



A view from the edge

Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

03 June 2021

STANDING ALONGSIDE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DONCASTER

IN THIS ISSUE

‘These are our neighbours’

By Paul FitzPatrick

The resistance to the ‘dawn raid’ and attempted deportation of chef Sumit Sehdev and mechanic Lakhvir Singh in Pollokshields, Glasgow, highlighted the importance of strong community links. On that same day another Indian resident of Glasgow was taken from his bed at 8.30 by five immigration officers and removed to Dungavel while in the process of submitting a fresh asylum claim. This event went unnoticed in the media.

All the contributions to this edition of our newsletter reflect in different ways on the complex processes involved in building community links, especially in a relatively small place like Doncaster – in the spatial distribution of asylum housing, in different involvements in different kinds of activities, in maintaining links with countries of origin, the role of history in shaping attitudes to borders and migration, and, of

course, against the backdrop of the Government’s proposed New Plan for Immigration and the continuing rhetoric of criminalising people seeking asylum.

One of the first signs of the UK Government’s ‘fair but firm’ New Plan for Immigration is an agreement with India - a [Migration and Mobility Partnership agreement](#). In the words of Priti Patel, the ‘historic’ agreement aims to attract the best and brightest and support people coming to the UK through legal routes, while stopping the abuse of the system and speeding up the removal of those who have no right to be in the UK. The agreement will enhance and accelerate the processes to return Indian nationals with no legal right to stay in the UK and vice versa, and ensure greater co-operation around organised immigration crime. To

whom is ‘Global Britain’ now a neighbour?



DCC outing

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Target Groups
 Refugees - Homeless - Displacement People
 Elderly People - Orphans

Sudan emergency response

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Asylum accommodation in the outlying villages

By Julia Burne

'I'm alone in my room. The people in my house don't speak my language. The people in this village look at me strangely. I feel I'm sitting in my grave'. *This is a quote from a man in Asylum Support Accommodation in one of the villages outside Doncaster.*

In the last 6 months the Housing Providers, Mears, have started to accommodate people seeking asylum in houses in the ex-mining villages surrounding Doncaster. There are now 18 properties (housing more than 70 people) – scattered between Conisbrough, Askern, Woodlands, Bentley, Armthorpe, Rossington, Stainforth, Thorne and Moorends. The houses are located by Mears and then approved for use by Doncaster Council.

The challenge this presents to the people housed in these properties is enormous. Imagine – four people, often with limited English and no other languages in common, arriving from temporary hostel or hotel accommodation and being left in a smallish town which isn't ethnically diverse. Where do you find food from 'home' or halal meat. How do you connect with others from your community - where is the opportunity for a chance contact with someone who speaks your language? How do you access places of worship – the mosque or the small Christian Denomination which is so important to you? Where is the college to help improve your English so that you can communicate better. Where is the community of other people who are in the same asylum

system? Where are the specialist services to signpost you to advice?

The answer to all of the above is that they are a bus ride away in the town centre. This costs £4.70 – which is about 12% of the weekly allowance of £39.63 per week.

People seeking asylum as a whole are resilient – they have already had to overcome huge issues in their own countries and in their journey here. But without a sense of belonging and the opportunity to develop networks of support, even the most resilient find that their mental health is affected.

There have been initiatives to engage people seeking asylum with local community groups. There are a few outstanding successes (well done Stainforth) – but these successes are for a small handful of the 70 or more people who are in these outlying properties. It has been suggested that bikes are the answer – but the roads from outlying villages to Doncaster are often dangerous for people on bikes (without all weather gear, helmets, effective lights) – and not everyone is able to cycle.

It is unclear exactly why this process of locating people in the outskirts of Doncaster has gained such momentum with the housing provider Mears (a private company) and the council. It certainly doesn't seem to be in the interests of the people who are the recipients of this approach.



Regional Refugee Integration Strategy

Migration Yorkshire is undertaking a consultation process to develop a new regional Refugee Integration Strategy. They have organised a series of thematic and sub-regional consultation sessions. They are particularly keen to have people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary in Yorkshire to attend.

To register your interest in attending, please contact Saulo Cwerner, Integration Strategy Manager at Migration Yorkshire; you can use the email Saulo.Cwerner@migrationyorkshire.org.uk

Migration Yorkshire Consultation Sessions:

- 8 June from 9:30 to 11:30 – The Economic Integration of Refugees – workshop 1
- 9 June from 9:30 to 11:30 – The Health and Wellbeing of Refugees and Asylum Seekers – workshop 1
- 10 June from 9:30 to 11:30 – The Economic Integration of Refugees – workshop 2
- 11 June from 15:00 to 17:00 – VCS issues in the refugee/migration sector – workshop 1
- 14 June from 15:00 to 17:00 – The Health and Wellbeing of Refugees and Asylum Seekers – workshop 2
- 17 June from 15:00 to 17:00 – VCS issues in the refugee/migration sector – workshop 2
- 30 June from 15:00 to 17:00 – Local refugee integration issues in South Yorkshire sub-regional workshop.

DCC's first outing in six months



This outing felt very overdue. In the last 6 months DCC has welcomed over 100 individuals seeking asylum to Doncaster. We have tried our best to offer a welcome – but this has not been easy. We are missing our usual drop-in session and have been unable to arrange group events other than football.



The weather forecast was good for the weekend of 29/5/21 – and a group of 23 met at Doncaster Station. It would have been lovely to offer the opportunity to even more people – but we knew that 30 was the maximum number.



We crossed North Bridge and turned left along the north bank of the Don. The sun shone – and so did the smiles.



And meanwhile, football continues on Wednesdays and Fridays.



Donny Doodles

10. 'I fled Syria with just £12....'

Imad Alarnab spent three months crossing from Damascus to Europe, smuggled in lorries via Lebanon, Turkey and North Macedonia. He arrived in the UK in the autumn of 2015 with £12 in his pocket – “enough for the bus fare to Doncaster where my sister lived” – and worked as a car washer and car salesman until he found a way to cook again.

Imad is a Syrian chef. When he arrived in the UK as a refugee five years ago, he could barely afford to eat. Meals were regularly skipped and a Snickers bar could be eked out over a whole day to help him survive. On Monday, the 43-year-old father of three will be celebrating lockdown rules easing with a fairytale twist: Imad will be opening the doors to his very own central London restaurant.

“This is not because I am strong or brave,” says Imad, who begins to well up as staff scurry through the restaurant, prepping for their first service. “I am proof that if you try to do something good for people, something good will happen to you. This is a fact.”

Back in Syria, he had lived a comfortably affluent life as the owner of three restaurants and several juice bars and coffee shops. “Everything I owned was bombed within six days in 2012,” he says. “We lost everything, but I still considered myself the luckiest person – we moved continuously from place to place but I had my family, I had my wife and three daughters.”

Source: The Guardian

Doncaster and the Sudan emergency

Last October, Adam Abdullah wrote in this newsletter about the conditions in Sudan which had inspired the Sudanese community here in Doncaster to gather goods to send to Sudan in response to the emergency situation.

We reported on the departure of a container from the mosque in Doncaster on 4 November.

Now we are delighted to learn that the shipment arrived in Port Sudan on 7 April and in Khartoum on 17 May.

The container is loaded in Doncaster.



The journey to Sudan

Location	Date	Status
LONDON GATEWAY PORT	04/11/2020, 10:33	Gate out empty
LONDON GATEWAY PORT	05/11/2020, 06:13	Arrival in
LONDON GATEWAY PORT	07/12/2020, 12:28	Loaded
JEDDAH	24/12/2020, 20:40	Discharged
JEDDAH	09/02/2021, 18:39	Loaded
JEDDAH	10/02/2021, 00:28	Vessel departed
PORT SUDAN	31/03/2021, 12:12	Vessel arrived
PORT SUDAN	07/04/2021, 10:00	Discharged

Arrival in Khartoum



We hope to give further details in a future edition.

TV catch-up: African Apocalypse

A stunning and profoundly moving film-documentary broadcast on BB2 on 22 May and now available on iPlayer.

In this film, Femi Nylander travels to the site of a colonial outrage perpetrated in 1899. He recreates the story of Paul Voulet, a French army captain who was responsible for the murder of between 7,000 and 15,000 Fulani herdsmen in the southern Nigerien town of Birni-N’Konni, where he enslaved some 800 women and looted several villages along the way. His invasion is responsible for the creation of modern-day Niger.



1899 is a significant date. It was the year of the publication of Conrad’s novel *The Heart of Darkness*, and Voulet could almost be a model for Conrad’s Captain Kurtz.

The film references other colonial-era atrocities such as the Battle of Omdurman in 1898, in which Lord Kitchener oversaw the deaths of 10000 Sudanese, and those perpetrated on the Ovaherero and Nama peoples of Namibia by the Germans between 1904 and 1908, over which presently hang allegations of genocide and the question of reparations.

While the story of Paul Voulet is largely unknown in Europe, it is vividly remembered in Niger, which remains one of the poorest and least developed countries on earth, not having benefited from its mineral deposits.

This film is a brave and welcome attempt by the BBC to listen to the voices of those who continue to suffer the consequences of European colonial involvement in Africa, which can help us all to understand its continuing impacts on our contemporary world, including the displacement of millions of people across the globe.

The Ration Challenge

By Liv Harrison-Little



I am a regular attender at Doncaster Meeting with my wife Beth and our baby daughter Theodora. This year, I am taking part in "The Ration Challenge". The Ration Challenge is a yearly fundraising challenge by Concern Worldwide that runs from the 13th to 19th of June. For these seven days I will be eating nothing but a mock up of the rations that Syrian refugees in camps receive. This includes 1.92kg of rice, 400g of flour, 330ml of vegetable oil, 85g of dried chickpeas, 1 tin of kidney beans, 170g of lentils and 120g of another protein such as sardines, tofu or soya mince (I'm using soya mince). Across the whole week, this is very little food. Any extras including salt, a spice, tea or other foods are only allowed if I meet certain fundraising goals. The food will be bland, stodgy and nutritionally incomplete. Once the week is over, I can go back to my abundant and varied regular diet but a Syrian refugee lives on these rations provided by charity and whatever they can grow, forage, trade, make or buy once they find work. They do this year after year in basic, crowded camps until they can move on.

Why am I doing this? Because I am human. For 10 years I've sat in my comfortable home being horrified by what I was seeing in the news. A country turned to ruins by a war most didn't want. Millions of people forced to flee and make dangerous journeys to protect their families. Millions shunned, discriminated against, turned away or even had their deaths celebrated by people safer countries that did not see their humanity. Simply for the crime of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I've donated to a few causes with my own money over the years but I didn't feel that this was enough.

I came across the Ration Challenge and discovered that by taking this challenge and being sponsored to eat in a similar way to refugees for a week I could do 2 things. Firstly, I could probably raise more money for the cause than I could donate myself. Secondly, I could use it to connect on a spiritual level in a comparatively small way with what these people have to go through. To feel a little of what they are feeling when they have no choice but to eat these basic rations. To eat the same thing day after day. To remind myself that I am the same as they are - a human being. The only thing that separates them and me is location and timing. Democracy, politics and secure living are fragile and fickle and at any point any one of us could run into bad luck either alone or as an entire country and find ourselves begging others for help.

To find out more and/or donate please visit

<https://www.rationchallenge.org.uk/olivia-harrison-little>

This is my fundraising page which has lots more information about the challenge and enables you to make an online donation. Alternatively, if you wish to donate in person with cash, you can find me at Doncaster Meeting House most Sundays and I can pay the donation in from my own bank.

Thank you for reading about my cause.

the other side of hope

the
other side
of hope

the other side of hope: journeys in refugee and immigrant literature is a new, UK-based, print and online literary magazine, edited by immigrants and refugees.

Funded by Arts Council England, and supported by ArtReach and Journeys Festival International, their purpose is to serve and celebrate the refugee and immigrant communities worldwide. This is their website: othersideofhope.com

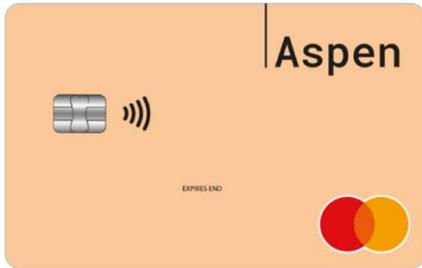
Call for submissions

fiction & poetry (no theme; open to refugees and immigrants)
non-fiction, book reviews & author interviews (open to everyone; theme: migration)

We pay £100 per published author for the print issue, and £50 for the online issue.

The new Aspen Cards

This is what the new Aspen card looks like.



The transition to the new card should have been completed over the weekend of May 22-23 for all people seeking asylum.

Experience in Doncaster has mirrored reports of difficulties from across the country: either no card, or a card which cannot be activated, or one declined in shops.

Lines were down at Migrant Help.

Previously the facilities management company Sodexo had the Home Office contract to manage the distribution of money to people seeking asylum. This changed on 21 May to Prepaid Financial Services. PFS came under fire last month from Ireland's central bank because of significant money-laundering risks.



Less reported news

1. UK Asylum statistics

The government has published its [immigration statistics](#) for the year March 2020 to March 2021. Within the 12-month reporting period, asylum applications in the UK fell to 26,903, which is a 24 % decrease compared to the previous year. With this modest number, the UK [ranks number 17](#) in Europe as regards asylum applications per capita while on a global scale, forced displacement [has grown](#). In 2020, the number of forcibly displaced people exceeded 80 million – more than the UK's population.

The actual development in the number of asylum applications in the UK clearly contradicts the government's rhetoric, with Home Secretary Priti Patel stating the UK asylum system was "collapsing under the pressure of parallel illegal routes to asylum, facilitated by criminal smugglers." While the government pursues a further reduction of asylum applications with its New Plan for Immigration, the asylum system itself continues to malfunction even with reduced arrivals. The backlog in asylum cases further increased to a new record high. At the end of March 2021, 66,185 people were waiting for an outcome on their initial asylum claim.

Enver Solomon, CEO of the Refugee Council, responded to the newly published statistics saying: "We remain deeply concerned by the record high numbers of people waiting in limbo on news of their fate, unable to begin new lives. This could easily be resolved through additional resourcing and more effective decision making,

however, we fear it is only set to worsen as the new rules continue to have an impact on asylum cases."

Source: ECRE

2. Jesuit Refugee Service

JRS recommends a new set of core principles for a radically reformed asylum system: one founded on justice, designed for the welfare of refugees and not for their harm.

They argue a newly reformed asylum system should aim to:

1. enshrine protection and transparency at the heart of the asylum determination process, in a culture where asylum claimants are seen and heard;
2. provide borders which are open to those in need of protection;
3. support asylum claimants and refugees to live in dignity, and participate fully in wider social, economic, and political life;
4. foster a society that welcomes, protects, promotes, and integrates those seeking sanctuary as our neighbours.

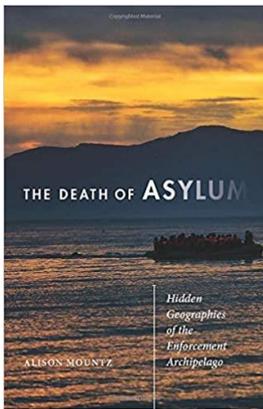
Source: JRS

Haiku corner



Here is freedom.
Together. Living. Playing.
Now.
And always the smiles.

Book Review



The Death of Asylum: Hidden Geographies of the Enforcement Archipelago

By Alison Mountz

University of Minnesota Press 2020

ISBN: 978-0816697113

By Paul FitzPatrick

'No man is an island entire of itself; every an is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less., as well as if a promontory were, as well as a manor of thy friends were or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee'.

John Donne's famous words frame this book by Alison Mountz, for this is a book about islands. Very specific islands, like Lampedusa, Malta, the Canary Islands, Lesvos, Christmas island, Nauru, Manus, Mayotte, Guam. And locations which function rather like islands, whose remoteness prevents scrutiny and awareness. Camps and detention centres function rather like islands, as do Ceuta and Melilla, highly fortified enclaves. (An enclave means a place where people are locked in, with a key). In December 2018, the Danish Parliament passed legislation to

detain asylum seekers on a small island about 80 km from Copenhagen, where the facilities proposed had previously been used for experiments on diseased animals. The Bangladeshi government proposed to build up a silt island, Thengar Char, one inundated during the monsoon season, to hold one hundred thousand Rohingya refugees relocated from Cox's Bazaar.

Mountz details how states use the geographic inaccessibility of places like Christmas Island, almost a thousand miles off the Australian mainland, to isolate asylum seekers far from the scrutiny of humanitarian NGOs, human rights groups, journalists, and their own citizens. By focusing on borderlands and spaces of transit between regions, *The Death of Asylum* shows how remote detention centres effectively curtail the basic human right to seek asylum, forcing refugees to take more dangerous risks to escape war, famine, and oppression.

Islands in this book are a metaphor for the exclusion of people seeking asylum. Although the writer is Canadian and the study is focussed on the EU, Canada, the USA and Australia, I think it provides relevant background to the current Home Secretary's thinking on asylum, with its assumptions that more border enforcement, more aggressive interception, detention and deportation will deter people from crossing borders. Over the last five years, as rates of dislocation have reached ever higher levels, states have retreated from refugee resettlement. As children have crossed borders, news coverage and politicians have framed their arrival as evidence of the abuse of a generous immigration and asylum system which has not been performing its deterrent function.

Remote detention centres confine tens of thousands of refugees,

asylum seekers, and undocumented immigrants around the world, operating in a legal grey area that hides terrible human rights abuses from the international community. Built to temporarily house eight hundred migrants in transit, the immigrant "reception centre" on the Italian island of Lampedusa has held thousands of North African refugees under inhumane conditions for weeks on end. Australia's use of Christmas Island as a detention centre for asylum seekers has enabled successive governments to imprison migrants from Asia and Africa, including the Sudanese human rights activist Abdul Aziz Muhamat, held there for five years.

In this book, Alison Mountz traces the global chain of remote sites used by states of the Global North to confine migrants fleeing violence and poverty, using cruel measures that, if unchecked, will lead to the death of asylum as an ethical ideal. Through unprecedented access to offshore detention centres and immigrant-processing facilities, Mountz illustrates how authorities in the United States, the European Union, and Australia have created a new and shadowy geopolitical formation allowing them to externalize their borders to distant islands where harsh treatment and deadly force deprive migrants of basic human rights.

This is a sobering text. Its theme is the death of asylum, not merely its limitation. She is writing an obituary, mourning the loss of an ethical ideal. In what she calls 'the enforcement archipelago, Island communities have transitioned from safe haven to carceral space, with those detained increasingly isolated and segregated from each other. She asks us as spectators to take political action, to bring to light what is hidden and to draw attention to the machinery of exclusion, for, in the end, no man, or woman, is an island.

A view from the edge Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

Based at the
Quaker Meeting House
Off St James St
Doncaster DN1 3RH



To receive a copy of this newsletter by email, send a message to Paulfitzp@aol.com

Please send your contributions and suggestions to the same address.

Doncaster Conversation Club offers opportunities for local people and people who have sought asylum in the UK to join together to share friendship, while offering support and practical help.

The Club seeks to create a relaxed, friendly and supportive environment, and works on the principles of

Ownership – *everyone can get involved*

Impartiality – *it is not affiliated to any political or religious body*

Confidentiality – *what you say is private*

Respect – *for each other's differences and individuality.*

DCC is pleased to acknowledge the support of **Doncaster Society of Friends (Quakers), The Red Cross, The Refugee Council, Migrant Help, The Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group, St Leger Homes, Club Doncaster Foundation, Ongo M25 Services, YMCA, DARTS, CAST, Fareshare, The Brelms Trust, The Ruth Hayman Trust and Doncaster Minster.**

The Doncaster Conversation Club is run entirely by volunteers with the support of occasional grants for specific activities, currently from the Allen Lane Foundation, and the Wharfedale Trust

Picture credits: Hayder al Jayyash

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributors.

Paul FitzPatrick

Doncaster Conversation Club
Doncaster, South Yorkshire

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