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Hotels, refuge, and the rise of carceral hospitality

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Abstract

Geographical work on hotels has foregrounded their role as spaces of commercial hospitality, leisure, and increasingly as sites of emergency accommodation for a range of displaced groups. Developing such work, this paper critically examines the central role of hotels in accommodating and containing asylum seekers and refugees. By considering the use of hotels in the UK and Australia, we argue that the hotel is a durable and vitally important site of bordering, one that manifests many of the tensions and contradictions of state responses to asylum seekers and refugees. Far from being a marginal or temporary space, we centre the hotel as a critical site for the reproduction and maintenance of contemporary bordering. In doing so, the paper advances understanding of the hotel as a *specific type* of social, political and cultural space, associated with three dynamics that we explore in turn: forms of flexibility and emergency response, patterns of hospitality, and the violent displacements of the hotel as a site detached from 'everyday life'. In surveying these understandings of the hotel, we argue that the cultural and political significance of the hotel as a site for understanding contemporary bordering emerges from its unique position at the confluence of the carceral and the hospitable. The paper thus proposes a concept of *carceral hospitality*, to designate the fraught positioning of the hotel between carceral conditions of institutional detention and spectacle, and the hospitable expectations more readily associated with sites of leisure, escapism and relaxation. It is this positioning that has allowed hotels in the UK and Australia to act as lightning rods for critical discussion and public concern over state responsibilities, welfare entitlements, and the narrowing scope of refugee protection.

KEYWORDS
accommodation, asylum, carceral, detention, hospitality, Hotel

1 | INTRODUCTION

In February 2023, the Merseyside borough of Knowsley made national headlines in the UK following a night of violent disorder outside the Suites Hotel. What began as a peaceful protest and counter-protest on the use of the hotel to accommodate asylum seekers, descended into violence and confrontations with the police. In the months after, asylum seekers and hotel staff continued to suffer attacks and verbal abuse (BBC, 2023). Events in Knowsley marked one of the highest profile and most violent in a series of demonstrations against the accommodation of asylum seekers in hotels across the UK. While the dispersal of asylum seekers to areas of relative deprivation is not new, the extensive use of hotels for such a purpose, with little oversight from local authorities and little communication with local communities (Darling, 2022), has fostered tensions that have coincided with a resurgence in far right organising (Moore et al., 2023).

In contrast to the anti-refugee assaults witnessed at UK hotels, protests outside hotels classified as 'alternative places of detention' by the Australian government, looked very different. In cities such as Melbourne and Brisbane, protests were instead supportive of asylum seekers, calling for the release of detainees from the torturous conditions of indefinite detention. Protests were also led by those detained in hotels (Loughnan, 2020). That the protests were peaceful events focused on solidarity with detainees, could perhaps be connected to the fact that the hotels operated as secure spaces of detention rather than accommodation, dissuading anti-refugee mobilisation from occurring, but also pointing to the diverse methods in which hotels are used for matters of asylum.

This paper critically examines the politics that underpin these examples of contestation by considering the central role of hotels in accommodating and containing asylum seekers and refugees. In both the UK and Australia, hotels have acted as lightning rods for critical discussion and fraught public concern over state responsibilities, welfare entitlements, and the narrowing scope of refugee protection. Crucially, moving beyond these specific cases, we argue that while examinations of hotels as sites of 'contingency' accommodation have drawn attention to the hotel as a flexible space of 'emergency' response to various housing crises (Burns et al., 2022; Nowicki et al., 2019; Tham, 2023), focusing on this 'emergency' role overlooks the enduring role of hotels in migration management and the warehousing of asylum seekers. By considering hotel use in the UK and Australia, we argue that the hotel is a durable, and vitally important, site of bordering infrastructure, one that manifests many of the tensions and contradictions of state responses to asylum seekers and refugees (Jerrems et al., 2023). Far from being a marginal or temporary space, we centre the hotel as a critical site for the reproduction and maintenance of contemporary asylum systems: the filtering and containment of mobile subjects (Burridge et al., 2017; Darling, 2011). On the one hand, the role of the hotel is, we assert, political and logistical, involving the production of profit and the carceral containment of mobile bodies. On the other hand, the role of the hotel is cultural and symbolic, involving a set of critical tensions between the responsibilities of the state and its expression of hospitality, and the cultural discourses of luxury and leisure that surround 'the hotel' as a space of commercial hospitality.

The cultural and political significance of the hotel as a critical site for understanding contemporary bordering is, we argue, drawn from this unique confluence of the carceral and the hospitable. In addressing this confluence, we propose a concept of *carceral hospitality*, a term intended to designate the fraught positioning of the hotel between carceral conditions of institutional detention and spectacle (Mainwaring & Silverman, 2017), and the hospitable expectations more readily associated with sites of leisure, escapism and relaxation (McNeill, 2008). Carceral hospitality foregrounds the durable nature of the hotel as a fundamental, if often overlooked, part of how modes of everyday bordering extend into civic spaces and practices (Burridge & Darling, 2024; Pugliese, 2009a), and how hotels are situated within carceral economies and networks of value production (Martin, 2021; Vianelli, 2022).

In examining these issues, the paper makes three principal contributions. Firstly, the paper advances our understanding of hotel use beyond accounts of emergency response (Mantler et al., 2021; Nowicki et al., 2019). We position hotels at the heart of systems of sorting and classifying migrants, operating as they do at the interstices of more traditional detention centres and urban spaces of circulation and relative freedom. In exploring the varied roles that hotels have taken up in the UK and Australia—but also recognising their varied roles in other countries—we argue that, like the short-term holding facilities studied by Bosworth (2022, p. 508), 'these sites of confinement resist simple explanation', as their cultural resonance extends far beyond an infrastructural role as 'holding cells for the unwanted' (ibid.).

Secondly, the paper critically advances understanding of the hotel as a *specific type* of social and political space. In much work to date, the specificity of the hotel has been largely overlooked. While hotels have been examined as modes of temporary accommodation (Jerrems et al., 2023), their cultural association with forms of hospitality and expectations of escapism and anonymity have received little consideration. This serves to position hotels as little more than adaptable accommodation centres as opposed to the much more complex sites of cultural meaning and association that they represent, encompassing both commercial framings of hospitality associated with leisure, luxury

and escapism (McNeill, 2008), and more political understandings of hospitality as a practice of welcoming strangers (Agier, 2021). We argue that these cultural reference points matter and that they shape not only how hotels are perceived as sites of carceral hospitality, but also how this role is challenged and contested, both from those seeking to advance migrants' rights and those set on restricting such rights. In looking to the specificity of the hotel as a space of (often incomplete) hospitality, this paper argues that the hotel is more than simply another site of containment within logistical chains of reception and detention. It is the cultural associations of the hotel *as hotel* that inform the politicisation of hotel use and that distinguish hotels from other forms of border infrastructure. In both the British and Australian contexts, attachments to imaginaries of hospitality still run through the politics of migration, even in contexts of overtly hostile policies (Bernhardt, 2023). It is unsurprising that, as a result, media coverage in both contexts has positioned the use of hotels as a costly extravagance that enables those seeking asylum to live in 'luxury' at the expense of taxpayers, a factor argued to act as an 'incentive' to seek asylum (Bulman, 2021; Loughnan, 2020; Matthews, 2022), and a factor only heightened in its salience by the cost of living crisis. The hotel is central to these imaginaries and to reproducing accounts of national hospitality as a resource that is both revered and threatened by the realities of migration (Derrida, 2000a; Rosello, 2001). As a battleground for contestations over the treatment of asylum seekers and the expectations of citizens, understanding the role of hotels is critical to ongoing public, and academic, debate over how far legal responsibilities to protect those seeking asylum extend and the conditions through which such obligations are met.

Third, expanding beyond the specificity of the hotel, the paper advances understanding of the interrelations of the carceral and the hospitable by foregrounding how radically divergent experiences of accommodation, escapism, leisure and incarceration coexist within the violent inequalities of global mobility. We propose a focus that connects the 'carceral circuitry' of geographies of detention and expulsion (Gill et al., 2018), and the patterns of 'welcome' associated with geographies of hospitality (Berg & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018; Gill et al., 2022), bodies of work that have tended to operate in parallel. Our focus on carceral hospitality addresses the contradictions of the carceral and the hospitable, reflecting the 'parasitical' relation of hospitality and hostility (Derrida, 2000a, p. 3) that characterises contemporary geographies of bordering. In doing so, we argue that through the example of the hotel, practices of welcoming, controlling, containing and accommodating refugees and asylum seekers are interwoven in increasingly selective geographies of limited, and often illusory, refuge that reflect the restrictive realities of the global refugee regime.

In developing this argument, we focus on three intersecting dynamics to explore how hotels have been situated: forms of flexibility and emergency response, patterns of hospitality, and the violent displacements of the hotel as a site detached from 'everyday life'. In each case, we trace these characteristics through the empirical realities of hotel use in Australia and the UK. We focus on these countries because both have relatively established histories of employing hotels as infrastructures of state bordering. In Australia, hotel use has a markedly carceral lineage as hotels have represented 'alternative places of detention' for the state, while in the UK they have been employed as sites of contingency accommodation that blur distinctions of carceral control and hospitable welcoming. Working across these cases allows us to consider how distinctions between detention and accommodation are destabilised in practice. In surveying these understandings of the hotel, we work towards an account of carceral hospitality that reflects the entangled forms of support, violence and contestation that hotels manifest in contemporary bordering. We begin by foregrounding the durability of the hotel as border infrastructure.

2 | FLEXIBILITY AND 'EMERGENCY' ACCOMMODATION

Critical discussions in geography have foregrounded the hotel's ability to offer forms of 'contingency' or 'emergency' accommodation for varied social groups. These discussions place the hotel at the heart of political and social geographies of conflict, accommodation and marginality (Fregonese, 2012; Fregonese & Ramadan, 2015), such that hotels are situated as infrastructures that are quite distinct from the sites of luxury, relaxation and consumption that they are more commonly framed as (McNeill, 2008, 2009). Crucially, these two functions are not mutually exclusive nor are they necessarily contradictory. Indeed, in many instances of hotel use for migrants, we witness fraught juxtapositions in which hotels are appropriated for the accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees at the same time as individual rooms, entire floors, or even entire wings, are used to accommodate other groups. This reflects the flexible nature of the hotel as a space able to be rapidly repurposed, reconfigured and removed from use at short notice. Hotels thus represent 'transient spaces, for temporary dwelling not permanent habitation, and they can therefore easily be emptied and reconfigured in times of conflict and crisis' (Fregonese & Ramadan, 2015, p. 808).

Recent scholarship has considered the hotel as a space of crisis response, as hotels are increasingly mobilised to address housing crises. For Nowicki et al. (2019, p. 316), hotels are 'taking on the role of emergency accommodation providers in Western cities, both as a consequence of rising rates of homelessness and, relatedly, in lieu of adequate and affordable housing stock'. This, they suggest, necessitates critical explorations of the socio-politics of the hotel as a site of everyday crisis response that moves beyond discussions of the hotel as a site of geopolitics alone (Craggs, 2012; Fregonese & Ramadan, 2015). In the context of asylum and migration, this account of an increased role for hotels in bordering is only partially accurate, as a preoccupation with the current turn to the hotel risks overlooking longer histories, which show a degree of continuity in how states in the Global North have appropriated hotels to control migrants. For example, under Direct Provision, asylum seekers in Ireland have been housed in 'accommodation centres sited in disused hotels, guest houses, holiday camps, hostels and caravan parks' since 1999 (Lentin, 2022, p. 53; O'Reilly, 2020). This is not to suggest that emergency responses have not become more widespread in recent years, but to recognise the important forms of continuity *and* change that mark hotel use.

2.1 | Normalising the contingent hotel

In the UK, hotel use has been a frequent response to housing demand for asylum seekers and refugees, stretching back to the late 1990s when 'dispersal' emerged as a policy to distribute asylum seekers across the country (Darling, 2022). Equally consistent has been the political controversy that has accompanied such housing decisions. For example, Dummett (2001) traces concern around hotel use to the 1976 case of two Goan families who were branded in the press as 'Four-Star Immigrants' who were 'parasitizing the welfare of the nation' (Gibson, 2003, p. 372). Similarly, during the early 2000s, government plans to convert several hotels in the south of England into 'induction centres' for asylum seekers, drew widespread tabloid condemnation and fuelled public protests that led the government to reconsider (Grillo, 2005; Millington, 2005). More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, hotel use become widespread when the Home Office (2021), and private accommodation providers, argued that a move to hotels was necessary to reduce infection, an argument that has since been challenged by data highlighting an increase in infections in hotels during this period (Guma et al., 2024).

In the city of Glasgow, the decision to move 300 asylum seekers into hotels in March 2020 was taken without informing people where they were going, or for how long (Da Lomba & Vermeylen, 2023). Those moved likened the experience to being in a prison 'due to feelings of surveillance' and cramped conditions (Piacentini et al., 2022, p. 7). The imposition of hotel curfew hours further exacerbated these concerns by restricting mobility and reducing opportunities to socialise (Guma et al., 2024). In this case, hotels were explicitly positioned as a form of 'contingency' accommodation, situated outside the standard housing categories of 'initial' and 'dispersal' accommodation. However, by May 2023, the Home Office had reclassified hotels as a form of 'initial' accommodation, reflecting their widespread use and normalising their role as a site of temporary accommodation for those seeking asylum, associated with expected stays of no longer than four weeks (Home Office, 2023a). In reality, many of those accommodated lived in hotels for far longer. For example, in March 2023, the Home Office announced additional support for Afghan refugees who had been resettled in Britain and were seeking to secure 'settled accommodation after 18 months in hotels' (Home Office, 2023b). At the time, 9000 Afghans had been supported into settled accommodation, but a further 8000 remained living in 59 'bridging' hotels (ibid.). In the UK then, while hotels may have initially provided a form of 'bridging' accommodation ahead of transitions into housing, since 2020 this 'contingency' role has been normalised to the extent that hotels are now intimately interwoven with the structures that accommodate, control and condition the lives of those seeking refuge.

Utilising hotels in this way is not without critique or challenge. Yet as McNeill (2008, p. 390) notes, hotels 'have long played a significant role in temporarily "fixing" mobile bodies', as historical accounts of the development of the hotel as a site of temporary interdiction for migration control have highlighted (Davidson, 2018). For example, Ong et al. (2014, p. 12) refer to the Lloyd Hotel in Amsterdam, built in 1918, as 'a sorting machine' that performed 'acts of identification and isolation' for the Royal Dutch Lloyd's network of passenger shipping. The hotel served to contain and prepare passengers and workers ahead of travel, acting as a sorting device to quarantine and isolate unhealthy bodies (Minca & Ong, 2016). The hotel represented 'a one-stop quarantine, disinfection, recovery, recreation, surveillance and transfer station' (Ong et al., 2014, p. 17) that was a critical node within transnational transport networks for maintaining 'disciplined mobility'. Similarly, Pratt (2005) and Davidson (2018), examine the Canadian government's use of the Celebrity Inn and a subsequent range of other converted hotels to detain migrants awaiting deportation. In 2004, a wing of the Celebrity Inn was converted for detention purposes, allowing a continued hotel operation for 'standard' hotel guests in other wings,

producing a site that was 'part hotel, and part immigration detention'. This juxtaposed tourist hospitality with an adjoined and often overlooked 'centre of confinement' for the state (Pratt, 2005, p. 23). Moves to modify other hotels to operate solely as detention facilities soon followed as the use of hotel space 'for interdiction and detention' became central to the Canadian state's practice of 'frontier management' (Davidson, 2018, p. 128).

Across this broad body of work, we note the diverse ways in which the hotel has been situated as a contingency space for the state. Yet, as Katz (2022) and others note, this contingent function has a biopolitical dimension too, as hotels operate as spaces to sort and control mobilities (Dawson, 2014; Minca & Ong, 2016), offering 'forms of flexible infrastructure that can be adapted to provide carceral fixes' (Burridge & Darling, 2024, p. 176). For example, in Australia both small individual hotels, as well as large well-known chains, have been outsourced for detaining medically transferred refugees from offshore detention sites (Ryan, 2020), while in the United States, the conversion of New York's iconic Roosevelt Hotel into an asylum arrival centre reflects a similar practice of contingent bordering within the city (Winsor, 2023). Forming critical parts of reception systems and informal detention estates, hotels have thus become central to the extractive economies that surround refugee reception, detention and containment. As Vianelli (2022, p. 53) argues, these are 'systems that generate value by holding and moving asylum seekers', and hotels have become one of a range of spaces that sustain and profit from such outsourced reception, control and accommodation (Darling, 2016; Martin, 2021). In a 2023 investigation, the BBC found that several bookings agencies and hotel firms used by the UK Home Office had tripled their pre-tax profits in a year following a rise in hotel use to accommodate asylum seekers (Sandford & May, 2023). Campaigners have also sought to damage hotel brands by exposing their profits and role in sustaining violent bordering practices. In the United States, such campaigns led the Hilton hotel chain to halt any links with incarceration, stating that they 'believe that hotels should be places of hospitality, and the detainment of migrants, including minors, is not activity that we support or in any way want associated with our hotels' (Hilton, 2020).

2.2 | Conditions and concerns

Across these areas of hotel use, one consistent factor has been a critical consideration of the conditions that hotels provide, particularly in contexts of prolonged use. Nowicki et al. (2019, p. 314) highlight how the constraints of living in a hotel impedes an individual's 'ability to perform everyday tasks and establish domestic or familial life'. Similarly, in examining the growing convergence between hotel accommodation and care homes, Horton (2021) suggests that while the standardisation and convertibility of hotel space enables profit generation, there is an important disjuncture between spaces of hospitality, such as hotels, and spaces of home (see also Loughnan, 2022). Horton notes that care home residents were acutely aware of this distinction and found accommodation that was too 'hotel-like' in its standardisation unwelcome as it risked imposing constraints on their agency as residents. Similarly, the uniformity of fixtures in hotel spaces necessitates against the individuality and appropriation of space associated with homemaking and serves as a reminder of the temporary nature of the hotel as a residence. In these instances, the very services that define the hotel as a site of commercial hospitality and leisure, such as the provision of food, laundry services and access restrictions, place constraints on the ability of longer-term 'guests' to perform domesticity.

In the context of hotels used as asylum accommodation and detention, these tensions are exacerbated by the placement of asylum seekers in systems *designed* to constrain agency and control mobility. Thus, while hotels may be distinct from more institutional sites of containment, this does not mean that they are not *experienced as* carceral spaces. The potential of hotel accommodation for the containment of those seeking asylum is summarised by Katz (2022) in her discussion of the links between the space of the hotel and that of the camp, suggesting that both display elements of 'care and custody'. Katz (2022, p. 8) argues that:

> With the management of 'temporary guests' and their space-time encapsulation, camps and hotels make spatial biopolitical techniques designed to address all aspects of the biological lives of those hosted in them, including shelter and food, hygiene and security, enabling the basic requirements of control and care, custody and protection, to be met simultaneously.

In Glasgow, Burns et al. (2022) argue that this convergence of control and care is evident in the use of cashless forms of support for asylum seekers accommodated in hotels. As the Refugee Council note, in the UK the 'majority of people living in hotels are accommodated on a "full board" basis so have no access to cash, making it impossible for them to buy or replace essential items' (Refugee Council, 2021, p. 3). This practice serves to increase the dependency of asylum

seekers on hotel services and exacerbates their loss of autonomy, reflecting a model of hotel use that seeks to 'confine and control' those seeking asylum (Piacentini et al., 2022, p. 5). Lentin (2022, p. 56) refers to this convergence of conditions in Ireland's Direct Provision as a system of 'coercive confinement' in which residents are required to sign in and out of accommodation, with some facilities having curfews and security infrastructures, such as CCTV and security cabins.

The continuum of control we have described above is most evident, and most developed, in the Australian case, where hotel facilities have been employed as carceral sites for the detention of those seeking asylum (Jerrems et al., 2023; Loughnan, 2020). While hotels were initially used as a means to remove women and children from mandatory detention in more traditionally carceral facilities, offering a 'softer' or 'better' option for these groups (Burridge, 2023), distinctions between hotel detention and the camp-like detention infrastructures experienced by other asylum seekers (Perera, 2002a) have eroded over time. Few pretences to 'care' are afforded, as hotels have been converted into detention facilities within the heart of Australian communities. In various statements from detainees held in detention following medical transfer, hotels were referred to explicitly as prisons and sites of torture (Arvin, 2021), while the Human Rights Commissioner, one of the few bodies able to access hotels used for detention, has repeatedly reported that the hotels they have inspected are the most punitive sites within Australia's detention estate (Australian Human Rights Commissioner, 2023).

Alongside concerns with the limited autonomy afforded to asylum seekers and refugees in hotels, critical examinations have raised concerns over the health implications of prolonged accommodation in hotels. In the UK, reports from the Refugee Council (2021) and Doctors of the World (2022) have highlighted poor conditions and a lack of support for those in hotels, leading to declining mental and physical health. The uncertainty of extended periods of time spent in hotels was a significant factor that impacted residents (Burns et al., 2022; Nowicki et al., 2019), leading to several suicides and a growing number of acute mental health crises (Asylum Matters, 2021; ICIBI, 2022; Piacentini et al., 2022). Concurrently, the inability to effectively socially distance during the COVID-19 pandemic led to outbreaks of infection in hotel accommodation for asylum seekers in Australia (Vogl et al., 2021), Ireland (Lentin, 2022) and Scotland (Da Lomba & Vermeylen, 2023).

Through these discussions, we have sought to foreground how hotels have been situated as spaces of flexible fixes for the accommodation of displaced groups, be they homeless populations, asylum seekers or refugees, often with negative effects for those accommodated. At the same time, an increasingly carceral dimension has infused hotel use, with the constraints placed on residents meaning that hotels reproduce aspects of 'detention by stealth' for migrants in the UK (Piacentini et al., 2022), and 'detention as policy' in the Australian context (Burridge, 2023; Vogl et al., 2021). While these discussions are vitally important in situating the hotel as a site of infrastructural shelter across multiple areas of social policy, to fully understand the cultural resonances of the hotel as a site of asylum, we argue that the wider discursive framings of 'the hotel' need to be considered more fully. It is to these framings that we turn next with a particular concern for understandings of hospitality, both in relation to the leisure and luxury associated with the 'hospitality industry' and the ethical and political associations of hospitality as a form of welcoming.

3 | HOSPITALITY AND WELCOME

Alongside their use as sites of emergency accommodation and detention, hotels are most readily associated with forms of commercial hospitality tied to leisure and tourism (McNeill, 2008). In their 'normal' function, hotels provide accommodation in exchange for a fee based, most often, on an understanding that the duration of any stay will be limited, and that the hotel is a temporary stop in the midst of pathways of movement (Burridge & Darling, 2024; McNeill, 2009). The hotel is thus a necessarily selective site, associated with the ability to determine who should stay and for how long. While associated with aspects of leisure and luxury, the hotel carries expectations of hospitality but also clear conditions, not least in the capacity to exclude or evict guests when needed.

The relations of commercial exchange and service that define the hotel take us to the root of hospitality as a relation at once ethical, political and economic. As a range of social scientific work has explored, hospitality reflects a relation crossing, and often blurring, boundaries of commercial tourism and service industries (Bell, 2012; Lynch et al., 2011), and ethical practices of welcoming to travellers of multiple forms (Agier, 2021; Dikeç, 2002; Gill et al., 2022). In the first instance—hospitality as a commercial relation—financial exchanges set the timeframe and conditions of accommodation provided, both for the voluntary mobility of the tourist and the involuntary mobility of asylum seekers. For the commercial traveller this involves booking a room or bed for a specific period with conditions of use attached. In the mobilisation of hotels for contingency accommodation and detention, we witness both practices of 'block-booking' in which rooms are temporarily reserved for the accommodation of asylum seekers (Refugee Action, 2023; Refugee Council, 2021), and

more formal partnerships in which hotels are appropriated partially or in their entirety for detention. Examples include Canada's conversion of airport hotels into permanent detention facilities (Pratt, 2005), and Australia's long-term use of hotels for medically transferred refugees from offshore detention (Burridge, 2023).

Beyond this commercial relation, the association of the hotel with hospitality is not coincidental to its use in the politics of asylum. Rather, hospitality has been framed as a language of the state towards migrants and refugees, with states keen to select 'guests' as a response to international obligations towards displaced peoples. In these accounts of national hospitality, the hotel has been enrolled as both a metaphor for the state and as a literal site of welcome for refugees (Dawson, 2014; Gibson, 2003). Considering hospitality, Gibson (2006, p. 694) argues that how the nation is framed, as a home, a fortress or a hotel, foregrounds different dimensions of the symbolic politics of mobility:

> While the house has connotations of a private, personal hospitality, the hotel represents a public, commodified experience of hospitality subject to the logic of economic exchange. In contrast, the fortress signals defensive nationalism, with strong and secure borders, inhospitable rather than hospitable. Entering these spaces will depend on the different imperatives which regulate them: the political (fortress), ethical (house), and commercial (hotel) forms of hospitality.

Examining the hotel in relation to hospitality is important not only because it is a site of commercial welcome, but also because discussions of the politics of hospitality and migration have often overlooked the symbolic, and literal, use of hotels in this way. Recent work on hospitality has considered the varied sites and scales through which welcome may be expressed or constrained, from the individual welcome of domestic hosting, through to state-led frames of national hospitality and urban sanctuary (Darling & Bauder, 2019; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Montforte et al., 2021; Sidhu & Rossi-Sackey, 2022). In this vein, Bulley (2015) calls for a focus on hospitality beyond a statist framing, asserting the need to explore the complexities of hospitality as a relation that operates through and across spatial scales. The role of the hotel as a site of asylum accommodation and containment reflects these complexities, offering a space in which different imaginaries and logics of hospitality converge, from intimate expressions of welcome to the limitations of national assertions of hospitality towards 'genuine' refugees. As Ahmed (2001) notes, assertions of hospitality operate as grounds for sovereignty, as the power relation that binds the capacity to welcome to the ability to expel is predicated on the sovereign ability to decide and differentiate. In the process, hospitality risks being subsumed as another mechanism of state bordering, with welcome expressed 'by invitation only' (Giannacopoulos, 2013, p. 181).

It is for this reason that Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality foregrounds the etymological link between hospitality and hostility to consider 'hostipitality', a relation that encompasses the tensions of welcoming and the desire to maintain control over such a gesture (Derrida, 2000a). The maintenance of sovereign authority over borders and strangers is at the heart of hospitality as a political gesture, as opposed to the ethical orientation of hospitality as a welcome offered to an unknown and unanticipated stranger (Derrida, 2000a). Drawing on Levinas' (1998) account of ethical responsibility and otherness (Barnett, 2005; Popke, 2003), Derrida (2000b, p. 25) asserts that an absolute and unconditional hospitality would demand an opening not only to the known foreigner but also 'to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other', a stranger that 'has neither name, nor patronym, nor family, nor social status'. It is this welcome beyond invitation or identity that Derrida (2000a) argues is essential to an ethics of hospitality, but that is also undone in the conditioning of welcome that reflects most hospitable relations, be they the invitation to a domestic guest or the selective politics of asylum enacted by nation-states.

For Derrida, hospitality always contains the capacity to become carceral and controlling. In looking to 'carceral hospitality', we argue that we are witnessing something more than simply the political limits of the hospitable. Rather, we identify a trend towards the use of hospitality to justify and legitimate carceral conditions, in part through the model of the hotel as a space *distinct from* more clearly carceral spaces. Carceral hospitality speaks to the hotel as a 'better' option than the detention centre or the fortress in Gibson's (2006) terms, but in articulating such a distinction, carceral hospitality occludes the violence of its limited and often controlling 'welcome'. It is to this issue of violence that we now turn before returning to outline 'carceral hospitality' in more detail.

4 | ESCAPISM AND VIOLENT DISSOCIATION

The 'normal' functioning of the hotel aligns it with patterns of commercial hospitality and thus with practices of leisure and comfort that offer a break from everyday routines and domestic life (McNeill, 2008). Here Pritchard and

Morgan (2006, p. 763) suggest that hotels represent spaces of flux and relative anonymity, creating conditions in which freedom and opportunity intermix, as 'peculiar configurations of open, closed and negatable abstracted spaces, offering a range of opportunities for adventure to guests'. The functional adaptability of the hotel, which is so central to its capacity to play a role as contingency accommodation and detention, is matched with a cultural openness that provides opportunities for hotel space to be interpreted, and used, in multiple ways by a range of users. Hotels offer spaces 'outside the ordinary of most people's everyday social life, distinct from our normal place of home' and present sites 'of anonymity where guests can "disappear"' (ibid., p. 764). These cultural associations of the hotel as a site of leisure and escape sit in tension with the hotel as a space of emergency accommodation or detention. This tension is manifest not only in the incongruence of placing guests who are tourists alongside those who are seeking asylum, but also in the mixed cultural messaging that such proximate diversity produces. Converging demands on hotels produce dynamics of escapism and relaxation for some and the restriction of everyday life for others. At the same time, the assumption of the hotel as a site of anonymity and freedom sits in tension with the forms of security, identification and monitoring that emerge when hotels are used as sites of containment by the state (Jerrems et al., 2023; Lentin, 2022). In these contexts, the conditional welcome of commercial hospitality is replaced with a more assertive conditional accommodation that requires the identification of 'guests' as a means to support their monitoring and control (Darling, 2011). It is the cultural assumptions of luxury and leisure that drive many of the tensions behind hotel use for this form of conditional accommodation.

The cultural framing of hotels as associated with forms of escapism, leisure and anonymity is not without political consequences. Recent discussions of hotels as sites of (post)colonial politics and contested sites of conflict have demonstrated how the positioning of hotels as outside, or detached from, 'everyday life' has masked their function within violent geographies of colonialism and socioeconomic inequality (Craggs, 2012; Fregonese, 2012; Kothari, 2015; Sarmento & Linehan, 2019). For example, through the Grande Hotel in Beira, Mozambique, Sarmento and Linehan (2019) argue that the hotel was a critical site in sustaining colonial violence. In this reading, the colonial hotel played two roles. On the one hand, the hotel offered 'gateways for white settlers' entry to colonial life' and acted as a home away from home for colonial administrators and officials through the curation of familiar material landscapes and insular social relations (ibid., p. 278). On the other, the hotel served to insulate and protect colonial figures and colonial culture from the violent effects of colonialism itself, as 'within the enclave of the hotel, the violent foundation of colonialism was constructively elided, as a means to restore emotionally and psychologically the beneficiaries of the colonial settlement' (ibid.). In reproducing dynamics of familiarity and comfort, the colonial hotel was able to fulfil the escapist cultural associations of the hotel as a site of luxury and relaxation and it is this function that Sarmento and Linehan (2019) argue is central to how hotels sustained the violence of colonial rule. In this reading, the hotel acts as a 'temporary replacement' (Peleggi, 2005) through which 'the exercise of violence is maintained not only by its legitimation, but also by suppressing its memory, keeping it at a distance, and securing certain comfort zones as a means to restore the perpetrator' (Sarmento & Linehan, 2019, p. 285). The colonial hotel was a site through which any recognition of violence was denied, a space of displacement and dissociation in which comfort was maintained at the expense of structures of exploitation, extraction and harm.

We see the troubling echoes of this violent relation in contemporary accounts of the carceral use of hotels (Pugliese, 2009a) and in the colonial politics of hospitality that pervade hotel use (Gill et al., 2022). Tracing these connections, we might consider how hotels are not secure or safe sites of escapism for all guests, but rather operate as spaces of differential inclusion that mask the violence they sustain within the guise of hospitality. If the colonial hotel was simultaneously a site of comfort and concealment, the contemporary hotel displays these same trends as a site for managing displaced people, controlling those subject to sovereign authority, while concealing the violence involved. In a context where border controls and mobility are framed as colonial projects of racialised injustice (Achiume, 2019), the role of the hotel shows considerable continuity. The sorting of mobilities enacted by state-commandeered hotels represents a filtering embedded in racialised notions of value and categorisation (Rajaram, 2018; Weheliye, 2014), that bear the legacies of colonial hierarchies of human value and that reproduce stark distinctions between the comfort of commercial hospitality for some and the confinement of bordered exclusion for racialised others (Guma et al., 2024). The contemporary hotel thus becomes a means through which the violence of carceral control and the warehousing of asylum seekers is obscured.

For example, in Australia, hotels employed as 'alternative places of detention' represent a form of detention intentionally dispersed within communities and kept out of the public eye, effecting a 'vernacular violence' notable for 'its invisibility and the seamless manner in which it is imbricated with the practices and sites of quotidian' life (Pugliese, 2009a, p. 155; Vogl et al., 2021). In the UK, hotel use rarely gained public recognition as it relied on often remote hotel locations to accommodation asylum seekers and represented an overlooked process that ran in parallel to that of dispersal accommodation (Darling, 2022). Unlike the assertive architecture of detention centres and military barracks, which are designed to convey messages of control (Mainwaring & Silverman, 2017), the carceral role of the hotel is often intentionally hidden

and only commented upon in exceptional circumstances (such as when a reliance on hotels, framed as 'luxury' forms of accommodation for asylum seekers, coincides with a cost of living crisis). Just as the colonial hotel represented a 'space of violence built upon the production of distraction and self and public denial' (Sarmento & Linehan, 2019, p. 289), so the current use of hotels masks violent practices of containment and conditionality behind a veneer of apparent hospitality.

At the same time, the juxtaposition of the hotel as a site of both migrant detention and commercial hospitality is reflective of the differential value assigned to lives in contemporary border regimes. We see echoes here of the 'violently disjunctive accounts and experiences of (the same) space' that Pugliese (2009b, p. 664) explores in considering the historic and contemporary role of Lampedusa and Christmas Island as sites that combine carceral conditions for migrants with commercial hospitality for the privileged subjects of mobility rights. Pugliese (2009b, p. 671, original emphasis) notes that both Lampedusa and Christmas Island 'are at once contemporary penal colonies established for the detention and processing of refugees and asylum seekers *and* tourist destinations and holiday isles'. Both have a long history of colonial annexation and the control of criminalised populations. In the case of Lampedusa, this represented the historic role of the island as a penal colony for the exile of 'insurgent southerners' during the nation-building process of the modern Italian state (ibid.). Christmas Island has similarly acted as a site of colonial exile for the British state and, most recently, for Australia (Perera, 2002b). In each context, we see a convergence of colonial relations of expulsion and criminalisation carried into the present as both house offshore facilities for the containment of migrants alongside tourist infrastructures of commercial hospitality and economies of welcome. Similarly, the expansion of migrant detention and containment facilities through a series of 'hotspots' located on Greek islands as a critical element of the EU's response to the 'migrant crisis' produces further juxtapositions between tourist infrastructures and those designed to control less privileged forms of mobility (Vradis et al., 2018). Pugliese (2009b, p. 674) argues that these juxtapositions of tourism and control bring into focus how bodies are organised along the axis of Global North and South, serving to 'produce dispositions of bodies and subjects that remain proximate yet invisible to each other, even as they generate radically different modalities of living and dying'. The ability to ignore subaltern subjects is a privilege that Pugliese argues is held by those tourists holidaying *alongside* the displaced, as these islands present locations at the limits of the state where stark biopolitical distinctions of value and treatment are both made visible and ignored (Pugliese, 2009b).

In the 'violent disjuncture' between tourism and the biopolitical realities of bordering evident in Lampedusa and Christmas Island, we witness resonances with the contemporary role of the hotel as an infrastructure of simultaneous bordering and commercial hospitality. As already outlined, the use of hotels to accommodate and detain those seeking refuge often relies upon a partial reformulation of hotel space, such that asylum seekers and refugees become 'guests' alongside commercial travellers and tourists. In such contexts, the hotel becomes a microcosm of those relations of distinction and distance that Pugliese (2009b) identifies in the dual function of islands of detention, serving to sustain but also conceal the violence of bordering as a process of sorting bodies and reproducing colonial systems of containment, valuation and expulsion. In the case of the hotel, it is this relation we refer to as 'carceral hospitality' and it is to this concept that we now turn.

5 | CARCERAL HOSPITALITY

Building on the framings of 'the hotel' in the varied cultural, political and social geographies discussed so far, we argue that hotels are uniquely situated as a space of convergence between logics of carceral control and political assertions of limited and conditional hospitality. This convergence reflects a condition of 'carceral hospitality', a concept that offers critical insight into two dimensions of the contemporary hotel as a site of bordering. First, carceral hospitality describes the processes through which hotels become locations for the control, containment and bordering of migrants. In this way, sites of commercial hospitality and leisure become entwined in networks of carcerality, political relations of exclusion, and economic practices of value extraction (Burridge & Darling, 2024; Martin, 2021). It is this process of appropriation and entwinement that we have identified in cases from Knowsley, Melbourne, Brisbane, and beyond. Second, carceral hospitality reaches beyond this process of appropriation to reflect how hospitality requires conditions and measures of control that easily become carceral in nature, as the welcome of some is predicated on the restriction and containment of others. While such contradictions of welcome are not new (Derrida, 2000a; Rosello, 2001), their expression through the unique cultural and infrastructural characteristics of the hotel reflects the spatial manifestation of carceral hospitality. The contradictions of carceral hospitality are best expressed through the use of hotels, reflecting a culmination of the tensions that have shaped responses to refugee displacement across the Global North, and positioning the hotel as a space that is neither strictly carceral nor purely hospitable.

Framing the hotel as an emblematic site of carceral hospitality recognises that the intersections of care and control that the carceral hotel embodies represent the wider struggles faced by liberal democratic regimes in reconciling international obligations to provide refuge with a desire to deter those seeking asylum in the name of sovereignty and 'migration management' (Coddington, 2018; Mountz, 2020). It is these contradictions that the mobilisation of hotels represents in infrastructural form, reflecting more starkly than other sites of accommodation and detention the impossibility of hospitality in a context of hostile bordering and populist politics (Darling, 2022; Gill et al., 2022). A focus on carceral hospitality therefore draws together the threads of hotel use we have examined, encompassing the social dynamics of contingent and 'emergency' use, the power relations and cultural expectations of hospitality, and the dissociation from 'violent disjunctures' associated with the hotel as a space of escapism for some guests (Pugliese, 2009b).

Understood in this way, we foreground two areas that carceral hospitality draws critical attention to. First, is the blurring of distinctions between the carceral and the hospitable that contemporary hotel use illustrates. In their work on the Lloyd Hotel, Minca and Ong (2016) trace the ongoing patterning of violence through hotel space and draw a distinction between 'hospitality and custody' and 'detention and custody'. Yet, as we have argued, contemporary hotel use often breaks these distinctions down, foregrounding how hospitality risks *becoming* detention. In this sense, carceral hospitality draws attention to the continued narrowing of rights to asylum across much of the Global North (Mountz, 2020). Read through the micro conditions of the hotel, carceral hospitality is one manifestation of this regression of refugee rights.

Second, through 'carceral hospitality', hotel use is positioned as distinct from other forms of migrant accommodation and detention. Distinctions from other modes of accommodation and detention draw attention to the positioning of the hotel as a 'better' or more 'luxurious' solution for those displaced. Hotels as forms of border infrastructure thus play out a relation of *hospitality and hostility*, through which overt hostility is deniable, hidden behind a pretence of hospitality and obligation to those seeking refuge. This evasion is evident in concerns over the costs of hotel use and the anxiety that hotels may 'encourage' refugee mobility, juxtaposed with critical reporting on the devastating mental and physical health effects of long-term hotel use for accommodation and detention.

A concern with carceral hospitality thus serves to highlight how hotels as infrastructures of bordering are distinct from the strictly carceral or the purely hospitable. It is the merging of these conditions that sets carceral hospitality apart and differentiates it. For example, the use of hotels to accommodate and detain migrants stands in contrast to the physical infrastructures of detention that Mainwaring and Silverman (2017) argue are central to 'detention-as-spectacle'. The barbed wire, CCTV and disciplinary spaces of military institutions are absent from the hotel. In the UK, this has led hotel use to be positioned in contrast to the use of military barracks and temporary encampments to accommodate asylum seekers, raising critical questions over whether hotels were 'too good' for those seeking refuge (Bulman, 2021; Matthews, 2022). In Australia, hotels which were initially used to remove women and children from mandatory detention in carceral facilities have become carceral spaces in their own right (Burridge, 2023). As sites of carceral hospitality, hotels remain wedded to cultural codings around hospitality, leisure and welcome, which means they are unable to fulfil the symbolic and cultural function of detention spaces. As Mainwaring and Silverman (2017, p. 31) argue, detention spaces 'reinforce logics of deviance, threat, and punishment', as their architecture, conditions and aesthetics communicate the idea that those subjects they contain *require* detention. By contrast, hotels are spaces that are neither wholly carceral nor wholly hospitable and this, again, makes them emblematic sites of the contemporary global refugee regime. Trapped between hospitality and hostility, the hotel reflects the 'violent disjunctures' of displacement and dispossession in our political present.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this paper we have developed discussions on the role of the hotel as a site of border infrastructure, reflecting both the current use of hotels in Australia, the UK and elsewhere, and their longer lineage of mobilisation as sites of 'contingency' accommodation and detention. In doing so, we have examined the social, cultural and political associations of the hotel, and argued that the complex and often contested position of the hotel in contemporary migration governance reflects a condition of 'carceral hospitality'. We thus specifically locate the hotel between carceral containment and hospitable welcoming. Hotels operate at the thresholds of acceptance, inclusion and security. Very often, this means that the role of the hotel as a site of border infrastructure is an uneasy one. On the one hand, as Nowicki et al. (2019, p. 321) argue, hotels act 'as a space through which stigma is compounded and reinforced' as the 'socially othered' status of long-term residents, be they homeless families or asylum seekers, is 'evidenced by their out-of-place presence in the hotel'. From this perspective, however hospitable, *the hotel is not a home*. On the other hand, the uneasy role of the hotel arises from concerns that hotels are expensive and inappropriate locations for migrant groups

that are often represented as needing containment by politicians and press. From this perspective, however carceral, *the hotel is not a prison*. It is these tensions that we suggest are critical to understanding the unique position of the hotel as a site of contemporary bordering. In proposing a focus on carceral hospitality we have drawn critical scrutiny to that unique position to further advance discussions of the hotel as a site of both geopolitics and consumption (Davidson, 2018; Fregonese & Ramadan, 2015; McNeill, 2009).

Looking to the hotel as a site of carceral hospitality has, necessarily, required a focus on the appropriation of hotels as part of the governance of migration, often at the instruction of the state or those outsourced to act on behalf of the state (Darling, 2022). At the same time, a trend towards 'heritage hotels' has seen carceral sites such as prisons being repurposed as luxury 'destination' hotels centred on encountering the legacies of penal conditions in the refurbished comfort of commercial hospitality (Shehata et al., 2021; Wyatt, 2025). Carceral hospitality offers a means to explore these distinctive and enduring relations of welcome and repression, and poses questions over alternative uses of the hotel. For example, future discussions might consider how hotels have been appropriated by migrants' rights' groups as resources for accommodation and squatting in rejection of the formal accommodation models and carceral constraints of the state, with the short-lived tenure of City Plaza in Athens serving as the highest profile example (Lafazani, 2018). Similarly, cases of the formal reworking of hotels, such as the Magdas Hotel in Vienna, where asylum seekers and refugees are provided with employment and training through the hotel (Deshpande, 2015; Rokem et al., 2017); forms of co-housing in which hotel infrastructures are reused for collective housing that traverses immigration status (Oliver et al., 2020); and innovative projects such as the Grandhotel Cosmopolis in Augsburg that combined a hotel with an asylum centre, café and artistic space (Zill et al., 2020), all provide valuable inversions of the carceral tendencies of governmental uses of hotels. At the same time, as Piacentini et al. (2022, pp. 10–11) demonstrate, experiments in the counter-use of hotels are also operating within systems of governmental provision. Running counter to the exclusionary hotel conditions provided by the UK Home Office, they highlight a pilot model of hotel use by Safe in Scotland and Glasgow City Council to support 177 people experiencing homelessness. This embeds hotel use in wider networks of asylum support and integration, serving to connect asylum seekers and refugees to communities in and around the space of the hotel. In each of these contexts, the hotel is understood as a platform for engaging with communities beyond the state and for developing ways of living that go beyond carceral hospitality.

The focus we have developed on carceral hospitality is, therefore, intended as a starting point. In looking to the varied associations of the hotel as a specific type of space for bordering, we have sought to advance discussion of precisely what type of space the hotel represents for migrants, and what controversies its use for the accommodation and containment of migrants produces. While hotels have been critical in addressing a series of accommodation 'emergencies', we have foregrounded the longer-term use of hotels as flexible functionaries for the state. As the tensions of global displacement and regressive moves towards the restriction of refugee rights continue, so the hotel is likely to retain a critical, and often unseen, role in shaping the management, sorting and governance of mobility.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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