

G. Doná, A. Lindley, P. Novak and C. Sanders. (2023) Shades Of Carcerality? Reflections On Asylum Accommodation In Italy, France And The UK. Available at: <https://blogs.law.ox.ac.uk/border-criminologies-blog/blog-post/2023/11/shades-carcerality-reflections-asylum-accommodation>.

SHADES OF CARCERALITY? REFLECTIONS ON ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION IN ITALY, FRANCE AND THE UK

[Giorgia Doná](#) (University of East London), [Anna Lindley](#), [Paolo Novak](#) and [Charlotte Sanders](#) (SOAS University of London) all work on migration, borders and displacement, with particular interest in how asylum seekers are received and accommodated.

In recent years, Europe has witnessed a proliferation of types of accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees, including army barracks, schools, hotels, ships, rural houses, public housing apartments, containers, tents and purpose-built centres. These facilities accommodate but also confine people in ways that break down neat distinctions between carceral and non-carceral spaces. This blog post explores the shades of carcerality that emerge. Foucault identified how the logic of confinement and discipline, seen in prisons in ‘compact’ form, diffuses out through other institutions in society in a ‘carceral archipelago’. To understand this wider terrain, as emphasised by [Moran and colleagues](#), requires an appreciation of ‘the subjectivity and relativity inherent in the experience of carcerality’. Here we draw together insights on experiences of accommodation sites in Italy, France and the UK.

In Italy, [recent research](#) has focused on the institutionalisation of Extraordinary Reception Centres (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria or CAS), where asylum-seekers are warehoused until their claim to international protection is resolved, emerging in the wake of the so-called migration emergency in Italy. Despite [their humanitarian functions](#), the carceral conditions that characterise these facilities are evidenced by curfews, formal and informal surveillance practices, disciplining mechanisms, the inadequate organisation of public and private spaces inside them and their remoteness from urban centres. At the same time, the experience of being accommodated in a CAS cannot be generalised. First, the ways in which the legal and administrative procedures that define everyday life conditions are peculiarly assembled in each delineate profoundly [uneven](#)

[geographies of asylum accommodation](#) that defy clear-cut generalisation. Second, carcerality is not only determined by legal and administrative procedures, but also by [the location of CAS and their relative distance from urban centres, or by everyday episodes of racist abuse](#). Third, CAS are not isolated units but part of the [broader network of carceral and non-carceral spaces](#) established by the EU border machine, which migrants forcibly or autonomously traverse. It thus seems necessary to explore the experience of confinement within CAS beyond their carceral nature.



Photo of an Extraordinary Reception Centre in Italy, by Paolo Novak

Moving to the border between France and the UK, transit sites like Calais are usually thought of as spaces of [high mobility](#) rather than confinement. Yet the landscape is marked with carceral features including the prison-like structure of the immigration detention centre, high fences scattered along highways and demarcating railway tracks and the port, and surveillance cameras. Practices of surveillance and control are very evident, with police routinely carrying out patrols, enforced removals of migrants' tents and possessions, and forced evacuations. Migrants risk detention and death while trying to cross the border. Thus, while there is a high degree of daily survival mobility to get food, recharge phones, or get information, migrants feel stuck at the border - unable to move onwards, backwards or sideways. At the same time, despite efforts to create temporary homes, the precarity of their position is constantly reinforced via surveillance and punitive discipline. Moreover, the effects of the carceral landscape also impact residents, humanitarians, and tourists, as they navigate this highly securitised area.



Photo of migrants re-charging their phones and accessing health care in Calais, France by Giorgia Doná

Some people do succeed in travelling on to the UK, where confinement features large in the housing experiences of people seeking asylum, with a marked increase in the use of mass ‘contingency’ accommodation, particularly hotels, currently housing [50,546](#) asylum-seekers, half of those receiving support (the rest still dispersed in the community). Movement in and out of hotels is not officially restricted, but there are numerous practical constraints. Departures and returns are monitored rather than controlled by security staff, but with support of around [£9 a week](#), residents cannot afford public transport, entry into sites of local interest, or food and drink whilst out and about. Within the hotel, there are unannounced room-checks, restricted mealtimes and lack of access to kitchen facilities, and controls on use of communal space, which is monitored by CCTV. Contingency hotels also enforce proximity, with the Home Office intensifying

existing [room sharing](#). Unsurprisingly, many people experience a vivid sense of confinement. The lack of space, meaningful routine, autonomy and privacy, while navigating the stressful and protracted asylum claim process, drive [deteriorating mental health](#), most obviously manifesting as experiences of anxiety and/or depression. These mental health effects have a palpable impact on abilities and desires to go out, and exacerbate social isolation.



Photo of a family room in a UK asylum hotel, by a resident participating in research with Charlotte Sanders

Thus, our analysis illuminates shades of carcerality beyond prison and detention, across these distinct geographies and rapidly diversifying spaces used to accommodate people on the move. Each of these sites is carceral in nature, as surveillance, regimentation of everyday life, lack of privacy, and a degree of immobilisation are evident in all of them. Yet these sites also reflect diverse and distinct regulatory, material and psychological entanglements that need further unpacking. These entanglements may dent the stability of the concept of carcerality. What is shared and what is different across these landscapes? What does the concept of carcerality help us to foreground and what does it obfuscate? New frameworks may be needed to understand the spaces which we have highlighted.