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<ct>The health and wellbeing outcomes of former ‘unaccompanied minors’: shifting contours of vulnerability and precarity

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<a>Introduction

<text>Institutional definitions of vulnerability and the governed responses to it have significant implications for young people in transition. This chapter considers the challenges to young people’s wellbeing as they make the complex shift in status from the ‘unaccompanied child’ to that of ‘adult’ within immigration and social care systems. At this juncture, ‘vulnerability’ takes on very different economic, social and political meanings and associations. While young people may no longer meet the institutional criteria of the ‘vulnerable child’ (in need of care and protection), paradoxically they may become more vulnerable as they encounter multiple changes and uncertainties as young ‘adults’ with undetermined immigration status. Drawing on emerging themes from ongoing research, this chapter outlines the multiplicity of interacting factors influencing young people’s wellbeing and vulnerability to adversity (Thomson 2011; Hardgrove et al. 2014). In doing so, it draws distinction between vulnerability, precariousness and precarity in the context of these young people’s lives, arguing that refocusing the lens away from individualised factors and circumstances associated with vulnerability towards broader questions of precariousness and the politics of precarity forces a reconsideration of policies and practices that fundamentally determine young people’s wellbeing outcomes.

<a>Young people’s transitions within and without immigration control

<text>Every year an average of 12,000 children under the age of 18 arrive in Europe from other parts of the world with no accompanying adult and become institutionally defined as ‘unaccompanied asylum seeking children’ (UASC) or, commonly, ‘unaccompanied minors’.

The number arriving in the UK has fluctuated widely over recent years – peaking at more than 4,000 in 2008; falling to just over 1,100 in 2012 and then rising again to almost 2,000 in 2014 with a further increase evident from data available for the first two quarters of 2015 (Chase and Allsopp 2013; Refugee Council 2015). Children and young people typically make the journey without accompanying adult family members via a third party, usually referred to as an ‘agent’, who receives a fee for their services. They come from many different countries in Africa, the Middle and Far East and countries bordering Europe; and for a variety of reasons including fleeing violence, persecution, poverty and political and climate instability. Once in the UK, children under the age of 18 usually come under the care of the local authority in which they first arrive. They are accommodated according to their age; those under 16 usually placed in foster care (subject to availability of foster care placements), while those over 16 are most often placed in semi-independent accommodation facilities where they are given additional support from a key worker and normally have a named social worker. The level and type of support provided across different local authorities is known to differ widely (Brownless and Finch 2010; Wilding 2015).

Aside from unaccompanied minors who come under the care of local authorities, other young people enter the UK out of sight of immigration control procedures and never claim asylum. For example, they may arrive under private fostering arrangements; may be trafficked into the UK or may actively avoid the lens of immigration control since they fear having their asylum claim rejected and the consequent possibility of forced return.

Much research has examined the health and wellbeing outcomes of the ‘unaccompanied child’, most notably with respect to their mental health (see, for example, Reed et al 2011; Fazel et al. 2012). Similarly, there has been a raft of policy responses to the circumstances of unaccompanied children who are variously defined and treated according to different categorisations of vulnerability and become eligible to commensurate forms of social care

and support. Such support is, however, contingent on them being deemed eligible through the notoriously contentious processes of age assessment (Crawley 2007; ADCS 2015). Much less research attention has been paid to these young people's wellbeing outcomes as they make the transition from the status of 'child' to 'adult' (at the age of 18) within the immigration and asylum system.

Previous research with young people who have uncertain legal status has demonstrated how their sense of subjective wellbeing is inherently linked to the possibility of a viable future for themselves and others in their lives (Chase 2013a, 2013b; Chase and Allsopp 2013) and that when the likelihood of such a future is undermined, they may experience a profound sense of insecurity and compromised wellbeing. A fairly expansive literature, drawn primarily from the experiences of adult refugees, similarly demonstrates how most other aspects of their health and wellbeing, including access to basic needs such as shelter, food, healthcare and protection are also compromised when they become ineligible for ongoing welfare support (see other chapters in this volume). Yet there has been very limited research on the impact of immigration status on young people's wellbeing during the transition from the status of child to that of adult (Wade 2011; Barrie and Mendes 2011). Small-scale studies by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have proved important in highlighting the barriers to young people in pursuing or maintaining educational and employment trajectories as well as personal goals and relationships at this point of transition (Refugee Support Network 2012; Brighter Futures 2013; Gladwell and Elwyn 2012; Pinter 2012; Bloch 2013). These practical difficulties are known to be produced and reproduced by legal and social care structures that pattern the lives of young people and their access to services and support at key points in their chronological age (Allsopp and Chase 2014).

The failure of policy frameworks to adequately respond to the needs of young people during this transition to 'adulthood' has been previously noted (European Migration Network 2010;

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2011) but, as yet, the policy response has been largely muted. This is arguably because at this same transitional point, young people may lose their status as vulnerable children from an institutional and policy perspective and become, instead, absorbed into the corps of asylum-seeking and refugee adults. Whether or not this happens, and the extent to which they are able to access ongoing care provisions after the age of 18 has been demonstrated to be largely a question of luck (Chase 2013b; Wilding 2015). Yet, as will be argued below, this redefinition of – or assumed reduction in – vulnerability (or even ‘invulnerability’) at the point of transition to adulthood, paradoxically induces new forms of risk and potential harm for young people and raises important questions about the conceptual validity of vulnerability itself.

<a>Situating vulnerability

<text>Although often considered synonymous, vulnerability and precariousness have some important theoretical differences (Gilson 2014). Vulnerability assumes a pervasive uncertainty and instability in life, encompassing the likelihood of destabilising alterations in general that may or may not have loss as an outcome. Chambers (1989) defines it as a state of being defenceless, insecure and exposed to shocks and stresses. Vulnerability with respect to young people is frequently associated with the somewhat slippery and vague (yet normatively deficit) transitory phase of ‘adolescence’, a time when such vulnerability is considered to be self-imposed – a result of taking risks or falling under the delusion of invulnerability; a stage when young people may actively render themselves a burden of vulnerability (Fischhoff et al., 2001).

Precariousness is arguably more profound, since it speaks to the tenuousness of existence and the potential of risk to life itself; ‘while increased precariousness produces increased exposure to injury, violence and death, the consequences of vulnerability are indeterminate’ (Gilson 2014: 25). The outcome of precariousness, therefore, is loss that may be physical (a

loss of food or safety) or psychological (the loss of dignity, self-esteem, sense of agency etc.). Much previous research attention has tended to focus on youth vulnerabilities (rather than on their precariousness) and with respect to very specific employment market or ‘human capital’ transitions (Furlong et al. 2003; Morrow 2013). ‘Precarity’ has similarly for the most part been understood in economic terms and captures the insecurity and instability of employment and the impact on lifestyle, livelihoods and wellbeing; the ‘youth’ *precariat* epitomising the core of young people who experience such instability over extended periods of time (Standing 2011).

Yet, precarity is not a neutral state but rather engages with the politics of loss and is helpfully defined by Butler (2009) as the ‘politically induced’ state of precariousness:

<extract>‘[P]recarity’ designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death ... Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection.

<sc>(Butler 2009: ii)

<text>Importantly, however, the state of precarity creates its own dynamics and has been defined as a condition not only of uncertainty and insecurity but also as a possible rallying point for resistance (Waite 2009; Allsopp and Gill forthcoming). So while the politically induced state of young people subject to immigration control undoubtedly pushes them to the brink of loss, there is always the possibility of them finding ways to counter the political power that renders them precarious in various ways – such as in relation to their ability to remain in the UK or continue to access publicly funded sources of support. However,

resistance to such forms of instrumental power on the part of young people may in itself entail new threats and risks to self, health and wellbeing.

By drawing on examples of embodied precarity, in Butler's terms, this chapter illustrates the politically induced nature of precariousness for young people who previously arrived in the UK as unaccompanied children. These examples demonstrate that although young people do take risks in response to the structures and situations they encounter, they are not inherently vulnerable or precarious but are rendered so as a result of policies and practices that undermine and limit their possibilities and futures.

<a>The study

<text>Themes for this chapter are drawn from early stages of a three-year ESRC-funded research project: 'Becoming Adult: Young People's Conceptions of Futures and Wellbeing while Subject to Immigration Control in the UK'. Working with young people from four countries of origin (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Albania and Vietnam), the research examines the outcomes of children who arrived on their own in the UK as they experience the transition to adulthood over time. For the purposes of this chapter, I draw on some preliminary themes emerging from early analysis of findings with young people from Afghanistan and Eritrea and here examine the emerging theme of the shifting nature of precariousness.¹ The chapter highlights some of the individual, political and social factors – what Thomson (2011) has termed the 'dynamic mutuality' of factors – governing such precarity over time and young people's own responses to the causes of their precariousness.

<a>Precarity of childhood

<text>As noted earlier, young people seeking asylum alone in the UK end up here as a result of politically induced precariousness in one form or another, whether war, conflict, poverty, discrimination, persecution, denial of political freedoms or political voice. As noted elsewhere, while many have witnessed extreme atrocities and direct persecution, others have

migrated, or their migration has been organised, to protect them from the likelihood of such adversities (Chase et al. 2008). Young men from Afghanistan, for example, typically describe the risks and dangers they face on a daily basis, including forced conscription by the Taliban (Schuster and Majidi 2014); while for young people from Eritrea, whether girls or boys, enforced recruitment into the military for indefinite periods of time and from a young age is what drives many to migrate (Bozzini 2011; Hirt and Mohammad 2013).

These forms of precarity in the countries from which they flee are often magnified by their journeys, young people frequently making reference to the extreme risks and dangers they have encountered and have had to cope with throughout the migratory process as they duck and dive borders that they are unable to cross legitimately due to lack of papers and documentation (Bloch et al. 2014) – a process that Iqbal, a young man from Afghanistan described as ‘literally gambling your life’.

Those young people that refer to their childhoods in their countries of origin, frequently conjure the juxtaposition between norms surrounding daily life, risks and expectations back ‘home’ with the life they have experienced in the UK. In such widely different cultural, societal and economic contexts where there are equally widely different norms and expectations surrounding ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’, the distinction between the two phases in life is frequently blurred – as is commonly noted in the sociologies of childhood literature (Boyden 2003; Mayall 2004; Morrow and Vennam 2012). As Kahlil from Afghanistan explained:

<extract>The thing with us is that we have been raised in difficult situations. Even if you are ten years old, we don’t consider ourselves adults but we have developed those life skills in that tough life we had. It helps you to grow up quicker and mature quicker ... It’s probably different to people that have been raised or born here or somewhere else ... but with us, it’s ... our parents wouldn’t have let us come if they didn’t know we are not adults. They know

the life we have had, the tough life and that we could cope ... at the same time, they want you to be safe ... But they wouldn't let you come if they didn't know you were tough enough.

<text>This exposure to the realities and dangers of life from a relatively young age may result in young people being perceived as older than their chronological age would suggest for a child having grown up in the UK. Young people often describe instances where their age has been disputed, not necessarily because of how old they appear but as a result of being perceived as not acting in age-appropriate ways. Hafiz, for example commented on why he believed his age was disputed soon after he arrived in the UK:

<extract>And that's the reason why when I came here Social Services said, 'looking at you, looking at your body, looking at your face he [sic] doesn't look more than 13, but what you are saying ... the answers you are giving, you looks even more than 15'.

<text>Such perceptions by immigration officers, social workers, foster carers and other professionals fundamentally affect the ways in which young people are treated on arrival in the UK; dictating whether or not they receive the care and support they require and ultimately determine their wellbeing outcomes.

<a>The lottery of security or ongoing precarity in the UK

<text>Findings from our research so far confirm the serendipity of outcomes for young people that have emerged from earlier work (Chase 2013b). Whether or not young people are recognised and believed to be children create a whole set of risks, vulnerabilities and possibilities for their futures and wellbeing outcomes. At this juncture, young people frequently get torn between state mechanisms governing the provision of social welfare and support on the one hand and immigration control on the other, the latter epitomising politically induced precariousness. And while some young people may be forcibly excluded from provisions reserved for children, as noted above, others may choose not even to attempt

to access such support because of fear of such exclusions and the possible repercussions of forced return.

These different levels of engagement with statutory systems and procedures soon after their arrival set young people along very different pathways – young people within the system are likely to receive at least some, if temporary, social care support such as accommodation, care, education and welfare security; whereas those excluded from or choosing not to engage with statutory systems and structures have no support from the very beginning of their arrival. In the latter case, there is an inherent precariousness for children and young people from the day they arrive; while in the former a period of security is frequently followed by rapid transition into uncertainty and insecurity, largely governed by chronological age (Allsopp and Chase 2014). The cusp of adulthood (institutionally at the age of 18) becomes in some respects, therefore, a point of convergence for these two different trajectories, and young people, irrespective of their route into the UK, may become more or less precarious at this point.

Fazil from Afghanistan, for example, spoke of how on arriving in the UK at the age of 14, he was never accepted as a child. As a result, he was immediately placed in a shared house with adults, and after one and half years received a letter of refusal for his asylum application from the Home Office. At that point his eligibility to any public-funded support ceased. He described how he survived initially with help from friends who shared food with him and sometimes gave him somewhere to stay. Over the years, however, he gradually lost contact with some friends while others were deported and his network of support dissolved. As a result, he spent a number of years on the streets with no access to social care or support. It was only through the involvement of a non-governmental organisation at the point at which he was ‘appeal rights exhausted’² and on the brink of being forcibly returned to Afghanistan, that his case for asylum was reviewed and he was granted indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the UK. When we spoke to Fazil, just a few months after this decision, he described how he

felt stuck and unable to move forward with his life, despite now having his papers proving his status in the UK. He commented, ‘papers don’t give you hope ... they only mean I am safe from the Taliban, or the police or badness I can’t just sit at home with a passport’. Fazil lamented the fact that he had never had a chance to have an education and that now, at the age of 24, it was too late to do all the things he had hoped for in the past. He commented, ‘in year one, year two, I had hope and then it all goes ... I lost trust in people ... there was no humanity ... now I feel it’s too late for me – I can’t learn now, my brain doesn’t work ... I have problems remembering’.

Similarly, Peter from Eritrea had his age disputed soon after his arrival in the UK and, as a result, has never had access to care and support from social services or any leaving care support. Until recently, his circumstances have been alleviated to some extent through the support of a charity (paying his bus fares to college and a small stipend for living expenses each week) meaning that despite this period of prolonged precariousness, he has been able to sustain his education at a local further education college. However, since he is now 23, Peter is no longer eligible to support from the charity and survives essentially on the goodwill of friends – this reliance on others’ help is, he says, a constant source of embarrassment. Peter conforms to his obligation of having to sign on with the Home Office and is hoping that a fresh claim for asylum will enable him to make a life for himself in the UK. In the meantime he experiences a further dimension of liminality since, for young people from Eritrea, their situation is further complicated by the fact that, at the time of writing, they are not ‘deportable’ in the same way as young people from Afghanistan are considered to be. Current guidance in the UK suggests that the risks of return for young people to Eritrea mean that the government would be contravening the basic principle of non-refoulement by returning them. Peter, like many other young people we meet, therefore is at once protected from immediate enforced return from the UK but at the same time denied any viable future here.

<a>The re-emergence of precarity

<text>The majority of children arriving on their own in the UK do not meet the criteria for refugee status but are afforded discretionary leave for the period of time that they are children, provided that is that they are accepted as being the age they claim to be. At the age of 18, some continue to be eligible for government-funded leaving care support while their applications for further leave to remain in the UK are pending. Ultimately, it is the decision on such applications by the Home Office that dictate whether or not they are able to remain and build their lives in the UK.

In practice, therefore, the run up to the transition to 'adulthood' is demarcated in UK policy by a series of biologically defined age boundaries (16, 18 and 21) that are accompanied by differentiated rights and entitlements. While for immigration control purposes, adulthood begins at the age of 18 in the UK, for certain welfare entitlements this boundary is more fluid and young people may or may not be able to access support beyond the age of 18. Yet the rules and regulations are far from transparent (Chase 2013b; Chase and Allsopp 2013; Allsopp and Chase 2014), and may in fact constitute more of a 'lottery' of opportunity (Wilding 2015). As noted earlier, the disputed nature of this terrain is characterised by ubiquitous age assessment procedures (Dorling 2013; Crawley 2007), creating much confusion among young people who must grapple with Western concepts of chronological age and time and the limitations these impose on them. For those young people who never claim asylum in the UK, on turning 18, they may continue to live in the UK by whatever means they can without legal status or documentation (Bloch et al. 2014; Sigona and Hughes 2012). Once they turn 17½, most are unsure whether or not they will be able to remain in the UK and for how long. With no legal right to stay, they may be categorised as eligible for voluntary or forced return to countries of origin, although the practical challenges in deporting young people often render their futures more insecure (Gladwell and Elwyn 2012;

Gibney 2008). For example, there are clear differences in the likelihood of forced return according to young people's country of origin – typically young people from Afghanistan are deemed to be more 'deportable' than other groups of young people such as Eritreans (although these potential outcomes can shift dramatically in tune with other geopolitical changes at different points in time). The uncertainties of these outcomes are likely to impact in profound ways on young people's conceptions of their futures and their subjective sense of wellbeing.

During this time of waiting, often for a number of years, young people speak not only about the re-emergence of a sense of insecurity (emphatically linked to their sense of subjective wellbeing) but also a sense of powerlessness to do anything about it. As the uncertainties about their futures re-emerge, they are faced with difficult decisions about whether or not to stay in touch with systems and structures that on the one hand provide often their only means of practical and financial support, but on the other impose systems of total control and, in the extreme, the risk of forced return. In an effort to shake off immigration surveillance and its inherent risk of removal, young people may at this point make the transition into illegality (Gonzales 2011).

Bashir spoke of his dilemma at the point when he became appeal rights exhausted and when he had to decide whether or not to maintain contact with the Home Office. At the same time, the rules and regulations had changed concerning applications for a fresh claim for asylum, meaning that in order to submit such a claim, people had to present themselves in person to an official at the Home Office, rather than submit their papers by post, which had previously been the case. This shift in institutional process, he was aware, rendered him more vulnerable to the vagaries of immigration control than the paper version of the application where he could maintain a degree of hiddenness and safety:

<extract>I wanted to go and sign and submit my fresh application but I told my solicitor, ‘if I get detained are you responsible? – can you do anything?’ And she said, ‘no ... I cannot guarantee anything’ And I said, ‘so you are telling me that if I get detained, you can’t do anything?’ ... and so I said, ‘I am not going’, I said ‘if you’ve got any other way to send my fresh application through the post or whatever then do it ... If you can’t then I am not going to sign’. Because if you go ... I wanted to go for the first few signs because there is very little chance to get detained in the first, second or third week to go for signing. But after that you will most likely be detained you know. ... Because to me, if you are going to sign, you have got both sides – a positive and a negative. ... I wasn’t like strong enough to make that decision to say ‘OK I am going to go for signing’ – because I have seen so many of my friends that have been deported ... so I just decided, ‘I will stay and see whatever happens later on’, but thinking that by yourself you are going to go into danger ... obviously you are not going to do it. So that’s it... I just quit.

<text>The dynamics of precarity are complex here – Bashir weighed the pros and cons of ‘signing on’ – on the one hand, it would enable him to put in a fresh claim for asylum with the possibility of his case being accepted; but on the other, it laid him bare to the possibility of detention and forced return to Afghanistan.

<a>Enforced return and new forms of risk and precarity

<text>For those who are forcibly returned, there is scant information on their outcomes.

However, an emerging body of evidence suggests that return renders many young people extremely vulnerable to a range of negative outcomes (Schuster and Majidi 2014; Gladwell and Elwyn 2012; Chase and Sigona 2016). Yet, while the politically induced state of precariousness for young people undoubtedly pushes them to the brink of loss, at the same time they are not routinely passive recipients of their ‘lot’, but find ways to counter the political power used to render them precarious. Examples above are implicit in the forms of

support afforded by communities of young people, who have shared a similar trajectory with more successful refugee outcomes, to those who no longer are eligible to publicly funded sources of support – such examples abound in this research. But they are also evidenced by young people's actions and resistance to the extreme forms of precarity epitomised by enforced return.

We first met Majeed from Afghanistan when he was aged 24 and living 'black' (illegally) in a UK city where he had first arrived at the age of 16. Soon after his arrival, Majeed was age-assessed as being at least two years older than the age he claimed to be. He spoke of how the age assessment occurred in total contradiction to the response he had received from other adults working with him in the hostel/care centre that housed him when he first arrived. They had, he said, repeatedly made reference to how young he looked and how he should be being placed with a family.

At the age of 18, Majeed was deported back to Afghanistan. He spoke of how life in Afghanistan was untenable – there was no way of earning a living; people viewed him with suspicion and he was under constant pressure to join the Taliban. He felt unsafe and after just one and half months and encouraged by family and friends, he set off again to return to Europe via Pakistan. He spoke of how his journey from Calais to the UK took 15 attempts before he successfully boarded a lorry that brought him back to the UK. On arrival he made his way back to his network of friends in the city where he had spent his years as a teenager. At our first meeting, he described an extreme state of liminality, unable to move forward with his life and totally dependent on friends and networks for survival. Six months later, when we spoke again – nothing had changed – he was pretty much in the same place as he had been six months previously. He grappled with the pros and cons of making himself known to the authorities and making a fresh asylum claim. His greatest fear was to be sent back to Afghanistan, although he knew that the most likely scenario was return to Italy where he had

acquired a temporary residence document during one of the stages of his lengthy journey.

However, life in Italy, he felt was not sustainable either – he had no job, could not speak the language and was not eligible for any financial or other support.

The efforts made and risks endured by young people such as Majeed (and many others we have spoken to) to resist forces of power and control in these processes of migration are ultimate examples of resistance. Yet, while on the one hand temporarily ‘safe’ in the UK, any sense of viable future – intrinsically linked to a sense of wellbeing – for Majeed is currently thwarted. He exists as an invisible other, unable to make the normal sorts of choices and steps forward with his life that others of his age would be making as they transition towards adulthood. For others, forms of resistance have been even more extreme. Some young people we are in contact with, fearing a repeat of their forced removal from the UK, embark on even more complex journeys in search of sanctuary outside of Europe. In doing so, emerging evidence suggests that they may face further risks of prolonged limbo and uncertainty (including periods of immigration detention) as they search for ‘any safe place’ where they can imagine and live out a viable future for themselves.

<a>The limits of vulnerability as a concept

<text>Butler’s notion of the politically induced nature of precariousness is something experienced by young people over extended periods of time and so has temporal as well as geographical dimensions. Typically young people describe circumstances of their childhood imbued with precariousness, largely the result of geopolitical events and circumstances of which they have little understanding and over which they have no control.

Once in the UK, ‘children’ – provided they are accepted as such – normally experience a period of respite from these forms of precariousness (although they may remain ‘vulnerable’ as defined earlier to more generalised insecurities and uncertainties). Yet precarity re-emerges around the time that young people make the transition to adulthood, in institutional

terms at 18 (or in a practical sense now at the age of 17½ years). At this point, a whole new set of legislative and political conditions and frameworks expose them to multiple forms of precariousness – including the likelihood of homelessness, destitution, termination of educational opportunities and no access to public funds, detention, forced removal and ultimate statelessness. In a subjective sense, precariousness takes on other forms – breakdown of friendships and relationships; becoming objectified by systems and structures that impose stigma and discrimination; portrayals of self as the Other/the outsider; difficulties in establishing a sense of belonging or firm identity – and being denied the ties and connections that have been established over many years (Carens 2009).

Within policy and political discourses surrounding migration, vulnerability and precariousness are frequently presented in neutral terms. Young people apparently face inherent difficulties or are exposed to risks and shocks that are considered to be either in the ‘natural order of things’ or are perceived to be self-inflicted. Yet in reality, just about all the difficulties, shocks and uncertainties described by young people are arguably generated by political decisions in one form or another – and across different social, political and geographical domains. Undoubtedly young people in the current study **clearly** make decisions that may be perceived as placing themselves at risk – but such risk-taking is bounded by the political, social and economic contexts that straightjacket the range of options they have and that curtail their aspirations and goals for a viable future.

Solidifying ideas about inherent vulnerability in discourses surrounding young people seeking asylum in the UK is itself a political process. In essence, it absolves governments and policymakers of the responsibility for causing or failing to respond to such precariousness other than relieving its symptoms at the point of crisis. Recognition that legislation, policies and practice decisions are not apolitical but in fact perpetuate these different forms of precarity has multiple implications.

Butler's notion of politically induced precariousness – that is precarity – is clearly evident from accounts of young people's own experiences of negotiating their pathway towards adulthood at a time when they have not managed to secure refugee status. As shown in the above examples, precarity – understood as imposed precariousness – at this stage in their lives takes on many different forms. What these examples also demonstrate is how young people make sense of and respond to such precarity with their own counter tactics (Allsopp and Chase 2014; Schuster and Majidi 2014). Policy perspectives and responses are often devised in relation to specific peoples deemed to be 'vulnerable' and that, as a result, demand a more specialised/targeted response. Social work practice, healthcare provision, public health initiatives and other facilities such as housing are frequently designed according to a matrix of needs assessment; prioritising concerns and then designing appropriate interventions accordingly. Much less is written or said about the imposed vulnerability by welfare systems and structures working in tandem with immigration control procedures that simultaneously respond to politically viable forms of 'vulnerability' in one space while reconstituting new forms of vulnerability in another.

There is nothing intrinsic about vulnerability – it is not a neutral state that requires a response by different providers – in the context of these young people's lives, it is politically induced, by implication requiring counter political responses on the part of all those charged with providing services and support. As evidenced from emerging themes from our current research, these dynamics of vulnerability, precariousness and precarity are played out at many different institutional, local, national and supranational levels. While some young people face the immediate precariousness of their immigration status, for example, others produce narratives of precarity, endured across time, geographical space (local, national and supranational) and in relation to multiple institutions and actors with which they are forced, by the nature of their journeys and transitions, to interact. These politics of 'precarity' and the

dynamics of the responses to it are clearly fields that require further investigation and reflection.

An important postscript to Fazil's narrative above is that when we spoke to him again, six months after our initial meeting, life had got better. By then he recognised and had made full use of his secure immigration status; he had a job that he loved; he had got married and had made a number of other concrete steps forward with his life. He smiled and laughed and was beginning to imagine a future for himself and his wife once they could be permanently reunited. This is further testament to the dynamics not only of precarity but of the possibility to return from the losses and setbacks imposed by systems and structures of power that govern young people's lives, provided there is a political will to enable this.

<a>Notes

<note>¹ The study 'Becoming Adult' is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Further details of the study and its progress can be found at www.becomingadult.net.

² 'Appeal rights exhausted' refers to when someone has been refused asylum or any form of temporary protection or whose leave to remain has expired (and an application to extend it refused), and they have exhausted all possibilities to appeal this decision.

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