions where there was one lad he'd been in school, 15, and then he was in a car crash. He died in a car crash and when it turned out he was actually 21 years old but he'd been in mainstream school with children under age of 16... they've been in a sexual relationship with him. This is where we're at as a country; we've got us hands tied because we've got to take what people say at face value. If they turn up with no papers and they say they're a 15 year old boy from Iraq, they do... That's what a lot of them have been doing (white, male, 30s).

Some of them I'm okay with, the obviously genuine ones where - like Afghans and Iraqis. Somalis, well my next door neighbour's a Somali. I've no problems with them because their country's in a right state - with civil strife and all the rest of it...But as regarding the asylum seekers that are basically economic asylum seekers... all flooding in to various parts of Europe and then trying to make their way into this country. As soon as they arrive in this country they say give us a house and give us some money - now that's the people I don't agree with... I mean we're having economic problems ourselves and if we get 10,000 economic migrants coming in in 12 months - they're working illegally most of the time because they've come in illegally ...If

they get kicked out I've absolutely no sympathy at all, we've got enough problems getting jobs for our own people (white, male, 60s).

In particular, interviewees commonly represented asylum seekers as a needy group who are receiving welfare and support without working to contribute to the economy and implicitly therefore having the capacity cause the majority population *material hurt*. These narratives were strongly predicated on a mobilisation of a Protestant work ethic which dates back to the first age of industrial capitalism (Sennett 2003). Sennett argues that it was in this period that the moral value of work and importance of being self-sufficient, and the consequent fear of being unproductive and dependent, became ingrained in society (amongst rich and poor). The principle of forcing the poor into productive employment by adopting punitive measures such as the workhouse meant these values became embedded into the nascent welfare state. Writing in 1980s Charles Murray (1984) argued that the development of an over generous Welfare State created dependency among the poor and a lack of motivation to work as well as contributing to wider social problems including crime, and incivility. This moralisation of work has persisted into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with 'dependency' reproduced as shameful in contemporary popular and public discourses (Valentine et al 2013). This was evident in the *Living with Difference* pilot and project interviews – the research participants below represent asylum seekers and refugees as receiving privileged support from the welfare state in contrast to the working population (echoing similar ways of othering previous generations of immigrants: Holmes 1997). This is not only argued to be unfair but also to hurt majority citizens by threatening their right to resources as well as the material security of family members who are now unemployed or retired, having worked hard all their lives (cf. Dench et al 2006). In such ways, the research participants' make relational claims comparing their own sense of material hurt and insecurity with the apparently pampered lives of newcomers ('they're getting it handed on a plate' v I see my Mum and Dad struggling; 'the tax you

pay' v 'they just walk in and think they can get free treatment'; and ' they've got that' v 'all I get are hand', cast downs').

we've worked hard for this place, you know. Before we moved here, everything was second-hand, you know even like the settee, [my] mother-in-law gave me the settee, a lot of my carpets ... we're working hard and it makes you sick when you see these people that come from other countries and get a house, they've got... named products on already, and you're thinking well you know we have to work hard you know to actually get what we want, you know and *they're getting it handed on a plate* [emphasis added]. Then *I see my mum and dad struggling*, and that really makes me very angry, you know that they are struggling, we're ticking over nicely but you know they struggle along, yeah. [referring to raising the retirement age]...'cos they're saying about moving the age up, well I think that's stupid because they move the age up to seventy for like a man or sixty five for a woman, you know like a friend of hers, he retired at sixty five, a few months later he died of cancer, and he's worked all his life (woman, white, 40s).

why are they particularly coming to Britain? Why do they cross all those other countries in order to get here? Is it because we do hand outs ...? It's so easy for them ... it is so expensive to live in this country, *the tax you pay* for council tax, the VAT, everything and you know you want to see something for that money, you want to see something in your own community...[I]f somebody you know or a member of the family's got to wait two years to get an operation, and yet people are coming into this country ...Something actually that annoyed my partner the other day, he went to the dentist and there was... an asylum seeker come in for dental treatment ...I think my partner was quite mad about it, because he said *they just walk in and think they can get free dental treatment* [emphasis added] (woman, white, 40s)

when I was at secondary school, the asylum seekers that came over, they got so many ... a guy came in with like two hundred pounds in his pocket and a mobile phone and you think and *you've got that* but I don't get any of that. You know my parents, they're working, they're paying their taxes you know *but I get hand, cast downs all the time* [emphasis added] from mum and dad and like their old phones and stuff and things like that, and they just can get them (woman, white, 20s).

In contrast to those who articulated their sense of hurt through the lens of the self or kith and kin other respondents' narratives of injustice were framed in the context of the nation. Here, they represented asylum seekers as a threat to more 'deserving' 'vulnerable' or marginal populations in the UK (including homeless people, unemployed, children etc) with whom they are perceived to be in competition with for access to limited resources. Although there was also a notable uncomfortableness or defensiveness about the way some interviewees rationalised their views ('I'm sorry'; 'They're maybe, maybe not undeserving'; 'try and sort the homeless out first, and then welcome the asylum seekers in') which suggests an insecurity about voicing prejudices and consequently about their own sense of moral values and identities<sup>1</sup>.

When you've got asylum seekers that are coming in and they're given a house straight away, so yeah I think the Government have got to put their foot down and say no *I'm sorry...I'm sorry* but *we've got people on the streets ourselves* [emphasis added] now, our hospitals are getting chocker block...the waiting list is getting beyond a joke, we can't cope with any more people coming in. Yeah, I think everybody needs to look after their own before they start on taking on others, and I think with these asylum seekers coming in, we can't do that, because they've taken over everything else, all the homes that are, you know supposed to be for people in this country ...not people that have just been brought into the country. (woman, white 40s)

there's people I know with children in one bedroom, or two bedrooms and they've got like two or three kids who are born and bred here, you know probably worked or their family's always worked or whatever, so why should they still be stuck like them, and they just come ...they give them [the asylum seekers] the brand new houses, garden, garage and everything else...*They're maybe, maybe not undeserving* [emphasis added], it's just that I think probably the people that are born and bred and lived there, probably deserve it more (woman, white 30s)

well my view is that if there's room in the country, yeah, but my point of view is ...there's a lot of homeless in this country and get the homeless sorted out ... *try and sort the homeless out first, and then welcome the asylum seekers in* [emphasis added](woman, white 40s)

The connection between place and identity was the source of many concerns over asylum seekers with participants articulating a '*spatial hurt*' by describing asylum seekers as a threat not only to their own identities but also to those of the communities in which they live. Here, classic spatial vocabularies of prejudice 'flooding' 'overflowing', 'invading', and 'taking over' were used to explain participants' insecurities about the current and potential future impact of new arrivals on the physical appearance and normal routines, and ways of life of local communities (cf. Sibley 1981, 1995; Holloway 2003, Valentine 2010).

Asylum seekers, we all agree that really flares my mum up... especially when... you know the Government are letting so many in here and they're putting them here, there and everywhere, and not asking what the people want..This place is getting big enough as it is, *it was a lovely little place but they're building more and more houses to cope with the overflow of* [name of nearby City removed] *and now they're bringing asylum seekers in* [emphasis added] it's going to get even worse, they're thinking of in time...And [name of the rural community in which she

lives] they reckon that in time they'll have to build that many houses, to cope with and it's going to be like a town (woman, white 40s).

In some cases, the potential of asylum seekers to threaten the security of the settled community was articulated not only in terms of material, psychological and spatial hurts but also literally as a potentially *bodily hurt* as perpetrators of crime and violence, namely that our bodies may be defiled or hurt by their bodies (indeed as Noxolo argues in this issue, securitisation in the context of post 9/11 terrorism has more broadly produced and legitimised asylum seekers, and even migrants, as intrinsic threats to the safety of the nation). These perceptions of threat repeat common themes in the national tabloid media and public discourses which represent asylum seekers as deviant (Lewis 2005). This is despite the fact that it is more commonly asylum seekers who are the victims of harassment and violence from majority populations.

I mean my friend lives in [place removed] ... and I'd say he's definitely prejudiced to asylum seekers, but I mean he's seen mates been beaten up by people from another creed so that's, he's just taken that on face value. (man, white, 20s).

...the biggest debates that we have in this house, about immigration, about the social decline of areas... When you've got a government that's so lax and it just allows our borders to be overrun. I think they were saying there's something like 600,000 illegal immigrants and they don't know where they are at the moment. That's unsettling because what they're doing is they don't know where these people are. Are they working, are they out robbing. Where are they, what are they doing. That again causes a lot of tension? (male, white, 30s)

Specifically, women respondents expressed personal insecurity in relation to male asylum seekers.

These men were represented as coming from culturally 'backward' societies in relation to the UK

in terms of their social practices in public space (such as wolf whistling) that are out of step with contemporary equality laws and norms of social behaviour in the UK. In this way male asylum seekers were literally (in that minor forms of violence such as wolf whistling are discursively linked to major forms of violence like rape) and metaphorically (having cultural views that do not recognise women's rights and might therefore threaten women's equality) ascribed with the capacity to hurt women (cf. D'Onofrio and Munk 2004; Finney 2004; Valentine 2010).

I've never ever met asylum seekers... in a social situation...my only real experience comes from this shop that I mentioned where I used to work, was opposite a café in the centre of [name of town removed]and we used to sort of go over and get cups of tea and stuff from this café and there would be, a lot of time there'd be large groups of I don't know, the Kosovan or whatever country they were from. There'd be large groups of guys, in there, and you only had to sort of go near them, and they'd all be cackling and whistling and sort of saying quite, not exactly offensive, very forward stuff that you, the kind you'd expect ten years ago or twenty years ago from guys from this country. I feel we've sort of moved past that... and now we've got people coming to this country with a different attitude, they think it's okay to do that, and it kind of shocks me because I thought we'd moved past that...so I do think if I do see something that fits that kind of attitude I do feel a bit threatened. (woman, white, 20s)

In sum, this section has demonstrated that the majority population – once presented as contented – is beset by insecurities as a product of the economic and social transformations which characterise new modernity. In this context, asylum seekers and refugees have become a classic 'folk devil' (Cohen 1972; Finney 2004) blamed as a cause of these hurts, which include *psychological hurt* (fear of being cheated), *material hurt* (unjust allocation of resources), *spatial hurt* (threat of change to communities) and *bodily hurt* (fear of violence and defilement). These insecurities are narrated by majority citizens as personal in terms of the threats they perceive

asylum seekers to pose to their own livelihoods, and their surrounding social and material environments. Yet, they are also articulated through the lens of the nation, in which the UK – and specifically its ability to support hard working majority citizens and ‘deserving’ vulnerable communities within it – is represented as under threat. In this sense, the hurt expressed by our majority respondents represents what Darling (2010:134) has described as a “(re)assertion of a national logic of territorialised prioritisation and concern”. Whereas some of the asylum seekers and refugees in the first section expressed a sense of agency in terms of their resilience and a sense of security in their own self-identities and moral values, the evidence of this section is that many of the majority interviews were suggestive of a lack of agency. Here, the research participants implicit discomfort at voicing their prejudices is suggestive of a lack of confidence in their own moral values and uncertainty about their social environments.

### **A Politics of Compassion: Conclusion**

Having drawn out two understandings of the capacity to hurt – both the ability to *be or feel* hurt, and the act of *doing* hurt to others, we argue that a shared recognition of what it means to *feel* hurt (i.e. bodily, material, psychological, spatial and ontological) – albeit to very different extremes and with very different consequences -- might be mobilised politically to challenge the doing of hurt to others. Specifically, our empirical research shows that while both the asylum seekers/refugees and the majority citizens interviewed for the *Precarious Lives* and *Lived Differences* research projects perceive themselves to feel hurt by the other group nonetheless neither group recognises the way they are perceived to do hurt to others. Indeed, the research also suggests that majority group individuals can often act in compassionate ways towards vulnerable individuals in everyday life despite holding negative views about asylum seekers and refugees as an abstract group. This was reflected in the accounts of both the majority group and asylum seekers.



My next door neighbour, she's Somali - she did tell me which religion she is - she asked me in on Friday evening to have a go at getting her television working because she'd bought this new television and she couldn't seem to get it to work, couldn't get any picture on it. Now the place smelt very strongly of curry type foods, now I'm allergic to that type of food so I can't eat it, but I was tolerant enough to go in and have a go. As it was there was nothing I could do, the television needed a decoder, but that's beside the point, I was tolerant enough to go in and have a go, even though I wanted to get out of there as soon as I could because of the smell of the curry (male, white. 60s)

[talking about factory work place] To be honest one, there was one, everybody was nice, especially one lady was there which is old as my mum. She was very very nice to me and always really, because we worked together I tried to help her, because I respect her too much. [edit] Even in England, I can see many nice people who is very .... you just enjoy...and they speaking and they see you and they speak to you (refugee)

Here, most research participants described separating their beliefs (as abstract practices) from their actual everyday conduct when they meet asylum seekers and refugees. Their ability to do so seems to be facilitated by an ethic of care towards marginalised 'others' understood and refracted through other identifications (e.g. "race", gender, age etc.). This is mirrored by evidence from previous empirical work with religious groups about their attitudes towards homosexuality which demonstrated that the 'what is' (i.e. personal experience) for both heterosexual and lesbian and gay people of faith is prioritised over theological or institutional perspectives of 'what ought to be' (Valentine and Waite 2012). Indeed, in the context of the internal diversity of most contemporary European and North American societies Amin argues that the proximity of difference demands an 'ethic of care' for those unlike ourselves. He has dubbed this the 'politics of propinquity' (2004,

2006) claiming that 'micro-publics' (e.g. libraries, allotments, festivals) where individuals from different social groups are brought together through positive encounters can be sites of cultural destabilisation and social transformation. In the context of this paper, voluntary sector-led initiatives that promote positive encounters between asylum seekers and majority groups (see Darling 2010, Askins and Pain 2011 and Askins 2012) represent examples of what Askins (2012) has called a 'quiet politics' within quotidian spaces that have the *potential* to enact positive social change.

Despite the possible benefits of such encounters in certain spaces; other research suggests that such opportunities for the bridging of differences are limited – Massey (2004, 2006) for example argues that we are better at caring for others at a distance rather than those proximate 'strangers within'. Indeed the *Living with Difference* study has found that the opportunity to encounter social diversity varies widely between cities but also within cities because urban communities have distinctive patterns of diversity (Piekut et al 2013). Moreover, contemporary austerity policies are resulting in severe cuts in public spending that are impacting on the statutory provision of support for integration programmes, at the same time the squeeze on the Third Sector is affecting its ability to fill the gap. Recent examples in the UK include the cutting of refugee employment integration programmes (Hill 2011) and the reduction in language training for new arrivals (Nash 2011) and other forms of wider support (e.g. the closure of community centres and termination of funding for particular initiatives such as befriending programmes). Even where the opportunity remains for positive encounters do take place in micro-publics the question of how such small-scale everyday interactions predicated on acts of care or kindness for 'others' can be scaled up to achieve wider social change has remained largely unaddressed (Valentine 2008, Valentine and Sadgrove in press).

In writing about poststructuralist ethics in the context of globalisation Popke (2003, 2007), drawing on the writing of Kant, argues that we need to advance a sense of spatial responsibility to others; recognising that we are woven together with geographically distanced people and places requires us to adopt a cosmopolitan approach to transcend our narrow self-interest. Yet such abstract ideals are difficult to mobilise in the context of individualisation in which the emphasis in contemporary life is on the significance of the personal rather than the social: in what Rose (2002) has termed a 'regime of the self'. Indeed, Fevre (2000) has argued that a process of desocialisation has taken place with values such as social responsibility, trust and social cohesion casualties in the face of the rise in an ethic of self-interest. As such a number of scholars have begun to argue that in contrast to focusing on individual responsibility we need to rediscover a broader framework of social solidarity, relational morality (e.g. McDowell 2004; Lawson 2007) and constructive communication (Ettlinger 2009). Indeed, Cloke (2002: 591) suggests that it is "far more difficult to discover... a sense *for* the other which is emotional, connected and committed".

Here, we argue that such mutuality might be developed through recognising affective affiliation between those in diverse situations – what Lawson (2007) has termed 'a social ontology of connection'. This is not however through building connections around acts of kindness but rather by exploring how difference might be bridged by the mutual capacity to feel hurt. Despite being positioned very differently (materially, socially, legally etc.), as the sections above have demonstrated, asylum seekers and refugees and majority groups share a sense of hurt in terms of their mutual experiences of insecurity and vulnerability in the face of rapid socio-economic change. Yet, this is not recognised with each group seeing only their own hurt, not how they are also perceived to hurt others, or how their hurt might be caused by the same processes which also hurt others in related but different ways. Whereas social and physical distance commonly breeds indifference (Barnett 2005) this emotional proximity offers the possibility to build a politics of

compassion predicated on notions of 'co-suffering' or 'suffering together' that might bridge this gap. Here, we understand compassion to comprise two elements - empathy for the suffering of others together with an active desire to alleviate another's suffering. In other words, it embodies the condition of being affected - being emotionally *moved* to feel some responsibility for others. Paradoxically therefore, the insecurities created by the contemporary crisis of capitalism rather than hardening attitudes towards 'others', as previous research suggests is common in times of crisis, might be mobilised to advance a more progressive politics predicated on a recognition of co-suffering. It is insecurity that might bind us together.

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