'Are We An Experiment?' Informality as Indispensable for Syrians' Resettlement in the UK

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Abstract

This article unpacks the status and significance of informal social infrastructures within the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) in one region of the UK to offer a case study exemplifying an enduring and renewed political embeddedness of informalities as an idiosyncratically British way of governing migrant incorporation and producing social order. From the perspective of the scheme's formal design, this was 'bottom-up', 'community-led' activity for community or 'social' integration. For refugees this was the existence and availability of a quality of sociality productive of a sense of existence and a viable and possible life, in other words, defining – above and beyond discrete domains or material things - what had been hoped for and expected from resettlement. Where this 'informal social infrastructure' was available, refugees conveyed an experience of positive processes of life, resonating with discussions of existential movement. Where unavailable refugees conveyed experience of a persistent or even worsened sense of biographical interruption that forced migration has been likened to. The article aims to contribute to informalities scholarship in relation to the imbrication of informal-formal as means of governance and attest to the significance of informalities to the reduction of uncertainty, production of stability, in other words means by which informalities help constitute and reproduce the social and cultural world. That the scheme includes any informal element is somewhat uncanny amidst a converging restrictive turn and considering formal rejection of laissez faire 'multiculturalism'. The article concludes that experience of refugees in the absence of informal social infrastructures must not be read as a straightforward critique that might call for further formal components. Rather, it is a critique that emphasises the importance of informalities within formal design and analysis of the wider factors that hinder or promote their availability.

Keywords: *Resettlement; informal; integration; social infrastructure; governance*

Introduction

'When I talk about the feeling of importance, I don't mean it in the extreme way of them needing to make a parade around me and glorifying me. We have to be simple everyday folks really. But of course, we can't live really without the feeling we're cared for and important. By important I mean for them to see us as people who fled their countries, left their families, left everything, came from war. What are their needs, their hopes, what jobs would they want to do? We need people supporting us who are interested in us, supporting us and that support and that engagement makes you feel stronger, motivates you as well. If I lose interest in my wife and children, it won't be the same anymore or if my wife doesn't care, she will lose interest. She won't have that emotional connection anymore. It's the same with the country. How am I going

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> to like, adapt and love where I am if I feel that nobody cares?' (Mohammed, Resettled Syrian Refugee, May 2018).

Mohammed was not the only refugee spoken with during the research from which this paper stems, who conveyed a sense of being stuck both physically and biographically for the lack of a register of resources that might help his family move on with their lives. This sense of immobilised life was echoed among other refugees in this and 3 other localities. In the remaining 3 of the 7 localities studied within one administrative region or 'County' in the UK participating in the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS), there was a starkly different, positive story. The difference between localities was the existence or absence of relevant *informal social infrastructures* available to supporting resettled Syrian refugees. The dependence of SVPRS refugees upon host locality informal social infrastructures for a positive experience of resettlement can attest to the particularity of resettlement scheme refugees as typically the less mobile, with aged/ young dependents and noted characteristics that distinguish them from those who arrive independently (Robinson 2003; Skleparis 2018). Furthermore, varied experiences of 1 scheme can prompt the banal observation that a relatively non-institutionalised scheme will unfold differently in diverse socio-geographical localities. But, moreover, the dependence on informalities in the host and refugee population for positive resettlement locates and implicates the scheme design vis-a-vis an enduring distinctive British liberal philosophy of integration (Favell 1998) despite convergence with other European countries in legislative activism in relation to a 'restrictive turn .. against irregular immigration … ' (Lendaro 2019: 309) and shift away from laissez-faire pluralist or multiculturalist ways of living (Schinkel 2017).

This paper unpacks the status and significance of informal social infrastructures within the SVPRS and to refugees' experience of resettlement with the aim of contributing to the field of informality studies. Specifically, it offers a case study of a resettlement scheme that exemplifies an enduring and renewed *political embeddedness* of informalities as an idiosyncratically British way of governing migrant incorporation and producing social order more generally (Favell 1998) that is based on an arguably increasingly misplaced presumption of their *social embeddedness* (Clarke 2007). Rather than informalities 'in spite of' or 'beyond' the state (Polese et al. 2019: 8), the paper unpacks ways in which the workings of the scheme manifest a way in which informalities can be considered as *integral* or continuous with the State. Drawing on van Schendel and Abraham (2005), the paper uses 'informalities' to refer to legal, variously licit/ illicit, voluntarily motivated, non-prescriptively defined actions of individuals and variously formalised groups in a locality. As the paper will unpack, from the perspective of the scheme's formal design, this was 'bottom-up', 'community-led' activity for community or 'social' integration. From the perspective of refugees this was the existence and availability of opportunities for and a quality of sociality productive of a sense of existence and a viable and possible life, in other words, defining what had been hoped for and expected from *Resettlement*. Where informal social infrastructures were available, refugees in these localities conveyed an experience of positive processes of life. Where these were unavailable refugees conveyed the experience of a persistent or even worsened state of life despite having legal security. As such, the paper aims to contribute to informalities scholarship in relation to the imbrication of informal-formal as means of governance and attest to the significance of informalities to the reduction of uncertainty, production of stability, in other words, means

by which informalities help constitute and 're-produce ..[the] social and cultural world' (Polese, Kovacs and Janciscs 2018: 225).

I turn first to sketch out the longer and wider substantive and theoretical context for this case study. A methodology section follows in which I identify how the findings were produced. The paper then turns to the two main substantive sections. The first presents the formal scheme perspective in terms of its design, approach to 'community integration', evaluations of and responsibilities for integration as perceived by Case Workers and identifies the existence and availability of 'informal social infrastructures' as distinguishing different resettlement localities as different *realities*. The second main substantive section starts with these different realities of resettlement as perceived and experienced by refugees. It goes on to show that for refugees, 'community integration' could be equated with 'resettlement' and moreover, that informal, qualitative processes constituted this desired resettlement. The paper then concludes by summarising what the paper has sought to address and illuminate, identifying too, questions raised.

SVPRS in context: top-down and bottom-up governance

'Resettlement' is one of the 3 'durable solutions' in the lexicon of the international refugee regime, the other two being local integration and repatriation (Brun and Fabos 2017). Britain has not historically been a country of resettlement compared with the US or Canada. Whilst there have been ad hoc resettlement schemes in response to specific global conflicts (see Robinson 2003a), Britain's contribution to international protection has predominantly been by way of accepting asylum claims by, if not granting refugee status to, individuals and families who have made their way independently to the UK rather than through organised schemes. This said, the case of Britain is indicative of a trend noted towards favouring resettlement as a national response and contribution (Collyer, Brown, Morrice and Tip 2017; Swing 2017). In June 2019, the UK Government announced their support of what will be a new Global Resettlement Scheme (GRS) from 2020. This is intended to resettle 5,000 refugees a year from around the world (Home Office 2019) and this will dovetail with the end of the SVPRS, set up in 2014 (Hough 2018), which has set a precedent for a largescale sustained and staggered resettlement programme committed to resettling 20,000 refugees. The Gateway Protection Programme, run since 2004, was novel for resettling refugees on a yearly basis and from different parts of the world, but was on a much smaller scale with only up to 750 refugees resettled annually (Evans and Murray 2009). In this context, the SVPRS can be seen as precedent setting for this change in policy.

What the SVPRS represents, however, in the way of a policy shift, and how effective it is – and the GRS will be – for refugees, is debatable. In comparison to the asylum route in the UK which, following legislation in 1999, subjects claimants to a deliberate and now much normalised 'governmentality of unease' (Bigo 2002) whilst awaiting a decision on their refugee claim (see Darling 2011), through no-choice geographically dispersed accommodation, capped welfare benefits, no right to work and withholding of state integration support (see Griffiths, Sigona and Zetter 2005; Kissoon 2010; Sales 2002), resettlement has been regarded as something of a *privileged route* (Bloch 1999; and see Kinlen 2011) or at least a reasonable gesture towards an anyway impossible *un*conditional hospitality (Darling 2009). In relation to the SVPRS specifically, its terms of hospitality have been implicated in creating a two-tier system (Karyotis, Mulvey and Skleparis 2020). That the Government agreed a 5 year funding

process to support the SVPRS, extending on the 1 year given to the Gateway Programme, would seem to suggest a heightening of contrast between asylum/ resettlement terms of hospitality and a concern is that the extension of resettlement policy will further delegitimise the asylum route (Collyer, Brown, Morrice and Tip 2017; Darling 2009; Swing 2017).

Whilst acknowledged as a route available to few refugees, Swing (2017) contends that resettlement can 'give real hope and a chance to begin life anew to many who would otherwise have neither home nor country to call their own' (Swing 2017: 4). On the other hand, its advance as a policy choice, however cathartic for national sentiment (Betts 2017), needs to be put in the context of broader sanguine debate at the international level as to the efficacy of *any* of the 3 durable solutions to integrate rights and needs; whilst providing legal protection, resettlement, repatriation and local integration have been found 'unable to offer social, economic and cultural means for refugees to rebuild their lives and livelihoods' (Brun and Fabos 2017). Rather, their priority is population management, of putting people back in place, in national (b)orders. At the same time, then, as considering how resettlement may de-legitimise the asylum route, producing 'spontaneous' asylum seekers as further undeserving (Sales 2002) for not having come a proper orderly way, it is the means and terms of legitimacy of resettlement and the experience of resettled refugees that must also be given attention.

According to Castles et al. (2002), 'settlement … tends to define the process in top-down or social engineering terms' (2002: 118). And top-down engineering, heavy 'agency of structure' (Korac 2009), is a much noted concerning trend across Western Europe in relation to migration, integration and citizenship (see Back et al. 2002; Cheong et al. 2007; Finney and Simpson 2009; Schinkel 2017; Schinkel and van Houdt 2018; van Houdt et al. 2011). The 'agency of structure' clashes with refugees' desire for 'estate agency' (Gregson 2007). Top-down 'political projects of belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2006) clash with desire for home 'typically understood as an issue of creativity and adaptation, which foregrounds individual agency, self-expression and identity …' (Kusenbach and Paulsen 2013: 16; and see Brun 2015). Immigration restrictions clash with desire to move on existentially (Hage 2005; Madison 2006, 2009) when this existential biographical life has been interrupted (Boccagni 2017).

As this paper unpacks, the SVPRS cannot but be read in relation to this increasingly top-down trend. It arguably sets a precedent both for the normalisation of physical control in the form of dispersal, not only for political economic arguments as were made for asylum seekers in the UK but on the basis of 'community relations' (Robinson 2003b) or what Schinkel (2017) calls 'multiculturealism', a new common sense regarding the supposed naivety of cultural pluralism. But, alongside this normalised restrictionism, the SVPRS must also be interpreted vis-à-vis other enduring and newer bottom-up forms of biopolitics, namely Britain's idiosyncratic approach to migrant incorporation as an expression of a liberal-utilitarian conception of individual-state relations for social order (Favell 1998). If this state supported 'experiments in living' (ibid. p140) approach informed multiculturalism as a public philosophy, underwritten by formerly 'race-relations', latterly anti-discrimination legislation as protective rather than proactive, it now supports neoliberalism in its subordination and delegation of social production (Clarke 2007).

Britain's 'philosophy of integration' has in some ways been much altered since Favell's analysis, prioritising national symbolism not unlike the French philosophy with which it could hitherto be contrasted and these trends of neoliberalism and cultural assimilationism (Schinkel and van Houdt 2010) may not be exceptional in Europe. That said, the governance of the

SVPRS suggests a particularly enduring British attachment to leaving people to *get on with it*, *make it up as they go along*; informalities as politically embedded means of achieving 'social stability' whilst neglectful of the ways in which hostile political discourse on immigration (see Robinson 2003c) instituted in compulsory dispersal of, in this case, Convention Refugees, and neoliberal economic policy are implicated in vulnerable refugees' deprivation of informal extra-domestic sociality that might help 're-produce their social and cultural world' (Polese, Kovacs and Jancsics 2018: 225). National SVPRS guidance states that before volunteering to participate, local authorities have to consider whether they have or can put in place the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration of people in need of help' (Hough 2018: 13) and those that are new to resettlement are encouraged to speak to more experienced resettlement areas. The case study offered in this paper attests to the significance of this infrastructure and the value of such an embedding of informality to governance; the clash was less between this and refugees' needs and aspirations than between the scheme's top-down and bottom-up governance that has at the same time depleted and depends upon a social embeddedness of informal social capacity. The refugees' experience shared in this paper points to the value of a political embedding of informalities but reveals it to be incompatible with the simultaneously heavy agency of structure and points to the life-immobilising consequences of such a clash.

Methodology

The paper draws on a new analysis of research undertaken for an administrative region or 'County' in the UK involved in the SVPRS (Blunt 2018b). This resettlement scheme was set up in 2014 (Hough 2018). A UK 'County' is composed of number of smaller sub-regional Local Authorities and it was at the County level here that Local Authority voluntary participation in the SVPRS was coordinated. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) takes a leading role then in arranging travel, offering cultural orientation, making legal arrangements, undertaking migration health assessments. Refugees are escorted on their journey and personally met by representatives of the Local Authority which then assumes responsibility for their resettlement. The County then takes but a steering and monitoring role in relation to Scheme governance.

By April 2018 there were over 300 refugees settled in the County, 67 families, of whom 138 were adults. Travelling together from Jordan and Lebanon, by the time my research began, the first 2016 cohort of refugees in this County had been in the UK for nearly 2 years. The County had commissioned a 'Community Integration Needs Assessment' that would prioritise refugees' voices to inform long-term strategy. The research was carried out intensively between April and June 2018 resulting in a comprehensive and candid report (Blunt 2018b), offering insight and making a number of recommendations that distinguished it from much contemporary 'integration research' (Schinkel 2018). The paper draws on content and ethnographic analysis of focus groups and interviews with 94 refugees (42 women, 52 men) resettled in 7 relatively geographically far-flung Local Authorities or 'localities' (towns/ cities), an interview with the County-level Coordinator and Project Officer, herself a Syrian refugee and interviews with locality-based Case Workers. Meetings with refugees mainly took the form of focus-groups of between 6 – 13 individuals at a time, although a number of individual and couple interviews also took place. These were thematic rather than structured meetings, exploring experiences to date, hopes and aspirations and needs to bring those to fruition. Similarly thematic interviews with the County level SVPRS

Coordinator and locality Case Workers are also drawn on. These interviews explored the Scheme and locality approach to community integration and more generally how the scheme worked. All but one of the meetings with refugees were conducted with an Arabic-English interpreter, the exception being an interview with a young man who told me that working with and getting to know international agency personnel in the refugee camp in which he had lived in Jordan had fostered his English language acquisition. At times in focus groups individuals would switch to speaking a few words in English but then this needed to be translated back into Arabic to enable whole group participation. Two hours were given to each focus group. This was needed not only for the extensive discussion but also in order not to rush processes of explanation, introduction and signing of consent forms and, at the end, to reflect on the significance and value of what had been shared. Pseudonyms are used in place of refugees' real names throughout the text and scheme personnel are referred to by their role.

The author's own family's migration and dual religious (Christian/ Muslim) background were resources for rapport with refugees and sensitising for data analysis. This supported the production of thematic and interpretive analysis and accounts of the focus groups which took a more 'ethnographic concern with social interaction and collective meanings' (Tonkiss 2012: 234).

The design, approach and unfolding of the SVPRS in different localities

This section aims to offer a window on the formal governance and varied locality-realities of the SVPRS from the perspective of the Coordinator, Project Officer and locality Case Workers. In 5 parts, the first 3 present the scheme as consisting of a unified approach in terms of it being housing-led, working to a particular narrow definition of, secondary status and bottom up approach to 'community integration'. The last 2 parts open up this 1 scheme and the 7 localities included in the research to reveal, rather, how different Case Workers' capacity and approach, together with locality-specific dimensions gave rise to almost incomparable unfolding of the scheme across the county. It is identified however, that the 7 localities could be distinguished as high or low resource localities based on the existence and availability of informal social infrastructures.

A Housing-led Scheme. The County SVPRS Coordinator interviewed for this research described how there had not been so many pledges of participation in the scheme from local authorities across the County that *any* had been refused. He described the SVPRS as housing-led with a deliberate policy of avoiding large clusters, with 5 – 10 families placed in any locality in one year. On this note, the scheme was described as *'probably the most segregationist project that the Government has ever made because there's no choice for the refugee …'* It was agreed that the scheme could be interpreted as highly isolationist.

Working definition and status of 'community integration.' Intensive Case work is provided in the first year through weekly home-visits with interpreters. The focus in this first year, I was told, was institutional and functional integration: housing, welfare, benefits, health and ESOL. Provided part-time on a drop-in basis in the second year, I was told by Case Workers that day to day practical issues could remain a focus of issues. Three further years of tapering yet undefined support would be available. In some localities, it had taken time to see children with special educational needs settled into schools or help schools in mono-cultural localities to obtain language support or adjust to girls wanting to wear a veil. Ager and Strang's

(2008) conceptual framework for integration was a common point of reference for both the Scheme Coordinator and myself as a researcher. Commissioned by the UK Home Office in 2002, it proposed a middle range theory of integration, identifying 10 core domains reflecting 'normative understandings of integration' (2008: 167). The 10 core domains are arranged in 4 strata, identified from the base as: Foundation (Rights and Citizenship), Facilitators (Language and Cultural Knowledge, Safety and Stability), Social Connection (Social bridges, Social bonds, Social links), Means and Markers and Means (Employment, Housing, Education, Health).

Although there was some community integration brokerage undertaken through case work around education and health, both the Coordinator and Case workers confirmed that the scheme gave 'community integration secondary status and defined it narrowly in relation to Social Connection domains with particular emphasis on Social bridges (relationships between refugees and host society) and Social Links (links between refugees and structures of the state, such as Government services) (Ibid 2008: 180-181

A 'bottom up' approach to community integration. The Coordinator described how, rather than a top-down corporate model of community integration which might see standardised and centralised provision at County level in an institutionalised form (courses, directives), the approach was *'a traditional model which is to do this in the community and let the Voluntary Sector do it their own way .. the programme is a mixture in a sense, more geared towards a community model of integration generally speaking … it might be an argument to have a syllabus if you like .. and then there are other arguments that say it's better done in the community by the community actors themselves, you know every community's different'.*

Evaluations of and Responsibilities for Integration. Case workers were asked how they felt integration looked for refugees in their locality. General evaluations ranged from 'dire, very dire', 'I wish we could have done more in 18 months', to 'disappointing' and 'acceptance of slow progress vis-à-vis other priorities' and 'there is a growing feeling of settledness'. It was noted in more than one area that a small Syrian community had formed. The extent to which Case Workers saw community integration as part of their role varied, affecting the factors offered for how well they felt integration was going. One case worker who had moved between localities and who considered community integration as part of her role captured how different this aspect was between two localities. In the first she told me that she was setting things up from scratch or brokering first visits of refugees to groups, whereas in the second, she was merely signposting to well-established welcoming and sympathetic existing resources. In another locality without an active voluntary sector, no experience of asylum seekers or refugees, a Case Worker with no experience of working with refugees or even religious or ethnic diversity attributed poor integration to refugees as having *'abdicated responsibility for their own resettlement'*. Her perception was that the refugees had not been *invited* to resettle so much as *volunteered* for their own resettlement and had not, in her view, followed this through. Whilst this was an extreme view heard, there was general talk of high dependency on Case Workers and often working alone in localities without existing social infrastructures, some case workers observed their lack of resources, opportunities to learn from other areas and some exhaustion.

Differences in informal social infrastructures. The Coordinator and Project Officer emphasised the diversity of localities of resettlement and this was attested through interviews with Case Workers and refugees in those localities and gathering of secondary data about

them. Although the 7 localities were each very different socio-geographical realities, it became clear that 3 could be distinguished from the other 4 as high or low resource localities, respectively and I came to call these resources *'informal social infrastructures'* available and supportive to refugees. Informal social infrastructures referred to a range of social, cultural, political and economic features and capacities, including but not limited to: a settled minority ethnic and religious population; experience of and familiarity with receiving refugees and asylum seekers; familiarity with diversity and global outlook; active voluntary and faith sector organisations; a resident population available and inclined to voluntary community activity (e.g. independent retirees/ young people/ students); private and public institutions (e.g. education, libraries, sports clubs) taking on community-building and leading role particularly in relation to poverty, marginalisation; reasonable quality private rental housing sector in terms of material structure and commitment to tenants; residents with reasonable level of economic security such that there is spare time beyond acute concern for economic survival and confidence/ openness to newcomers vis-à-vis the job market. The table below highlights contrasts in these informal social infrastructures, offering examples of features that distinguished a high from a low resource localities. Also identified are contrasts in SVPRS Case Work Providers and Case Worker experience and capacity that was found between high and low resource localities.

Table 1. Contrasting informal social infrastructures

	High Resource Localities included …	Low Resource Localities included …
Local support	Sanctuary city status with well-developed network of individuals, groups and businesses aware of and specifically interested in supporting refugees	Few Voluntary Sector Organisations (VSO) active in locality and none with specific refugee focused remit
Settlement experience	Locality is a 'dispersal area' for Asylum Seekers prior to SVPRS and refugees have stayed and settled	No prior experience of Asylum Seeker dispersal or refugee settlement
Ethnic context	20% Black and Ethnic Minority population	Less than 2% Black and Ethnic Minority Population
Local Authorities	Local Authority vocal in its support for refugees generally and expresses pride in SVPRS participation	Local Authority prevents any local media coverage of arrival of SVPRS refugees for fear of political backlash
Case Work Provider	Case Work Provision outsourced to VSO with extensive involvement in global and migration issues	Case Work Provision outsourced to VSO in locality with no experience of working with refugees or asylum seekers

Case Worker – refugee relationship	Case Work provider organisation includes employees who include refugees in social life outside Case work role, as locality co-residents	Case Workers maintain role-based relationship with refugees, despite being locality co-residents

The localities differed starkly for the existing social infrastructures and capacity for community integration and, as identified in the lower part of the table, case workers' experience and approach did not always make up for this. Indeed, the experience and skills of Case Work providers and Case Workers tended to reinforce rather than even out differences. Differences in this capacity and resources for community integration made for not only different localities for resettlement but, moreover, as the following section will highlight, different *realities of resettlement* among refugees.

Different localities and *realities* of resettlement among SVPRS refugees

That refugees' experience of resettlement, depended primarily on the locality in which they had placed, became quickly apparent in meetings. At the start of one focus groups, before the first man who had arrived had sat down, he glanced over at me and around at the group saying *'Are we an experiment?'*. He was not the only person in a least resourced locality who conveyed a sense that not only had the SVPRS not matched their expectations or needs but left them feeling that they had been subjects of a cruel social experiment they had few resources to alter the conditions of. This could be distinguished from more resourced localities in which refugees conveyed a sense that whilst slower than they had hoped, their life was reasonably matched with their expectations. General evaluations of life in least resourced localities included: *'we could stay here for 100 years and they would still not want us … Other Syrian people feel more comfortable, more confident, they're living a different life'* and *'like Zero. Is there anything lower than zero?'* Of his experience in one poorly resourced locality, one man questioned the value of his legal status in comparison with the social impoverishment of his experience: *'We can't communicate, socialise, speak … the situation back home wasn't so bad, we had problem with Government, yes, we fled from Syria but we still had life, even if we had our documents taken from us'*. His family had been subject to Islamophobic harassment which the local Police had not initially wanted to pursue as 'hate crime', preferring to put it down to mere antisocial behaviour of teenagers, however, the Case Worker had insisted that it be recorded correctly in order that the family receive appropriate support. From that time, I was told, the family had CCTV installed on the outside of their house and lived under a self-imposed protective curfew of 4pm, particularly in terms of walking through the park to which they had previously enjoyed taking the children after school.

'Community integration' is Resettlement

Among refugees, it was quickly apparent that 'community integration' denoted not particular domains of integration but the purpose and measure of resettlement as a whole. It became clear that refugees in least resourced localities were relieved to be asked about 'community integration' for it seemed that this equated to their first opportunity to ask how *resettlement*, rather than just a part of it, was going. As one man in such a locality said, *'Integration is about more than having a house!',* referring to the deficiency to him of having a place to live in, but not *live* in a wider sense. For many in the least resourced localities, the Case Worker was still the only non-Syrian refugee semi-social contact after 22 months in the country. Not having

employment was an issue, indeed, only 1 refugee included in the research had paid work at the time. None in least resourced localities had found voluntary work. Progress with English language acquisition was described as slow and poor; for some, this scheme provision had been delayed and others told of the provision not differentiating between literacy and ability levels. But it was not any one of these things alone or stacked up that meant resettlement to refugees but rather, a viability of life in which things between and transcending these isolated domains were more important. A highly multifaceted definition of community integration or *resettlement* could be identified from focus groups and it was possible to ascertain that it referred to a quality of agency, sociality, creativity and animation that might bind these and be productive of them individually. A number of refugees' aspirations for 'community integration' could be aligned with particular domains from Ager and Strang's (2008) conceptual framework, notably 'Be part of UK society' (Social Bridges), Wellbeing (health), feeling safe and confident (Safety and Stability), but more dominant than these were 'normal life', 'Independence/ Control' and 'upward social mobility' which were less easily categorised and referred to a quality of social reproduction.

Processes of 'community integration' or Resettlement

Across the multiple themes that refugees identified as denoting 'community integration', 3 processes emerged as common desires and needs. These were recovery, continuity and development. Recovery related to a desire to recover biographic life lost in exile and to the between 3.5 – 10 years of protracted displacement in Lebanon or Jordan and to deal with and accept loss that could not be recovered. Continuity related to a desire to pick up and continue aspects of life (profession, patterns of sociality, desire to retain culturally normative family structures) with an element of desire to retain and preserve what had been known and enjoyed before. Development captured a palpable, desperate and impatient desire to both insert selves into life in the place of resettlement but also take up opportunities to better life: *'We want to do any activities that will help us, to improve ourselves … it's something that will never end'.* In line with the emphasis on processes rather than material things, although the needs refugees identified to help them achieve their aspirations included specific things such as 'help finding a job', financial support, 'help to maintain culture' and 'new/ more people involved', again, more dominant were *'Help with moving on',' Empowerment, responsibility, support to feel brave and positive', 'To feel listened to, cared for, understood and allowed to criticise'.* That these processes were underway and possible in some localities but not others was made readily apparent in some refugees' identification that they needed to move out of the locality for a chance for their needs to be met.

The SVPRS had clearly placed refugees in starkly differently resourced localities with the presumption of animation, inclination and capacity of community actors in the host community; a presumption of that polysemic notion of 'community', active, open and available to refugees. In these circumstances I did not perceive passivity among refugees, but rather vulnerability and bafflement at how people in the 'host' community could live that way, never mind their own needs not being met. *'It's not the bonding that we're used to'* was one remark made of this and, *'even locals only know 2 or 3 people', 'neighbours are working from morning until night'.* Refugees laughed dryly as they told me of the integration they had achieved with one another but also gave more sober detailed accounts of the difference one-off or minimal social contact had made to them. For example, one refugee told of having offered food to workmen fixing things in his house, overjoyed by this opportunity to interact and share food. His family

invited the workmen to return another day to share food again and this happened even though the jobs had been finished. In this same locality, I was told by the Case worker that a church had collected volumes of donations for the refugees on arrival – clothes, children's toys – but according to the refugees these people had not been seen again until happily recognising somebody from this group at the park who said 'hello'. These refugees had lived in this locality for 22 months and that this was given mention, is an indication of the deprivation of informal social contact and support. Similarly, in another of the 4 least resourced localities, whilst a focus group was extremely negative and lacking in hope, one man spoke up of his 'one good neighbour' whom his family did not see every day as this lady worked full-time but whose apparent care, interest in their welfare but also genuine like of them, seemed to give him a glimpse of 'normal life'. These experiences were isolated but significant to refugees who conveyed a desperate sense of need but disablement to move on or animate their lives themselves.

Conclusion

The paper has offered a case study of the SVPRS as designed and unfolding in 7 localities within one administrative region or 'County in the UK, the governance of which exemplifies an enduring and renewed political embeddedness of informality as an idiosyncratically British way of governing migrant incorporation and producing social order. These informalities couched as integral to the scheme's design were valued or desired by refugees, depended upon the informal social infrastructures of the locality in which they had happened to be placed, supporting several observations and implications. The incompatibility of increasingly politically embedded restrictionism (no-choice dispersal in small groups, support conditional on remaining in dispersal locality) and dependence on and presumption of informal social infrastructures can be deduced. Arguably, this restrictionism and state monopolisation over the scheme's housing-led design, unlike previous resettlement schemes (Robinson 2003: 119) is implicated in withholding of informal social capacity supportive of refugees' resettlement, along with neo-liberal trends depleting of capacity to produce more than a private, survival focused and domestic 'social' domain (Clarke 2007). Furthermore, the significance of informalities, informal social infrastructures, to vulnerable refugees' experience of resettlement which, where absent, gave rise to the sense that life was immobilised or even lost, point to some critical value in retaining an informal 'experiments in living' approach to migrant incorporation. At a time when there is much – and much needed – criticism of a heavy top-down, restrictive and conditional turn in relation to immigration, integration and citizenship, that this bottom-up element is overtly articulated in and integral to the scheme is somewhat uncanny, attesting to this historic liberal British practice but too, to more convergent neo-liberal responsibilisation of citizens for their own welfare and specifically migrants' responsibilisation for their own resettlement. This was directly suggested in a Case Worker's view that refugees' lack of integration indicated that they had 'abdicated responsibility for their own resettlement'.

Resettlement has been regarded as a privileged route and where one participant said, *'Integration is about more than having a house'*, a plethora of research with refugees recognised as such through the asylum system in the UK might retort 'but it's a good place to start'. Given 28 days to move out of designated asylum accommodation and find a place to live, there is much informal activity in the UK attempting to fill this breach (e.g. No Accommodation Network (NACCOM)). There are formal 'top-down' elements of the SVPRS that should be made

available not only to recognised refugees through the asylum system but also to asylum seekers (see Kinlen 2011). That said, to consider SVPRS as a scheme is privileged or even acceptable needs to be declined for its unprecedented normalisation of no-choice dispersal and 5 year tied support for Convention Refugees without due care to check or invest in the informal social capacity of a prospective resettlement locality, indispensable to the scheme's capacity to support rebuilding lives and livelihoods.

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