



ArtLacuna
48 Falcon Road
Battersea
London
SW11 4LR

Material Conjectures present ***Diagonal Diagram of Dispersed Documents***

Private View: 7pm – 9pm Thursday 12th October 2017

Closing Event: 7.30pm – 9.30pm Saturday 28th October 2017

ArtLacuna is open 12:00 – 17:00 on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 13/10/17 – 28/10/17

**Jonathan Darling | Rachel Garfield | Jaspar Joseph-Lester |
Pil & Galia Kollektiv | Graham Lister | Maggie Roberts / Orphan Drift |
Anne Tallentire | BAW and Bruce Gilbert |**

Dispersed lives: the fragmentation of asylum support in Britain

The ongoing refugee crisis across Europe has dominated political and public debate over the last year. Whilst Europe has been discussing responsibilities for refugees at an international scale, the UK has faced its own questions over responsibility for asylum seekers at local levels. From the quality of housing provided, to the divisive use of red doors and wristbands to identify asylum seekers and their properties, a range of problems have been publically highlighted within the UK's approach to housing asylum seekers.

Since 2000, the UK has run a policy of 'dispersal' through which asylum seekers are relocated across the country to temporary accommodation whilst awaiting decisions on their claims to refugee status. For the last three years, I've been researching this process. This research explores in detail the UK's provision of asylum accommodation since it was privatised in March 2012.

Privatisation in this sector was intended to both cut costs and to simplify the task of managing dispersal. Yet, the reality has been that the contracts provided do not offer space for rising asylum applications, and the removal of local authorities from this process has led to a less cohesive system of support.

My research found a support system that is fragmented, under-resourced, and often reliant on poor-quality accommodation in areas of existing social deprivation. With local authorities facing unprecedented financial pressure, asylum support services have rapidly diminished, leaving only charitable provision in many parts of the UK.

Local authorities that were housing providers, also now complain of a lack of communication with private accommodation providers and the Home Office. Reflecting wider fears that the wellbeing of all involved in dispersal – asylum seekers and the communities they are dispersed to – are being ignored in favour of providing cheap housing and minimal services.

Contracts with private providers also mean that the process of accommodation is managed through an economic lens of efficiency and profitability, rather than one of vulnerabilities and needs. In this context, it is worryingly easy to see asylum seekers as ‘burdens’ to be distributed. This ignores both the skills that asylum seekers may bring to dispersal regions and the life stories and aspirations of those seeking refuge.

What recent events in the UK point to, is the need for stronger communication between actors involved in dispersal, longer-term planning of dispersal support services and integration opportunities, and a real need for political leadership in refuting the idea of asylum seekers as ‘burdens’ to be transferred between authorities, regions, and countries.

Jonathan Darling @Jonny_Darling