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Gender and the Criminalisation of Asylum:

Exploring the experiences of refugee and asylum seeking women

by

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Contents

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Acknowledgements

Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

I acknowledge awareness of any outstanding payments due to the University in respect of my studies and that my degree will not be awarded until such time as any study-related debts have been settled. Outstanding payments can be checked on your Student eVision.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the racist and sexist redefinition, regulation, and dehumanisation of refugee and asylum seeking women (RASW) in the UK. A feminist approach is taken to investigate how RASW are constructed as 'crimmigrants' and subjected to crime control measures through a 'crimmigration regime' that restricts their access to their human rights. The project aims to centre the lived experiences of RASW at the intersections of race, gender, and nationality, and also consider the ways in which they respond to their experiences. Qualitative methods were utilised to collect data through one-to-one conversations with 25 RASW over a 12-month period, with consideration for epistemic oppression and developing reciprocity in feminist research. These participants, as well as eight community allies, became involved with the project through the Meena Centre in Birmingham, and particularly the Baobab Women's Project.

The study finds that RASW are criminalised beyond that which convicted criminals experience, dehumanised to extremes, and punished severely for supposed immigration crimes. This redefinition is enacted within the modern hostile environment RASW through 'immcarcerality,' which forces them to exist in carceral spaces and restricts their ability to access their human rights. These range from large scale spaces like immigration detention centres, to everyday 'immcarceral' spaces like asylum accommodation and Home Office reporting centres. The thesis concludes with a discussion about the agency enacted by RASW in responding to and challenging this dehumanising criminalisation.

Abbreviations

ASW   Asylum seeking women

ECHR   European Convention on Human Rights

EDB   End Deportations Birmingham

HRA   Human Rights Act

NHS   National Health Service

RAS   Refugee and asylum seeking

RASW   Refugee and asylum seeking women

UDHR   Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Chapter 1. Introduction:

'You feel like the asylum system is killing you slowly, slowly' (Aaminata)[1]

Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the study before outlining the themes tackled in the coming chapters. It then goes on to present the institutional framework of refugee protection and the historical backdrop to immigration policy in the UK. The chapter concludes with a summary of the organisation of the thesis.

Overview of the study

This qualitative research examines the racist and sexist dehumanisation of asylum seeking women (ASW) through the 'crimmigration' regime, which impacts on their access to their basic human rights. This will be done within a feminist framework to enable a greater exploration of the disproportionate harm caused to women redefined as 'crimmigrants' by the gendered and racialised asylum system, while prioritising what research participants said about their lives. The focus is on women (as opposed to people) who seek asylum as the systemic oppression they face as women is amplified by their immigration status. The discussion is based on one-to-one conversations with 25 refugee and asylum seeking women (RASW) in and around Birmingham (see Appendix 7),[2] with the primary research site being the Meena Centre in

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[1] RASW research participant Aaminata was a Nigerian woman in her early thirties with a ten-month-old baby. She had sought asylum in the UK due to political persecution and had been dispersed to Coventry. Her application had been refused. She was proud of her Nigerian identity, and always spoke in calm but powerful tones.

[2] All RASW participants have pseudonyms; the majority of additional information is taken from how they spoke about themselves, and some from observations that I made.

Birmingham,[3] and in particular the Baobab Women's Project.[4] Eight community allies (see Appendix 8) participated in one-to-one conversations and provided contextual information.[5]

The discussion is shaped by the insights of research participants, and centres around the criminalisation of asylum seeking women and their redefinition as 'crimmigrants' by the state, the racist and sexist 'crimmigration' regime and the institutions it is enacted through, and the dehumanisation which restricts ASW's access to their basic human rights more than those convicted of crimes and imprisoned. This thesis goes beyond the existing literature to reveal that criminalised asylum seeking women are dehumanised to extremes that even criminals are not subjected to, exposed to everyday 'immcarceralities.' The study concludes by exploring the ways in which refugee and asylum seeking women responded to their experiences of seeking asylum in the UK, countering their construction by the state as less than or non-human criminals. In a crowded field, this thesis make a unique contribution by exploring how the redefinition of RASW as 'crimmigrants' through practices such as everyday 'immcarceralities,' impacts RASW's ability to claim and access their human rights.

This research developed out of many years of working with and advocating alongside refugee and asylum seeking women around the world, and an understanding that seeking asylum is gendered and disproportionately harms women. This extensive contact with RASW, whether through formal settings like employment or through social interactions and personal relationships, made evident that RASW and their own words about their lives in the UK were not prioritised. They spoke about being 'spoken about,' while their own stories about engaging with a system that was slowly killing them were unheard. A search of the literature on asylum revealed that few studies explored RASW speaking about their experiences of a racist and sexist asylum system that treated them like criminals who could not have their basic human rights guaranteed.

I decided to take a feminist approach which centres the lived experiences of RASW and acknowledges their agency, opening a space for investigating their views and responses, and for these insights to inform the analysis. The feminist ontology and epistemology in which this

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[3] The Meena Centre was formed in 2015 as a grassroots initiative to support women in Calais and was later set up as a community interest company in Birmingham to support newly arrived asylum seeking women and children in the UK. The centre will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.
[4] The Baobab Women's Project was set up in 2016 as a community interest company, aiming to support undocumented, asylum seeking, and refugee women with information, knowledge, and assistance in navigating the asylum system. The project will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.
[5] Community ally research participants ranged from immigration solicitors and modern slavery support workers to community interpreters and campaigners.

study is grounded, allowed me to engage with RASW as active participants while recognising their unique life histories, and experiences informed by living at numerous intersections of oppression. A feminist framework, predicated on the belief that reality is continuously being reconstructed through gendered and racialised power relations, is particularly apt for understanding the case of RASW in the UK. I tried to create space for RASW to speak about the aspects of their lived experience that they themselves prioritised: the ways in which they spoke about being redefined (as criminals), the institutions they spoke about as maintaining this redefinition (through the hostile environment), the impact on their daily life (and access to their human rights), and the possibilities for self-redefinition that they identified.

The aims of this study are to:

1. Explore the practices and processes by which asylum seeking women are defined and redefined in the UK.
2. Examine the ways in which asylum seeking women's bodies are regulated and dehumanised.
3. Understand how the redefinition and regulation of asylum seeking women impacts their access to their human rights.
4. Consider the ways in which refugee and asylum seeking women respond to their experiences of being redefined, regulated, dehumanised, and denied their human rights.

I will now turn to the development of gendered and racialised international refugee protection norms, the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and their roots in colonialism, the European implementation, and UK policy and practice. This contextual information is essential to understanding the UK experience of seeking asylum, which will be placed within the wider history of immigration to the UK.

The development of the Refugee Convention as gendered and racialised

This section will provide context which will enable a greater understanding of the institutions involved in gendered and racialised refugee protection and asylum determination. After a brief outline of the development of the international refugee regime and the gendered aspects, I will discuss how this has splintered along regional and national lines according to the political priorities of Western countries i.e. to keep black and brown bodies out in order to preserve the 'white state.' I will then discuss where women are placed within the splintered racialised system, which is also sexist. This foregrounds the discussions that will take place in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 about the experiences research participants had within this racist and sexist system in the UK.

It has been historically more difficult for women to qualify for refugee status. Refugee women are more likely to experience gender-based violence by non-state as well as state actors, and are at greater risk of exploitation and abuse when fleeing persecution. The omission of gender from the definition of a refugee marginalises women's experiences and fails to acknowledge the exploitation and violence that women in particular face (Honkala, 2019; Bloch and Galvin, 2000). Therefore, one of the motivations for this thesis is to fill this gap. The international regime of refugee protection is founded upon the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the '1951 Convention') (UNHCR, 1951) which was built upon the displacement needs of Europeans after World War II (Mayblin, 2017).[6] The 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (the 'Protocol') acknowledged the global nature of refugee flows, signalling that the 1951 Convention was not limited only to individuals persecuted due to 'events occurring before 1 January 1951' (UNHCR, 1951). In other words, it acknowledged that non-Europeans could be considered refugees and that refugee populations existed outside of Europe (Bloch, 2002).[7] Under international law refugees are defined and protected by this instrument, but its conception and implementation reveal it to be Euro-centric and male centric, biases which have evolved from colonialism (Krause, 2021).[8]

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[6] Intended to secure the right to flee persecution, seek asylum, and avoid refoulement, the Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone outside of their country, with a 'well-founded fear of persecution' on the specific grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion' (UNHCR 1951).

[7] Currently 146 states are parties to the Convention and Protocol, including all EU member states and the UK.

[8] The role of colonialism in the development of the global refugee regime is largely under-researched, even though colonial and imperial states dominated debates about the Convention definition of a refugee (Mayblin 2017). Colonial power dynamics came into play between the state delegations that created the Convention (Robinson 2012). Colonised territories were excluded from discussions, and a

Krause's postcolonial reading of the development of the 1951 Convention asserts that the othering of refugees in (de)colonised states was strategic, with delegations supporting a limited definition in order 'to deny the 'Other' refugees the Convention's protection if they reached Europe and to negate responsibility for them in the colonised territories that they controlled' (Krause, 2021, p. 612). These limitations in the Convention became more obvious during subsequent refugee flows, particularly those sparked by decolonisation struggles (Krause, 2021; Marfleet, 2006). States like the UK employed colonial rationales like 'insiders' and 'outsiders' during Convention negotiations in service of the systematic exclusion of particular peoples (Mayblin, 2014), namely people of colour. The lack of protection from gender-based persecution means that women of colour have been among the most excluded groups. This historical context is criticised as being absent in refugee studies (Kushner, 2006; Marfleet, 2007), and the legacies of colonialism in fact offer valuable insight into present day asylum policy (Mayblin, 2017).

Chimni contends that 'an image of a 'normal' refugee was constructed – white, male and anti-communist – which clashed sharply with individuals fleeing the Third World' (Chimni, 1998, p. 351). This colonial inheritance has impacted the regime as it currently operates, prioritising the 'West' over the other, refugees in Europe over those in other regions (Krause, 2021), and silencing colonised peoples (Mayblin, 2014). The 'myth of difference' constructed asylum seekers after the 1980's as fundamentally different to those in the past (Chimni, 1998), less deserving of protection as they were not primarily white and male. The 'difference' was in fact that these refugee flows were from the Global South, many from former colonies. Western states worked to legitimise the erosion of these refugees' human rights (Mayblin, 2017), a population that has long been intentionally excluded from international rights (Mayblin, 2014). Now, so-called 'Third World' countries are the origin of the largest refugee populations worldwide (UNHCR, 2015; UNHCR, 2020), and receiving nations in the 'First World' discriminate as to which of these refugees are 'worthy' of inclusion (Grewal, 2005, p. 160) and which of exclusion (Mayblin, 2014). These discourses originate from racialised and gendered regimes of knowledge (Grewal, 2005), informed by histories of colonialism, imperialism, and the British Empire (Mayblin, 2017), which result in women of colour being defined as the 'least' deserving of inclusion.

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number of states insisted that the 'true' refugee was from or in Europe (Krause 2021). There began the challenges to accessing protection that refugees outside Europe still experience now.

Since the 1951 Convention, refugees and particularly refugee women, have been strategically reframed through processes of racialisation, feminisation, and victimisation (Canning, 2017; Jensen and Ronsbo, 2014; Johnson, 2011). The refugee regime began as Eurocentric in focus, and the figure of the refugee was represented a man with political agency (Johnson, 2011). With a shift in focus to the Global South, this imagined figure is now a racialised woman, a voiceless victim who is apolitical and undifferentiated (Johnson, 2011). This has taken place partly within humanitarian discourses concerned with eliciting support, but largely in order to manage the perceived threat of instability from refugee populations (Johnson, 2011). This categorisation of the refugee woman denies her political agency, excluding her from political spaces and indeed from claiming asylum on political grounds. It is clear that refugee and asylum seeking women have always been constructed outside of a legitimate claim for refuge, as apolitical or as dangerous threats to security, as I will discuss later. The imposition of victimhood (Canning, 2017, p. 126) and of criminalisation are political constructs, both of which silence and obscure the lived experiences of refugee and asylum seeking women.

The globalisation of migration has challenged the refugee regime and given rise to the creation of new labels and explanations for how these labels are formed (Castles, 2003). In the recent context of increased, and increasingly complex, refugee flows into Europe, politicians, policy makers, and the media have contributed to shifting the boundaries of these categories to suit their reluctance to receive refugees. Across Europe, states' racist restrictions on refugee protection have separated the category more and more from the UN definition of a refugee, criminalising those seeking asylum in order to justify the violence committed against them through border controls and restrictive domestic policies (Huysmans, 2006; Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015; Kjaerum, 2002) that have contributed to the institutionalisation of the securitisation of migration (Bourbeau, 2011).

The 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol have long faced criticism for being inadequate in the face of the changing nature of conflict, globalisation, and complex migratory patterns (Honkala, 2017; Kneebone, Stevens and Baldassar, 2014; Feller, 2014).[9] The article definition of a refugee is considered far from cohesive, criticised as being too 'narrow' in its approach to guarantee the rights many of refugees (Marfleet, 2006, p. 146; Kneebone, 2005). Specific types of persecution are overlooked, in particular, gender related persecution (Crawley, 2000)

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[9] For example, offering protection to refugees who flee individualised violence, but requiring groups of refugees who flee generalised violence to prove that they are persecuted as individuals to meet the Convention definition (Crawford and Hyndman 1989). There is also the exclusion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have not crossed an international border and therefore do not meet the Convention definition (Feller 2014).

which is explicitly excluded (Honkala, 2017). The Convention is 'gender-neutral' and assumes that gender is not a factor in the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers (Bloch and Galvin, 2000). Feminist critics of the 1951 Convention warn that neglecting gender as grounds for persecution is highly problematic (Greatbatch, 1989, p. 518), and many have advocated for gender oppression to be included as a criterion for granting refugee status (Castel, 1992, p. 48; Indra, 1987; Greatbatch, 1989). Indra pronounces this omission in status determination as revealing the male centred interests of the Convention (Indra, 1987, p. 3), and Grewal's feminist critique also focuses on the representation of the refugee subject as male (Grewal, 2005, p. 159).

Excluding gender-based persecution implies it is less 'serious' which renders its victims invisible (Freedman, 2015, p. 75; Stevens, 1993). Calls for women to be recognised as 'members of a particular social group' have been made, to which the primary objection appears to be the unfounded fear of opening 'floodgates' to a large portion of the population (Lobo, 2011). The UNHCR has acknowledged that 'historically, the refugee definition has been interpreted through a framework of male experiences' but claimed that it is not necessary to include gender as a sixth ground for persecution in the 1951 Convention:

> "Gender-related persecution" is a term that has no legal meaning per se… Even though gender is not specifically referenced in the refugee definition, it is widely accepted that it can influence, or dictate, the type of persecution or harm suffered and the reasons for this treatment. The refugee definition, properly interpreted, therefore covers gender-related claims (UNHCR, 2002).

While these guidelines recognise the importance of a gender-sensitive approach to refugee status determination, it becomes clear that issues with the formulation of international human rights law aside, there is a tension between UN mandates and state interests (Loescher, 2001; Loescher, 2008; Betts, 2013). Without a treaty body to monitor compliance with the Convention treaty obligations (Hathaway, 2002), the 'proper' interpretation and then implementation of the Convention in gender-related claims relies on the political will of states, as treaty-based norms are enforced domestically (Hathaway, North and Pobjoy, 2013). Herein lies a 'crisis of meaning' where the term 'refugee' is at best misunderstood (Kneebone, 2010b, p. 216), and more likely constructed in a way that marginalises and discriminates against those who require protection (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018).

Two issues emerge: the formulation of the 1951 Convention and its exclusions, and the interpretation and implementation by states parties. Both national and intergovernmental protection regimes have been criticised for being largely gender insensitive and failing to protect refugee women as it has refugee men (Manchanda, 2004, p. 4179; Greatbatch, 1989; Indra, 1987; Crawley, 2000; Arbel, Dauvergne and Millbank, 2014). A growing body of feminist theoretical and empirical research has asserted that women who seek asylum do not benefit equitably from protection under the Convention, with a lack of protection under national legislation and unequal access to the asylum system (Crawley, 2000, p. 87; Edwards, 2010; Freedman, 2015; Bloch and Galvin, 2000). Protection does not seem to have a gendered aspect, but persecution does as women experience the same types of persecution as men, but also further human rights abuses that are gender-based (Bloch and Galvin, 2000; UNHCR, 2020). Women's persecution and its consequences have gone unrecognised in international refugee law, not fitting easily into the categories of the Geneva Convention (Bloch and Galvin, 2000). Unsurprisingly, national asylum procedures reflect this lack of a gender-sensitive framework and not only fail to protect women but cause them further harm.

> The legal and political framework of refugee law has become quite fragmented and stratified, difficult even for experts to understand and interpret. The fragmented, complex structure is accompanied by a lack of consistent and standardized implementation (Gökalp Aras *et al.*, 2020, p. 9).

Without the possibility of expanding the 1951 Convention to explicitly include gender as grounds for protection, feminist organisations, activists, and academics have turned to issues with the regional and domestic interpretation and application of the Convention (Honkala, 2017). Divergent interpretations by states have resulted in widely varying national determination systems (Storey, 2008; Maluwa and Katz Anton, 2020; D'Angelo, 2009), the inconsistent application of the Convention (Arboleda and Hoy, 1993), and limited access to refugee protection in industrialised states (Kneebone, 2010b). The European approach to refugee protection over the last three decades can largely be categorised as intentionally extremely restrictive (Gökalp Aras *et al.*, 2020; Davitti, 2018), designed to deter 'illegalised' migrants and prevent the mobility of all but a select (white) few (Gerard and Pickering, 2013; Baldwin-Edwards, Blitz and Crawley, 2019; Crawley and Blitz, 2019). Refugees and asylum seekers are faced with 'a relentless hostility' in Europe (Bhambra, 2017)[10] as states work to

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[10] EU member states are signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN 1948), the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) (Council of Europe 1950), and the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which means they are bound by a legal and moral obligation to offer protection to those fleeing war and persecution (UNHCR 1951). Yet

emphasise their sovereignty and the need for increased securitisation of migration according to national conditions and priorities (Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015).

> Increasingly, the status-conferring function of the state is used to marginalise the international system of refugee protection, and to diminish the status of refugees and asylum seekers within the community (Kneebone, 2010a, p. 237).

Much of the global increase in forcibly displaced people in the last decade occurred between 2012 and 2015, driven primarily by the Syrian conflict (UNHCR, 2019, p. 4). Across Europe, this has been referred to as the 'European migration crisis' after more than 200,000 refugees fled for safety across the Mediterranean in 2014 (Baldwin-Edwards, Blitz and Crawley, 2019; Crawley and Skleparis, 2018; Davitti, 2018; Squire, 2020; Sirriyeh, 2018). By the end of 2015, almost 4,000 people lost their lives undertaking irregular boat journeys across the Mediterranean (IOM, 2016), and an estimated 1 million people arrived on European shores. Simultaneously, powerful political, policy, and public narratives focused on the 'perceived economic, security and cultural threats of increased migration to Europe' (Baldwin-Edwards, Blitz and Crawley, 2019, p. 2140). These narratives have framed events as a 'crisis' for Europe, characterising new arrivals initially as vulnerable victims, and later as dangerous outsiders or villains (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017).

Davitti examines the EU's construction of this emergency as demanding exceptional measures, externalising and privatising migration in order to avoid meeting international obligations (Davitti, 2018, p. 1173). Under the guise of humanitarianism, the EU adopted enhanced measures via the European Agenda on Migration (European Commission, 2015), made up of policies used to 'justify and enable violent externalisation measures' in order to prevent people reaching the EU (Davitti, 2018, p. 1175). While not new, EU border practices have increasingly militarised migration control since 2015, exploiting the concepts of 'safe third country' (ECRE, 2017) and protection 'elsewhere' (Foster, 2006), in the context of amplified fears about the security of external EU borders (van der Woude and van Berlo, 2015). This 'crisis' concerns the supposed crisis facing Europe, rather than the devastation experienced by those, especially women, fleeing violence and other serious human rights abuses, or

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Europe is the wealthiest continent and accepts the smallest proportion of the world's refugees. UNHCR mandated refugees hosted in Turkey alone accounted for 18% of all refugees, while the rest of Europe hosted 14% of the total refugee population in 2018 (UNHCR 2019). Oxfam reported in 2016 that the world's 6 wealthiest nations who account for almost 60% of global GDP (US, China, Japan, Germany, UK, and France) hosted less than 9% of the world's refugees and asylum seekers (Oxfam 2016).

indeed, the crisis *of* Europe (Bhambra, 2017, p. 400). The European project 'in its own terms [was] founded on a commitment to human rights' (Bhambra, 2017, p. 395) which it has undermined in its 'facilitation of forms of exclusionary nationalism hostile to those values' (ibid.).

Informed by 'a new generation of deterrent regimes' (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Hathaway, 2014), these measures have enabled the emergence across Europe of camps, processing 'hot-spots,' and detention centres, redirecting refugees towards more dangerous routes, and exposing them to traffickers and worse (Canning, 2019; Crawley and Duvell, 2017; Squire, 2020). The severity of these controls and their consequences are encapsulated by the thousands of migrants risking and losing their lives trying to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean (Freedman, 2016; Davitti, 2018; IOM, 2020; Squire, 2020). The infrastructures of the EU's liquid borders reproduce and legitimise violence, presented as necessary and justified in a time of 'crisis' (Davitti, 2018). Bank et al conceptualise the intersection of migration and violence, positing migration as a movement out of violence, a violent process in and of itself, and a path into violence (Bank, Fröhlich and Schneiker, 2017).

Increased securitisation across Europe has had a gendered impact on refugee protection, with a greater vulnerability and exposure to gendered violence like trafficking when in transit (Gerard and Pickering, 2013; Kofman, 2019), and in fact death (Squire, 2020; Pinelli, 2021; IOM, 2020). The limited feminist scholarship in border studies finds that women of colour are disproportionately harmed by systemic gendered and racialised border violence perpetrated by the state (Marmo and Gerard, 2020; Gerard, 2014). In short, those who are deemed to be not 'fully human' (Squire, 2020). Once in a country of asylum, women are met with varying but largely uniform asylum determination processes across Europe (Bloch, Galvin and Harrell-Bond, 2000), which are slow, complex, and inaccessible (Canning, 2017). Bloch et al contend that European policy and legislation falls extremely short in addressing the protection needs of women (Bloch, Galvin and Harrell-Bond, 2000), and in fact they 'actively contribute to or increase the risk of vulnerability to violence' (Canning, 2019, p.3).

The 1951 Convention has failed to secure protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Europe, informed as it was by an exclusionary, racist, colonial rationale which has filtered through to its implementation in Europe where states have exploited the potential to exclude black and brown bodies. Particularly relevant to this thesis is the UK's implementation of the Convention within this regional context, and to fully understand the UK experience it must be placed within the wider history of immigration in the UK.

The UK response to immigration

I will now turn to the context of immigration and asylum institutions in the UK today as it relates to the experiences of research participants and the analysis of these experiences in later chapters. The UK has taken part in the continual formation, transformation, and reformation of the categories of refugee and asylum seeker in response to its political interests, increasingly disconnecting the labels from the lived experiences of RAS. Categories such as 'refugee,' 'migrant,' and 'asylum seeker' do not simply exist but are constructed and used for political purposes (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018). In the UK this construction takes place within the context of the hostile environment, namely for the identification of those who are 'unwanted' and then as the racialised justification for the exclusion and infliction of harm against them.

The articulation of the hostile environment since the 2015 Mediterranean migrant crisis, and even since the Coalition government came into power in 2010, exposes the UK's priorities as the reassertion of the state's right to control the entry of asylum seekers. The redefinition of the category of asylum seeker to include the feature of security threat has resulted in the development and implementation of much harsher policies, enacted through a hostile environment built on institutionalised racism and sexism but with greater formalisation in law (the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts), and expanded reach (such as citizen on citizen checks).

The UK has been a 'country of immigration over the past 200 years in a variety of ways' (Panayi 2010), during which time it has consistently worked to exclude certain bodies. The first piece of legislation brought in to regulate the entry of 'undesirable immigrants' was the widely criticised 1905 Aliens Act, primarily in response to the persecution of Eastern European Jews (Bashford and McAdam 2014). With the goal of deterring poorer Jews from Britain (Canning 2017), the Act exposes the UK's early priorities to exclude those who it did not believe belonged to a society built on whiteness. In this case, based upon the racialisation and criminalisation of Jewish people who, like Irish migrants before them, were constructed as being unethical and possessing an 'innate criminality' (Knepper 2010, p.68). Rather than refugees who were fleeing religious and ethnic persecution in Russia, Eastern European Jews were marked out as being migrants who posed a threat to Britain. The Act set a precedent for 'alien criminality' in law, applied to all immigrant populations in the name of stopping crime at the border (ibid.). The redefinition of those seeking refuge as criminal outsiders who do not belong has a well-established history in the UK, and the concept of border control as a

necessary crime control measure (Knepper 2010) has continued throughout the UK's development of its immigration control system.

In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the UN, and in the same year the UK's Nationality Act granted citizenship to citizens of current and former colonies (*British Nationality Act 1948,* 1948). Post-war Britain reluctantly allowed immigration from parts of its fast-disappearing Empire to fill labour shortages with the so-called 'open door' policy. However, this piece of racist legislation was intended to facilitate white people from Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand moving to the UK, not people of colour:

> People of colour from the colonies and former colonies weren't welcome in the UK… Britain had fashioned itself as the centre of an empire, in which those living in the colonies were its subjects – ones they ruled over, oppressed, and exploited – so long as they stayed in their countries of origin (Goodfellow 2019, p.44).

White 'Old Commonwealth' migrants were insufficient in numbers, and so migration in this period marked significant levels of movement from the 'New Commonwealth,' South Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa, changing the demography of Britain (Panayi 2010). The 'coloured colonial subjects' were met with hostility (Small and Solomos 2006, p.237), as their redefinition by Empire as inferior 'other' was maintained. Once British capitalism failed to provide enough jobs (Sivanandan 1990), Commonwealth migrants of colour were again redefined and reconstructed as competition for limited resources such as employment and housing, and apparently responsible for 'genuine fears' amongst the indigenous white population (Small and Solomos 2006). Always 'undesirable' and now no longer 'useful,' immigrants of colour were then restricted (Sivanandan 1990).

In the context of the end, and legacy, of Empire, this period marked the start of the increasingly public and 'explicit racialisation of immigration in which issues of race came to dominate the political agenda' (Small and Solomos 2006, p.238). This 'othering' had well established roots in the UK's colonial endeavours, which were unambiguously racist in redefining colonised peoples as 'inferior' (Sirriyeh, 2018). The redefinition of asylum seekers which takes place today is built upon the historic racist desire to exclude people of colour, and the bodies of the 'crimmigrant other' have become 'a site for the exercise of state sovereignty' (Fiske, 2016, pp. pp 113–146). This has been enabled by the failures of the 1951 Convention, its exclusions, and the scope for interpretation and implementation by states, who err on the side of restriction and exclusion.

Legislating hostility

The UK continued to build its immigration system based on the exclusion of the racialised 'other.' Campaigns to control the immigration of people of colour both inside and outside of government resulted in the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962), widely seen as restricting the access of non-white Commonwealth citizens to the UK (Solomos 2003), followed by the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1968). Explicitly racist, and a further racialisation of immigration, these Acts expose the redefinition of outsiders in action during a period when Enoch Powell spoke of the 'race problem' and called for immigrants of colour to be repatriated (Solomos 2003). The 1971 Immigration Act (1971) went further and applied 'overtly racial criteria' to keep out Commonwealth citizens of colour (Solomos 2003). The 1980's and 1990's saw major political events take place in Rwanda, Romania, Kosovo, and Iraq, during which time the UK worked to reduce access to sanctuary on its soil (Webber and Peirce 2012), a tactic repeatedly employed in response to the outbreak of conflict (Cohen 1994).[11]

New Labour (1997 – 2010) viewed their obligations under the 1951 Convention as impeding their desire for preventative controls, arguing that the Convention was no longer relevant (Mulvey 2011). The government externalised border controls to other EU states (Mulvey 2011), reminiscent of the 1905 Aliens Act, which marked the beginning of intervention moving beyond national borders to the country of departure (Knepper 2010). This was supposedly in the name of preventing crime which was constructed as being inherent in the racialised immigrant 'other.' It was imagined that immigration control could be undertaken 'at a point on an international map further and further from the nation' (ibid., p.97), thus keeping undesirable bodies further and further from its borders.

New Labour passed six immigration acts building on the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act (1996), institutionalising hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers by placing greater and greater restrictions on the everyday aspects of their lives, while encouraging other forms of migration. The focus was on 'removing a never-evidenced 'pull factor' of 'generous' social provision' (Mulvey, 2011, pp.1477-1493). The right to work was removed, access to the asylum system was made harder, safe third country provisions were exploited, and forced

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[11] This was mirrored by the intensification of deterrent immigration controls across Europe, despite the EU being established in 1993 in the spirit of unity (Canning 2017). Contrary to the EU's stated aim of fluid borders, the criminalisation of asylum through and within the law began in earnest in the 1990's (Dauvergne 2013).

returns were enabled. By 2005, 'talk of bogus asylum seekers had become a staple of political and media discourse (Partos and Bale 2015, p. 169–184), and the restriction of public services was positioned as a necessary response to the 'suspect' other (Bowling and Westenra, 2018).

The immigration policies of David Cameron's government of 2010 – 2016 were 'remarkably restrictive, hard-line' and punitive, with changes to economic, student, and family migration (Partos and Bale 2015, p. 169–184). The 2010 Conservative election campaign centred on significantly reducing migration, and Theresa May spoke of immigration control as a 'means of strengthening cohesion' and 'of protecting public services' (Laverick and Joyce 2019, p.297). Immigration and diversity were once again made synonymous with social and political breakdown, the racialised other was constructed as 'dangerous' (Bhatia, Poynting, and Tufail, 2018, p. 181–212), and 'abuse' of the asylum system presented as being rife (Aliverti, 2012). It is within this context of anti-immigration that most research participants for this study arrived in the UK.

In 2012 May announced the 'hostile environment' policy aimed at deterring people from coming to the UK, preventing overstayers who were here, and stopping irregular migrants from accessing public services and the essentials of everyday life (Yeo 2018). The 'Hostile Environment Working Group' (later renamed the 'Inter Ministerial Group on Migrants' Access to Benefits and Public Services') sought to achieve deterrence and returns by making life unbearable for 'illegal immigrants' (Travis 2013). The rhetoric of protecting public services for citizens was built upon the criminalisation of refugees, asylum seekers, and all migrants of colour, although these measures came to impact both citizens and non-citizens, as the Windrush scandal highlighted.[12] These intentional policies designed to make life difficult for those without the correct documentation continue to impact people, as will be discussed throughout this thesis.

By 2013 fear-mongering discourses and aggressive policies fuelled 'a ratcheting up of anti-migrant feeling to the point where it was possible for a government-sponsored advertisement to use the same hate speech and rhetoric as far-right racists' (Jones, Gunaratnam et al, 2017, p.3   ).[13] While the discourse of 'the refugee crisis' in the UK has contributed to increasing

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[12] The Windrush scandal refers to the wrongful detention, deportations, and denial of legal rights of hundreds of Commonwealth citizens as a consequence of the discriminatory immigration system, and particularly the hostile environment policies.
[13] The EU Referendum's Leave campaign overwhelmingly centred around immigration, and opposition to immigration became closely connected to EU membership, while security was equated with independence from the EU (Laverick and Joyce 2019). The Leave campaign secured a narrow

fears of besiegement (Hage, 2016, p. 38), the statistics offer different picture. Asylum seekers accounted for approximately 6% of immigrants to the UK in 2018 (Sturge, 2020). In the year ending March 2020, the UK received 7% of the total first-time asylum applications to the EU compared to Germany's 21% (Eurostat, 2020).

This translates into the UK receiving 35,099 asylum applications from main applicants only in the year ending March 2020, compared to a peak in 2002 of 84,132 applications, and a low point of 17,916 in 2010 (Sturge, 2020). The percentage of asylum applicants refused at initial decision was 88% in 2004, and 48% in 2019 (ibid.). Between 2004 and 2019, approximately 75% of refused applicants lodged an appeal, and only around one quarter of those was allowed (ibid.). For further context, by the year end 2019 Turkey hosted 3.6 million displaced people, Germany hosted 1.1 million, and the UK hosted 133,100 (UNHCR, 2020). These statistics expose the reality that the UK is not experiencing a 'refugee crisis.' In fact, far from it as the UK has succeeded in preventing most asylum seekers from even arriving and making an application through its exclusionary policies and practices. This provides a preliminary insight into the challenges faced by the small population of asylum seekers who do make an application in the UK, and even smaller number of whom are granted status, which will be further explored in later chapters.

The Home Office claims that it bases immigration policy and practice in a number of international, regional, and national laws and conventions which are intended to offer protection to refugee and asylum seeking women in particular. It's 'Gender Issues in the Asylum Claim' (Home Office, 2018) guidance for asylum caseworkers refers to the 1951 Convention, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (ratified by the UK in 1986) (United Nations, 1979), and the 2004 and 2005 European Council Directives relating to procedures for granting and withdrawing refugee status. UK legislation referred to includes the Human Rights Act 1998 (*Human Rights Act 1998*), the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004 (*Asylum and Immigration Act 2004*), the Equality Act 2010, and the FGM Act 2003 (Home Office, 2018). The guidance asserts that 'it is important to ensure that the asylum process is gender sensitive throughout' the assessment of gender-related persecution which can include forced marriage, FGM, sexual violence, and trafficking (Home Office, 2018, p.5). Echoing the UNHCR Guidelines on Gender-Related Persecution (UNHCR, 2002), the Home Office advises referring to the country policy and information notes, careful consideration of the convention grounds for persecution and how these are impacted

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victory in 2016, echoing an historical trend in the UK and Europe of increased far-right political activity in the face of increasing numbers of refugee and asylum seeker arrivals (Laverick and Joyce 2019).

by gender, and the individual circumstances of the claim (Home Office, 2018). This legislation and adherence to it should ensure fair and equal access to asylum for vulnerable groups who require it, especially those who live at the intersection of multiple oppressions, like asylum seeking women.

The hard-line anti-immigrant approach of most EU governments has been focused on deterring migrants and asylum seekers from Europe, of which the UK was a part until the end of 2020. While migration was a key feature of Brexit campaigning, little attention has been given to what impact leaving the EU will have on refugee protection, and even less to the impact on gender issues in asylum. A leaked Home Office document claimed that the UK intended to remain a 'safe haven for those fleeing persecution' before going on to lay out more restrictive, 'Britain first' migration policies (Hopkins and Travis, 2017). The UK has displayed reluctance in the past to adopt European legislation regarding refugee protection, exposing the state's priorities to 'protect' its borders, and the ability to take an even more hard-line approach.

The Common European Asylum System ('CEAS') framework, established under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (European Union, 2012) aimed at standardising international refugee legislation and practice between Member States. The ongoing divergence in the asylum procedures of EU states resulted in reforms to the CEAS instruments in 2010, the majority of which the UK opted out of. These Directives were later replaced by 2015 Regulations in the face of continued fragmentation of the asylum system, which the UK also did not opt in to due to concerns they would 'further limit the Government's ability to take decisions on the UK asylum system at national level and in the UK national interest' (*House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee: EU asylum reform*, 2017). It has been suggested that the UK's asylum law and policy only marginally relied on EU asylum legislation, which failed to 'bring about a more inclusive and gender-sensitive interpretation of the refugee definition in the UK' (Querton, 2019). Certainly, in terms of legislation the UK has not been in line with Europe's asylum regime, and while it may have introduced gender guidelines they are unevenly applied if at all.

When afforded the choice, the UK has opted out of instruments it deemed a threat to its autonomy in regulating its borders, as opposed to the opportunity to make a commitment to sharing the regional responsibility to offer protection to refugees. As stated in the Home Office Gender Issues asylum guide (Home Office, 2018), the UK is party to numerous instruments, which if adhered to and enacted fully could provide a comprehensive suite of legal protection

for women who face discrimination, violence, human rights abuses, and require refuge. However, as I will demonstrate, the hostile environment operates in such a manner as to exclude the women who meet this criteria, by redefining them as existing outside of the right to access asylum.

Racialised citizens and non-citizens are both impacted as instead of having their rights protected, they are at best offered privileges which can be, and are, removed at any time (Webber, 2019). The implication is that poor, racialised migrants and asylum seekers are 'less than,' not 'deserving' of having their human rights protected, and therefore prevented from accessing public services and everyday essentials. Research participants reported being systematically dehumanised so that the state's redefinition of them as 'crimmigrants' and the accompanying violence could be justified as 'necessary.' This 'othering' involves the denial or attribution of certain characteristics to people based on their membership of a group so that they are perceived as not fully human (Kelman, 1973). Systematic practices of dehumanisation can be carried out by institutions, the government, and the state by treating non-citizens like asylum seekers as less than human so that citizens will support the use of violence against them (Browning, 1998; Haslam *et al.*, 2005; Smith, 2014). I will conclude this chapter by outlining the organisation of the thesis.

Organisation of the thesis

This thesis has seven chapters. I begin by providing an introduction to the project and outline the research aims in the introduction, before presenting a number of relevant concepts and contextual information in Chapter 2. This includes an overview of developments in feminist and gender research in forced migration studies, and the criminalisation of asylum. In Chapter 3 I turn to the methodologies that have informed the research process, namely feminist epistemology and participatory action research strategies.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are based on RASW participants' insights about seeking asylum in the UK. Chapter 4 explores how participants spoke about the redefinition of those seeking asylum as criminals by the hostile environment, while Chapter 5 discusses ways in which participants spoke about being controlled and dehumanised once they have been redefined as criminals. Chapter 6 examines what participants described as the impact of the hostile environment on asylum seeking women, namely the restriction of their access to their human rights. Finally, the Conclusion turns to refugee and asylum seeking women's responses to their experiences in the UK, before an assertion of the key contributions of my thesis.

Chapter 2. Conceptualising and contextualising the 'crimmigrant' RASW: '*They speak ABOUT us*' (Ina)[14]

Introduction

This chapter will introduce key concepts around the criminalisation of asylum seekers and the punitive measures they are subjected to, demonstrating the need to pay greater attention to the particular experiences of asylum seeking women, the impact of gender, and the lack of feminist analysis. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that there is a gap in the literature regarding asylum seeking women's experiences of everyday 'immcarcerality' and the extent to which their racist and sexist dehumanisation prevents access to their basic human rights.

Following on from the contextual information given in Chapter 1 about the institutions involved in refugee protection, this Chapter will provide greater context regarding the people who are impacted by asylum systems, primarily ASW as seeking asylum is gendered. I will begin by discussing how sexism and racism in the asylum system dehumanises RAS women in particular, and one technique used to do this is by redefining them from legitimate asylum seekers to 'crimmigrants.' The regime that they are subjected to is harsher than that for criminals, as they are guaranteed access to their human rights in prison.

The framework within which I do this is feminism informed by intersectionality and transnationalism. This approach informs the methodology for this project as it enables the creation of space for women's experiences with an acknowledgement of the geographical and historical context that has shaped their search for asylum. This is especially valuable in refugee and forced migration work, as the processes of globalisation and transnational migration play an essential role in transborder violence which intersects with gender and race. Dominant narratives about refugees and asylum seekers have centred men (Freedman, 2008; Crawley, 2000; Nahla, Lee Anne de la and Helen, 2003), while literature about women focuses

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[14] RASW research participant Ina was an Albanian woman in her early thirties who had fled sexual violence and trafficking, granted 5 years leave to remain after numerous refusals. She spoke openly about the impact of permanent disability resulting from the abuse she experienced. Ina was dedicated to raising awareness of trafficking and slavery.

on their victimhood; apolitical, traumatised, and vulnerable members of an homogenous group (Johnsson, 1989; Canning, 2017; Manchanda, 2004; Malkki, 1996). Listening to what refugee and asylum seeking women have to say about their experiences in the UK was the starting point for this study, creating space for their words, and acknowledging their agency, which a feminist approach supports.

The sources of literature that I utilised can broadly be categorised as the following: international human rights instruments; national policy, legislation, and practice documents; international and national statistics; research-based studies; academic publications; grey literature such as reports; political and media debates; literature from events, conferences, and seminars; campaign literature; and articles from practitioners and NGO's. My strategy was to review documents relating to the larger structures at play in global, regional, and national migration trends, particularly asylum and immigration policy that related to women, from intergovernmental organisations like the UNHCR to the UK Home Office. My knowledge of relevant organisations and charities meant that I could focus my engagement with grey literature for very up-to-date information. I made extensive use on electronic databases and key word searches to generate pertinent academic data sources. The next section will begin with a review of forced migration studies and the emergence of gender focused scholarship, as well as feminist approaches in the field.

Forced migration studies, gender, and feminism

Refugee and forced migration studies emerged as a distinct field in the 1980's (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh *et al.*, 2014, p. 2; Malkki, 1996), albeit with a Eurocentric bias (Gatrell, 2013, p. 2). Barbara Harrell-Bond's ground-breaking early work asserted that research should be undertaken with the goal of guaranteeing refugees' rights and agency (Harrell-Bond, 1986). Debates in the field include the extent to which research should be policy relevant (Bakewell, 2008), the ethics of data collection and the dual imperative (Landau, 2012), and the value/ risks of categorisation and labelling (Zetter, 1991; Zetter, 2007; Marfleet, 2006; Crawley and Skleparis, 2018). There is agreement that the field broadly includes the study of asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons, development induced displaced persons, trafficked persons, and 'all those whose claim to such labels may have been denied, but who have been forced to *move* against their will as a result of persecution, conflict, or insecurity' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh *et al.*, 2014, p. 5). At the heart of the field is the drive to understand and address the human experience of displacement (ibid.).

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (2014) work out of Harrell-Bond's insistence that passivity and dependence is created and even demanded of forced migrants, denying their agency and hindering their access to their rights (Harrell-Bond, 1986). They suggest that it is therefore essential to 'simultaneously interrogate structures and mechanisms which unduly criminalise and subject forced migrants to securitisation paradigms, but also those structures which concomitantly lead to an unrealistic and potentially equally oppressive idealisation of certain groups of displaced persons' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh *et al.*, 2014, p. 6). Unfortunately, much work in the field since the 1980's represented displaced persons as a group of silent victims (Malkki, 1996), dehumanising them (Stepputat and Sørensen, 2014, p. 88). Historians have 'ignored most refugee movements and "silenced" those involved' (Marfleet, 2007, p. 138), perhaps because refugee voices 'challenge national narratives and the political and socio-cultural arrangements which continue to endorse them' (ibid., p. 144). The omission of refugee voices is therefore 'actual resistance rather than simple apathy' (Kushner, 2006, p. 40). There is a pattern of refugees and asylum seekers being defined and redefined by the political agendas of others, whether as criminals to enable their exclusion or as victims in order to dismiss their resistance to their exclusion. This project is speaking to that refusal to hear refugee voices and the denial of their agency, particularly RAS women of colour.

Women and gender were largely invisible in migration scholarship in sociology until the 1970's (Kofman, 1999, p. 269; Bloch and Galvin, 2000) due to the male bias (Pessar, 1999; Morokvaśic, 1984). Early research on the gender aspects of migration was merely 'compensatory' (Amelina and Lutz, 2018, p. 21). The 'contributory' phase in the 1980's gave greater consideration to the role of women in migration and their experiences of it (Amelina and Lutz, 2018, p. 21), but the application of gender analyses to the refugee experience 'influenced the perception of refugee women as victim*ized* rather than as victims *per se*' (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Khanlou and Moussa, 2008, p. 6). Morokvaśic questioned the assumption in previous research that migration, particularly for women, was 'a move from a more oppressive […] to a less oppressive environment' (Morokvaśic, 1984), and advocated for a feminist theoretical framework in migration studies. This project utilises a feminist framework to highlight that asylum seeking women arriving in the UK have not moved into a less oppressive environment, perhaps just a differently oppressive one.

Evolutions in gender and migration research occurred alongside the emergence of feminisms which centre previously unheard voices, particularly significant given that most refugee populations are from the Global South and have been excluded not only along the lines of

gender but also race. While the experiences of women are increasingly discussed in migration scholarship, 'the relationship between migration and feminism is not' (Bonifacio, 2012). Chimni critiques refugee studies as an imperialist research project, highlighting the lack of continued postcolonial or feminist examinations (Chimni, 1998; Chimni, 2009), which is pertinent given the role of colonialism in refugee flows, many of which originate in the Global South. Hyndman demonstrates the marginalisation of feminist analysis by pointing to the *Journal of Refugee Studies* having published fewer than 10% of articles containing references to feminism, feminist, women, or gender over a twenty one year period (Hyndman, 2010, p. 454). According to Hondagneu-Sotelo, 'immigration and feminism are rarely, if ever, coupled in popular discussion, social movements, or academic research' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000, p. 112). This project will contribute to rectifying this neglect by undertaking a feminist analysis of women's experiences of seeking asylum in the UK.

A gender analysis and a feminist one are often mistakenly conflated and the terms used interchangeably, even though the 'mere recognition of gender is not necessarily a feminist practice' (Parreñas, 2009, p. 10). Hyndman considers what a feminist analysis of displacement and asylum across international borders would look like, decentring the state in order to consider other political actors (Hyndman, 2011, p. 169). She champions a more nuanced examination of varying scales of security 'from the state to the refugee household' as a means of gaining a more accountable and embodied understanding of power and space (Hyndman, 2011, p. 170). As sites of violence and conflict have evolved to include people's bodies, homes, and communities, feminist geopolitics endorses a re-scaling of concepts of security, and a greater accountability to the safety of refugee bodies in particular (ibid., p. 181).

For some, refugee and forced migration studies as an interdisciplinary field has increasingly come to include gender as a primary factor of analysis, with a greater understanding of the interconnections between gender, violence, security, and migration (Marchand, 2008; Freedman, 2015). Feminist migration scolarship before the 2000's was concerned with labour, immigrant women's employment, and domestic carework, as well as migrant households, family relations, and social netwoks (Nawyn, 2010). Gender later came to be understood as a system of power relations which impacts every aspect of the migration experience (ibid.). Research developed around the transnational landscape of gender and power (Mahler and Pessar, 2001; Pessar and Mahler, 2003), the gendered structures which impact migration flows (Oishi, 2005), and migrant women's access to citizenship (Benhabib and Resnik, 2009).

For many however, forced migration studies remains a largely heterogeneous field, failing to make more nuanced connections between migration and gender (Carastathis *et al.*, 2018; Gatt *et al.*, 2016; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013; Nawyn, 2010). Amelina and Lutz (2018) acknowledge a difficult relationship between gender studies and forced migration studies, critiquing discussions about the feminisation of migration for failing to adequately address reasons for migration by the majority of refugees and displaced people, who are women (Amelina and Lutz, 2018, p. 20). Other critics point to the continued dearth of gender, and particularly feminist, scholarship examining mobility and displacement (Hyndman, 2010; Freedman, 2015; Nawyn, 2010; Gatt *et al.*, 2016; Carastathis *et al.*, 2018). While there has been some growth in gender sensitivity in forced migration studies and indeed feminist analyses in the field of asylum (see Canning, V., 2017, 2019, and Smith, K., 2015, 2017, 2019), it is largely white and could go further in investigating the experiences of women of colour who are forced to migrate. This kind of feminist analysis is often missing in much of the policy-led analysis in the field of asylum. This thesis is speaking to these critiques by taking a feminist approach informed by intersectionality in order to open up more space for the exploration of the experiences of RAS women of colour who experience life at the intersection of multiple oppressions.

The Canadian journal 'Refuge' published a special edition in 2018 which brought together work concerned with addressing the lack of intersectional feminist analyses in refugee studies, 'even as border and (forced) migration studies have proliferated' (Carastathis *et al.*, 2018, p. 3). The authors acknowledge that the 'present "refugee crisis" is a product of the accelerated conditions of war and state violence, which are inextricable from globalised capitalism, histories of colonialism, and contemporary imperialism' (Carastathis *et al.*, 2018, p. 4). Experiences of migration and displacement differ according to position in hierarchies of gender, race, age, class, religion, and sexuality, and the little research that address gender in migration does so with a single-axis approach (Carastathis *et al.*, 2018, p. 6). Feminist interventions remain marginalised in border and migration studies, omissions which include 'deemphasizing [sic] gender and sexuality, ignoring the 'intersectional' interplay of gender with other dimensions of inequality in migration societies, Eurocentric preoccupation, [the] non-consideration of the agency of migrants and [being] caught up in methodological nationalism' (Gatt *et al.*, 2016, p. 1).

As a marginalised approach in migration studies (Carastathis *et al.*, 2018), an intersectional feminist framework enables an analysis of the violence inflicted by asylum systems upon those deemed undesirable by the state: in this thesis, criminalised asylum seeking women. Rather

than a limiting single axis approach (Crenshaw, 1989), intersectionality encourages a deeper understanding of women's experiences by exploring the multiple oppressions that intersect to create their daily lives. For RASW in the UK, the vulnerability to structural violence is not only due to gender, but is compounded by their race, religion, ethnicity, and nationality. The intersectional framework is an essential starting point, encompassing three broad arms: firstly as a frame of analysis, secondly as a theory and methodology, and thirdly as a lens for political interventions (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013).

Intersectionality has met with criticism over the years, usually due to a lack of engagement with the concept and its historical origins, and a failure to recognise the growth of intersectional scholarship over the years (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013; Bilge, 2013). It has been suggested that intersectionality colludes with US imperialism rather than resisting it, and falls prey to 'geopolitical problems' (Puar, 2007). According to Puar, the desire for recognition from the state is a failing as it acknowledges state authority. This thinking is somewhat short-sighted, as the state already enacts violent forms of identity categorisation upon 'racialised others in the United States' (Cooper, 2015), much like the Home Office in the UK.

Cooper argues that actually, 'asking for recognition on different terms constitutes not collusion but dissent from various forms of state-based violence, both physical and discursive' (ibid.). For Patil, intersectionality has focused too heavily on the Global North, prioritising domestic dynamics rather than cross-border dynamics, and produced very little analysis of international, regional, or global power structures (Patil, 2013). She also points to the importance of historical and spatial context in applying an intersectional analysis, in particular, how 'the patriarchies of colonial Europe were a racialised, gendered, transterritorial phenomenon' (ibid.). For Mirza, the 'postcolonial impulse to chart counter-narratives and memories of racialised and gendered domination' is at the heart of black British feminism (Mirza, 2015). The concept of intersectionality has allowed black British feminists to 'interrogate the ways in which power, ideology and the state intersect with subjectivity, identity and agency to maintain social injustice and universal patterns of gendered and racialised economic inequality' (Mirza, 2015).

A growing awareness of intersectionality (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000, p. 115) contributed to the acknowledgement by the 1990's that women were not an homogenous group and are impacted very differently by forced migration, as informed by intersecting factors like race, class, ethnicity, and religion (Indra, 1999). There was a recognition of the production of

knowledge by migrant women about themselves (Kofman, 1999, p. 269).[15] The 1990's also saw the growth of the feminist movement in the Global North for women's rights to be recognised as human rights (Bunch, 1990), a discussion which extended to the protection of refugee women (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Khanlou and Moussa, 2008, p. 9). Gender and migration work became more interdisciplinary into the 2000's, and some believe a new phase of research is emerging which is more suited to addressing migration in the 21st century, informed by poststructuralist, postcolonial, and queer debates (Amelina and Lutz, 2018, p. 22).

Postcolonial and transnational feminist approaches also contribute to richer insights into the experiences of RASW, particularly as forced migration studies are concerned with transborder movements that are rooted in complex historical and geographical contexts. Postcolonial (Fanon, 1967; wa Thiong'o, 1986; Said, 1978) and decolonial (Mendoza, 2015; Anzaldua, 1987; Lugones, 2010) scholars critically analyse the persistent legacies of colonialism, and challenges dominant frameworks of knowledge production. Spivak's influential essay laid the groundwork for postcolonial feminist critique (Spivak, 1993), and Mohanty critiques western feminist writing as assigning the 'third world woman' to the category of powerless object, erasing the depth of the 'histories and struggles of third world women against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and monopoly capital' (Mohanty, Russo and Torres, 1991, p. 4). Parreñas asserts that women migrate from one patriarchal system to another, and asks how we can pursue feminist migration studies, advocating not only an intersectional approach but a transnational one too (Parreñas, 2009).

Grewal and Kaplan introduced the term 'transnational feminism' to encompass a re-centring of 'third world' feminisms and international solidarity for decolonisation (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994). As processes of globalisation and transnational migration 'are not new phenomena but build upon the terrain carved by older histories of colonialism, race, empire, and nation, feminists see history and contemporary affairs, the local and the global, as necessarily interconnected' (Loomba and Lukose, 2012, p. 14). With a foundation in postcolonial studies and especially 'third world' feminism (Blackwell, 2006), transnational feminism works to move away from the binary of local versus global, to instead focus on the 'lines cutting across them…[as] transnational linkages influence every level of social experience' (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994, p. 13). This calls for an analysis of intersecting power structures as being

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[15] The concept of intersectionality will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, and issues around the production of knowledge will be explored in Chapter 3: Methodology.

created and recreated in the context of European imperialism and colonialism, neoliberal globalisation, etc (Kaplan, Alarcón and Moallem, 1999, p. 14).

Patil takes up what she calls this 'trans-territorial' analysis to address the failure of intersectionality to attend to the cross-border 'constructions of racial and cultural hierarchies' (Patil, 2013, p. 849). Alexander and Mohanty bring attention to the value of this approach in creating space for the experiences of migration; the repression and resistance that existed in the places that migrants left and how they interact with what they find in countries of asylum (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997). Mohanty formulates this as 'feminism without borders' (Mohanty, 2003). As touched on above, some scholars criticise transnationalism as minimising the importance of the nation. However, an analysis that excludes this transborder dimension is 'very inadequate to describe the context in which working-class, impoverished, and racially minoritized people find themselves constrained by national borders and the violence of imperialism and political economic forces' (Briggs, 2015, p. 996). This is an especially useful framework within forced migration studies, particularly to examine the experiences of refugee and asylum seeking women.

At the juncture of gender studies and transnational migration (Amelina and Lutz, 2018, p. 7), intersectionality as a critique of state power in border and forced migration studies is based in Crenshaw's work and the tradition of black feminism (West *et al.*, 1995). It is inseparable from no-borders politics which 'seeks to dismantle the nation-state system and its various practices of bordering and the multiple manifestations of power and domination that it embodies' (Carastathis *et al.*, 2018, p. 9). As Canning has asserted, an intersectional feminist approach is the most valuable framework for gaining insight into the lives of refugee women, as life in asylum sits at the intersection of multiple oppressions (Canning, 2017, p. 39). This project adds a transnational feminist lens to create more space for richer understandings of the experiences of refugee and asylum seeking women in the UK.

This project will take an explicitly feminist approach, informed by intersectionality and transnationalism, to challenge the ideology, systems, and infrastructures that inflict violence on those who are defined as not belonging to the 'fortress nation' (Carastathis *et al.*, 2018, p. 8). In other words, reframe, deconstruct, and contest the reproduction of categories of oppression (such as that of asylum seeking women) as a critique of state power. This approach will enable me to develop the concepts of 'crimmigrants,' 'crimmigration,' and 'immcarceration' more fully as they relate to women in particular by opening up space for the

exploration of the experiences of women through what they say about their lived experiences. I will now provide background to these concepts.

Crime and immigration in the UK

When looking at the history of immigration to the UK as outlined in the previous chapter, what became apparent was the way in which crime and immigration have become linked to impact both citizens and non-citizens. This section will explore the concept of 'crimmigration,' whereby increasingly strict measures have been taken by states like the UK in order to manage and control the movement of people (Bhatia, Poynting and Tufail, 2018; Solomos, 2003). This growing area of research is concerned with the criminalisation of migrants and migration, the merging of crime control and immigration control measures, and the dichotomy between the securitisation of migration and refugee protection (Billings, 2019; Bhatia, 2020; Canning, 2017; Pickering and Ham, 2015; Gerard and Pickering, 2013; Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015; Huysmans, 2006; Bourbeau, 2011). An intersecting set of policies and procedures have developed to link crime and insecurity with (irregular) migration and migrants, manifesting a 'crimmigration' regime (Stumpf, 2006).

While responsible for coining the term, Stumpf was certainly not the first scholar to examine the criminalisation of migration (Garcia Hernandez, 2018), and 'crimmigration' trends have been observed in the US, Australia, and across Europe (Guia, Koulish and Mitsilegas, 2016; Šalamon, 2020; Marmo and Gerard, 2020). In the current era, 'crimmigration' refers to the entanglement of immigration control and criminal justice (Bhatia, 2020; Billings, 2019; Stumpf, 2006; Šalamon, 2020). Migrant criminalisation has been established through stronger border control institutions like Frontex, the increased use of immigration detention and forced removals, more policing of non-citizens, and the use of other criminal enforcement tools (Šalamon, 2020; Billings, 2019; Stumpf, 2006; Bloch and Chimienti, 2011). In Europe certainly, large migration flows are 'mediated through a discourse of insecurity, criminality and criminalisation' (Franko, 2020).

Non-citizens, in particular asylum seekers, are most severely impacted by the growth of 'crimmigration' regimes (Billings, 2019), as crossing borders is treated as an immigration crime and the existing criminal deportation measures for non-citizens have been expanded (Stumpf, 2006). Hernandez notes a number of other trends, namely the uniquely harsh law enforcement measures being adopted (Garcia Hernandez, 2018). Migration is increasingly tackled as a

criminal justice 'problem' (Aas and Bosworth, 2013; Bowling and Westenra, 2018), particularly in the UK. This facilitates the use of crime management practices which function as punishment, creating 'an ever-expanding population of outsiders, making criminals into aliens and aliens into criminals without the protections that citizens enjoy' (Maartje and Patrick van, 2015). There is some discussion of how citizens too are impacted by 'crimmigration,' particularly those of colour, as evidenced by the Windrush scandal.

'Crimmigration' regimes develop out of the belief that migration should be suppressed for the benefit of host countries (Šalamon, 2020). Hernandez contends that 'crimmigration' policies are flourishing due to the reignition of the fear of dangerous non-citizens, as was the case in the 1970's and 1980's (Garcia Hernandez, 2013). The 'suspect community' theory was developed by Hillyard, who discussed the British Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974 as discriminating against Northern Irish communities (Hillyard, 1993). After 9/11, Muslim communities in the UK were reframed as 'terrorists' (Kapoor, Kalra and Rhodes, 2013), and this redefinition of a community as criminal has expanded to include asylum seekers as racialised threats, as potential terrorists, and therefore the most dangerous kind of criminal. Non-white newcomers have been presented as threats to security and therefore undesirable. In other words, crime has become a proxy for race and administering 'crimmigration' policies is racialised (Billings, 2019), certainly in the UK where racism has long shaped immigration policies (Bowling and Westenra, 2018; Bhatia, 2020).

UK immigration policing defines 'suspect' communities along racial lines, and enforcement is undertaken according to what is assumed about individuals' nationality and ethnicity (Bowling and Westenra, 2018; Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009; Hillyard and Liberty (Organization), 1993; Hillyard, 1993). These racist discourses are used to demarcate who to include and exclude based on visible difference, enabling policing within the border, at the border, and beyond the border (ibid.). This political construction of the racialised other is designed to separate the supposedly deserving and the undeserving, and is used to justify extremely punitive measures taken in the name of state security (Kapoor, Kalra and Rhodes, 2013). Policies of 'separation, containment, and exclusion' now proliferate in the Global North (Bowling and Westenra, 2018), and in the UK are built upon a long history of institutionalised racism. 'Crimmigration' is a 'racial project' designed to exclude the racialised other who is perceived as not belonging to the imagined white state (Bhatia, 2020; Provine and Doty, 2011; Johnson, 2015). This is evidenced by the contemporary policy of the hostile environment, which I contend is how the UK's 'crimmigration regime operates.

'Crimmigration' 'fosters the expansion of state power. It is a wellspring for the regulation of crime, migration, security and ethnicity' (Stumpf, 2015). The Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016 (*Immigration Act 2014*; *Immigration Act 2016*) formalised the current era of hostility, with May stating that the goal was 'to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration […] What we don't want is a situation where people think that they can come here and overstay because they're able to access everything they need' (Kirkup and Winnett 2012). May made no attempts to conceal the discriminatory policies that spanned numerous government departments from transport to justice, entrenching immigration checks in every aspect of people's lives. This included limiting access to healthcare, work, housing, restricting the right to appeal, and punitive measures such as dispersal, detention, deportation, and destitution (Liberty, 2019; Yeo, 2018a; Lewis, Waite and Hodkinson, 2017) The militarisation and criminalisation of asylum is being undertaken through internal 'invisible borders' within the UK, via social controls that are harder to define.

The 2014 and 2016 Acts laid the foundations for the modern hostile environment, enacting 'crimmigration' by limiting access to everyday essentials and preventing access to public services in the hope of reducing net migration and punishing 'irregular' migrants by marginalising, isolating, and criminalising them (Yeo, 2018a). The UK's 'crimmigration' regime has evolved since the 1970's, and connects to regional and global systems of policing, punishment, and exclusion (Bowling and Westenra, 2020). To illegally enter the UK or breach visa conditions by overstaying were already criminalised under the 1971 Immigration Act; the hostile environment's legislative and administrative measures went further in also criminalising private citizens and public servants who failed to act as pseudo immigration enforcement agents (Yeo, 2018a). This is a unique aspect of the modern hostile environment, utilising untrained private individuals as enforcement officials, ranging from doctors, landlords, and employers to staff at banks and the DVLA. The complexity of immigration law ensures that many are 'administered into illegality,' also faced with increasingly high fees and little access to legal remedies against Home Office mistakes (Yeo, 2018b).

The goals of the hostile environment are to deter (certain) people from coming to the UK, prevent overstayers, and stop 'irregular' migrants from accessing the essentials of everyday life. There is little evidence that the hostile environment is meeting its aims, and the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration pointed out that 'there was no evidence that any work had been done or was planned in relation to measuring the deterrent effect of the 'hostile environment' on would-be illegal migrants' (Bolt, 2016). In fact, the regime has 'not increased voluntary departures, may have cost more than it has saved and in doing

so has made the lives of some people miserable' (Yeo, 2018a). Both citizens and non-citizens have been adversely impacted by 'crimmigration' measures, including lawful citizens who do not possess immigration documents like the Windrush generation.

'Crimmigration' helps us to understand the life experiences of RASW as it provides a framework for the systematic redefinition of RASW as criminals through racist and sexist institutions which subject them to punitive, dehumanising crime control measures. Deliberate policy and practice produce and reproduce structural violence that disproportionately impacts those who live at numerous intersections of oppression, such as RASW. This violence (which includes the denial of access to human rights) is maintained by placing ASW in the category of 'crimmigrant.'

The 'crimmigrant other' and 'immcarceration'

As 'the racialised social construction of illegality' (Bowling and Westenra, 2018), 'crimmigration' controls are enacted in particular upon non-citizens of colour: the 'crimmigrant other.' Franko conceives of the figure of the 'crimmigrant' 'as a central object of media and political discourse and state intervention,' who is perpetually being produced and reproduced through complex othering processes (Franko, 2020, p. 3). The 'crimmigrant' is defined by being unwanted, 'bogus,' infused with illegality, and undeserving of protection, rather than as a refugee, supporting the state's avoidance of international obligations. Franko touches on the intersections of citizenship, class, race, gender, religion, and cultural belonging at which the 'crimmigrant' other lives (Franko, 2020, p. 82). She also acknowledges the deep historical roots of immigrant criminality, the legacies of colonialism and their influence on race, and how they shape citizenship regimes today. Particularly, 'the 'colonial other' – othered by race, religion and tradition – remains also in the post-colonial order more closely scrutinized at international borders than his/her Western counterpart' (Basaran and Guild, 2017).

Bhatia critiques the lack of scholarship on the violence produced by the 'crimmigration' regime, and its impact on those it is imposed upon (Bhatia, 2020). Migrants in the UK are subjected to a punitive penal framework, designed to regulate and govern migration through disciplinary interventions (Aas and Bosworth, 2013; Stumpf, 2013). Prosecution and imprisonment for supposed crimes committed by this 'dangerous' group (Bhatia, Poynting and Tufail, 2018) are pursued rather than addressing their needs for protection under the 1951 Convention. In fact, criminal law is being utilised to punish violations of immigration rules (Bhatia, 2020) through

incarceration and the denial of access to basic rights like healthcare, which causes significant social harms (Hillyard and Tombs, 2007). Pemberton explores social harms caused by state bodies, corporations, and the organisation of society itself (Pemberton, 2016, p. 8). Imperialism, racism, sexism, and poverty are some of the structural causes of harm (Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 2014, p. 52).

Social harm is continually produced through 'the relations, processes, flows, practices, discourse, actions and inactions that constitute the fabric of our societies, which serve to compromise the fulfilment of human needs' (Pemberton, 2016, p. 24). This would certainly apply to the asylum system, which Canning contends is responsible for facilitating structural violence through deliberate legislation and policy making (Canning, 2017). This project will contribute to the existing literature on 'crimmigration' by exploring the gendered violence of the 'crimmigration' regime in the UK, and to the study of 'crimmigrants' by focusing on the experiences of women who live at numerous intersections and how they are impacted.

Refugee and asylum seeking women are excluded from having their protection needs met at a global, intergovernmental, regional, and national level, while simultaneously being disproportionately exposed to violence and abuses of their human rights. This thesis addresses a gap in the literature by utilising the concept of the 'crimmigrant' to explore the deliberate and structural redefinition of RASW as deserving of punitive measures to extremes that convicted criminals are not subjected to. British nationals in prison are guaranteed housing, healthcare, and food among other things once they have been convicted. Yet those represented as having committed immigration crimes are subjected to punitive measures far beyond those of the criminal justice system, based upon 'new forms of racism' (Bhatia, 2020, p.38). Being assigned the category of 'crimmigrant' exposes RASW to greater levels of racist and sexist violence.

This redefinition of asylum seeking women as a 'crimmigrants' is not a recent enactment of state violence, but merely the latest iteration of an historically racist and misogynist immigration system that excludes those who are deemed as unwanted by the state as marked by whiteness. These processes have developed through a history of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, and now operate in the context of increasing global migration and the accompanying punitive measures taken to 'manage' the movement of people. While the Coalition government may have only explicitly claimed the hostile environment as a policy goal in 2012, it has in fact existed in varying degrees and guises for as long as the UK has legislated immigration. The state and its definitions of citizenship have long been exclusive and

exclusionary. Hostility towards outsiders has always existed in the UK (Panayi 2010), as has the continual redefinition of who those outsiders are (namely people of colour), and why they do not belong (the criminality that has been assigned to them).

The state legitimates violence against women both directly and indirectly, 'in order to create, justify, excuse, explain or enforce hierarchies of difference and relations of inequality' (Crawley, 2000, p. 99). Their bodies become 'sites of enforcement' for immigration law through pre-entry controls, border checks, in-country enforcement, and generalised surveillance (Weber and Bowling, 2004). Punitive in-country measures like detention and deportation subject asylum seeking women to 'immcarceration' (Kalhan, 2010), intended to discipline undesirable bodies (Griffiths, 2015; Nethery and Silverman, 2015). The limited literature on 'immcarceration' discusses it only in terms of immigrants who are incarcerated in detention centres (Billings, 2019; Gottschalk, 2016; Kalhan, 2010), and does not extend the discussion to carceral spaces beyond the prison (Wacquant, 2005; Cassidy, 2019).

The literature fails to consider the everyday bordering practices (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2018) which utilise alternative sites as carceral spaces, making the daily lives of asylum seeking women an experience of 'immcarceration.' In this thesis I will expand understandings of 'crimmigration' and 'crimmigrants' by looking at the ways in which RASW are subjected to everyday 'immcarceralities,' on various scales, while living at the intersections of gender, race, nationality, and language. This intersectional approach offers richer insight into how RASW are impacted by the racism and sexism of the 'crimmigration' regime.

Women who have been labelled as 'crimmigrant' are subjected to violence and death beyond the border, while in transit (Gerard and Pickering, 2013; Kofman, 2019; Squire, 2020); at the border, including body searches ports of arrival (Smith and Marmo, 2014); and within the borders, through dispersal policies (Bloch and Solomos, 2010; Stewart, 2012), reporting (Fisher, Burridge and Gill, 2019), and surveillance (Franko, 2020) practices, which also act as forms of 'immcarcerality.' The regulation of 'crimmigrant' bodies of colour becomes more expansive once they are permitted to remain in the UK pending their asylum application, with increasingly insidious restrictions placed on the spaces these bodies are permitted to enter and occupy. In the process of seeking asylum, ASW are exposed to everyday carceralities at the hands of non-state actors. Carceral spaces are not only located in prisons (Wacquant, 2005) but on a continuum with other social and geographical spaces (Cassidy, 2019). The mobility of ASW is disciplined in terms of the homes and localities they occupy, their use of

public services, and their access to everyday essentials. They are pushed to exist in non-spaces as a kind of everyday 'immcarcerality.'

Asylum seekers have been constructed as 'not quite human enough to deserve full access to human rights' (Mayblin, 2017, p. 3). The 'crimmigration' regime bolsters this denial of access to basic rights by positioning gendered and racialised asylum seekers at the extremes of criminality, which is used to negate their human-ness. The 'crimmigration' regime as enacted through the hostile environment so thoroughly dehumanises asylum seekers that aside from the challenges to accessing their right to asylum, they are struggling to access their basic universal rights to adequate housing, healthcare, food, and freedom from degrading treatment.

There is however little research that considers 'crimmigration law as very discretionary and arbitrary type of law: namely, migrants are treated worse than criminals even when they are innocent' (Šalamon, 2020). This is enabled by the racist and sexist institutions which govern the immigration and criminal justice systems. The characterisation of asylum seekers as threatening criminals enables the very humanity of this group of people to be 'questioned or concealed' in service of normalising exclusionary practices (Vecchio and Gerard, 2017). Neglecting the various forms of agency that RASW engage in is another way of denying humanity, which this thesis will avoid. The next section will conceptualise the ways in which RASW respond to their experiences of racism and sexism, demonstrating that they are neither passive victims nor only exercising agency when committing immigration crimes as the 'crimmigration' regime suggests.

Responding to experiences of the 'crimmigration' regime

As touched on at the start of the chapter, the agency of refugees is too often denied, silenced, or weaponised against them (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Malkki, 1996; Marfleet, 2007). The redefinition of refugee and asylum seeking women has included constructing them as apolitical victims (Johnson, 2011; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2009; Crawley, 2021), passive and without agency (Vecchio and Gerard, 2017; Malkki, 1996; Johnson, 2011). RASW are in fact deliberately unheard (Roy, 2004), and their voices suppressed throughout the processes and practices of the asylum system. This silencing extends to the ways in which they respond to 'crimmigration,' which is why it is an aim of this research to create space to discuss the agency of research participants. The feminist framework employed in this study (Spivak, 1993;

Mohanty, 1988) prioritises the voices and stories RASW chose to share about how they responded to and challenged their redefinition, criminalisation, and dehumanisation.

The conception of 'crimmigrant' assigns a limited amount of agency to asylum seekers, as they are constructed as having chosen to commit crimes of immigration, thus being redefined as dangerous criminals (Franko, 2020). They are accused of engaging in 'asylum shopping,' a supposed form of agency that is used as a sign of their criminality and as another tool of exclusion (Moore, 2013). Beyond this selective agency, the state ensures that ASW have limited space within which to enact their agency. Although the existence and exercise of their agency is impacted by the social, legal, and economic marginalisation they are subjected to (Vecchio and Gerard, 2017), RASW are not passive recipients of state power and violence. Asylum seeking women respond to, and challenge, their experiences of institutional racism and sexism. Scholarship on resistance has grown in feminist, postcolonial, anti-racist, and queer studies, among others, acknowledging the impact of geographical, historical, and socio-cultural context. The concept of resistance is central to the postcolonial project (Fanon, 1967; Brah and Phoenix, 2004), concerned with the subversion of colonial power and opposition against the coloniser.

The concept of resistance has also proliferated in sociology over the last few decades, with some identifying its two core elements as action and opposition (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004; Hynes, 2013). The power and immunity of the state in committing structural violence is matched by a history of resistance 'from below,' not only against gross violations such as genocide but also pervasive, everyday state perpetrated violence (Stanley and McCulloch, 2013). There is a body of literature which explores refugee political protest, activism, and resistance, targeting the state and challenging border regimes (Crawley, 2000; Bhimji, 2020; Chimienti and Solomos, 2011; Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl, 2016).

Refugee mobilisation demonstrates agency through protests, marches, hunger strikes, anti-deportation actions, and acts of solidarity (Bhimji, 2020). It is noted that for asylum seekers, resistance can come with a price and place them at risk of further criminalisation (Vecchio and Gerard, 2017). Survival strategies, like taking informal employment when living under such harsh limitations, can support the state's desire to deny the rights of certain groups, as this will be cited as evidence of criminality (Johansen, 2013; Coutin, 2010). Bhimji asserts that there is a lack of discussion about the anti-racist, feminist, intersectional, and decolonial aspects of refugee resistance, pertinent considering that asylum systems are built upon colonial categories of racialisation (Bhimji, 2020).

Resistance to oppression is not necessarily a public, direct challenge to state violence. Scott's well-known work focuses on 'everyday resistance,' consisting of informal and non-organised forms of resistance (Scott, 1985). Concepts of resistance based on Scott's 'weapons of the weak' seek to understand the 'less than revolutionary acts' of subalterns striving to undo their subordination (Chandra, 2015, p. 568). There is a tendency in sociological literature to position everyday resistance as small and less significant (Kamete, 2010; Shih and Pyke, 2010), and therefore less effective at disrupting structural categories of oppression such as gender. Micro-sociological analyses 'take seriously the smaller scale dynamics of power and resistance as they play out amongst individuals in the context of everyday life,' while macropolitical analyses focus on 'highly visible, collective struggles against structures of power' (Hynes, 2013).

Hynes proposes expanding the view of resistance beyond this dichotomy so that 'less readily perceivable forms of power and the potentials for resistance associated with them' can be detected (Hynes, 2013). While macropolitical resistance is often recognised as oppositional, less visible or recognisable resistance can also generate political potential, particularly when the forces that mobilise action are taken into consideration (Hynes, 2013). Struggles against structural oppression can look like working to dismantle harmful state power, but also like claiming personal agency and finding belonging. This study will consider how challenges to institutional racism and sexism by those who live at numerous intersections exist on a scale, from individual actions like taking rest to collective action like campaigning. Re-asserting the right to define themselves in a way that is not centred on their immigration status is another type of response that asserts RASW's challenge to their dehumanisation.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined current research on the criminalisation of asylum in the UK and highlighted the need for further work on the gender aspects of this criminalisation, as well as a lack of intersectional feminist analyses. Having identified a gap in the existing literature, this project will contribute to understandings of 'crimmigration' and 'immcarceration' experienced by refugee and asylum seeking women through the use of an intersectional feminist framework, informed by postcolonial and transnational approaches. This will enable a more careful exploration of the complex factors which produce and perpetrate violence upon refugee and asylum seeking women. Transnational feminism is particularly illuminating and pertinent in refugee studies as it looks beyond local and global as fixed and separate categories, instead

acknowledging how they interact, as well as the role of geography and history in the creation and maintenance of oppressive systems which inflict violence that disproportionately impacts women. The contribution this project makes is to go beyond the existing literature and expose how extreme the abject treatment of asylum seeking women in the UK is. It further challenges the exclusion of refugee and asylum seeking women's voices and denial of their agency by exploring the ways in which they respond to their experiences of 'crimmigration.'

Chapter 3. Methodologies:

'*They don't listen to my story*' (Dellina)[16]

Introduction

This chapter will discuss how I went about undertaking this study. I will start by outlining the feminist ontology, epistemology, and methodology that informed the project, the desire to avoid epistemic oppression, and my reflexive practice. I then turn to the methods that I employed to collect data, namely feminist participatory methods which shaped my choice of research site, the interview guide, and the development of research themes. This includes a discussion about the Meana Centre and the Baobab Women's project, the primary research sites. I will describe how I went about the transcription of data, coding, and thematic content analysis. Finally, there is a discussion about voice and power, which were central concerns in undertaking this research. I conclude the chapter by speaking about my focus on developing reciprocity as a feminist practice in carrying out this study.

Feminist ontology, epistemology, and methodology

> Women's experiences constitute a different view of reality, an entirely different 'ontology' or way of going about making sense of the world... a previously untapped store of knowledge about what it is to be a woman, what the social world looks like to women, how it is constructed and negotiated by women (Stanley and Wise, 1993, p. 119).

As the researcher's view of reality, the constructivist feminist ontology that informs this research is based on the recognition that knowledge is created by human social experience which is historically, culturally, and contextually specific (Stanley and Wise, 1993). This

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[16] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution. Her claim had been refused. She spoke about being in extremely poor health as a result of the severe abuse she suffered. Dellina spoke about becoming very reclusive in the UK, hoping for a 'normal' life but incredibly fearful that would not be possible for her. She was the warmest host and shared cake with me.

research works from the basis that social reality is continuously constructed and reconstructed through gendered and racialised power relations, as opposed to being a universally knowable truth. A constructivist feminist ontology considers how these social realities have come to be and how they are understood, which is especially fitting as this research is concerned with the realities of seeking asylum in the UK for women who live at numerous intersections including race and gender. This forms the foundation of the feminist standpoint epistemological approach taken in this project, as it acknowledges that multiple feminist standpoints exist as informed by race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other axes of differentiation (Harding, 2004). RASW live at many of these intersections, and yet they are often homogenised.

Feminist theories are diverse, but at a basic level concerned with the structures and ideologies that oppress women (Hesse-Biber, 2012), and challenging gender inequality (Aronson, 2017). Historically, dominant canons of knowledge like sociology have misrepresented and excluded women (Westmarland and Bows, 2019), having been concerned with 'the activities and interests of men' (Oakley, 1974). Feminist research is a 'commitment to giving a voice to the marginalised,' prioritising women as the sources of knowledge about their lived experiences, and aiming to produce knowledge that will be of benefit to women's lives (Westmarland and Bows, 2019, p. 11). It is an approach that is suited to the aims of this project, creating space for the multiple voices of RASW who are the experts on their own lives but rarely involved in discussions about them.

The growth of academic feminist research in the late 1970's and early 1980's in the UK centred the 'woman' as white, middle class, heterosexual, able bodied, and young (Stanley and Wise, 1993). Scholars have since critiqued this essentialist formulation of women as an homogenous group (Narayan, 2004). Most now agree that women 'occupy many different standpoints and inhabit many different realities' (Hekman, 2004, p. 227), calling for greater recognition of difference, diversity, and conflict in women's unique experiences as rich ground for knowledge production (Brooks, 2007, p. 71). Knowledge and truth are 'partial, situated, subjective, power imbued, and relational' (Hesse-Biber, 2012). There is therefore no singular universal truth about the lived experiences of RASW.

Feminist epistemology is about 'the ways gender influences what we take to be knowledge' (Anderson, 1995, p. 50), and contests 'privileged ways of knowing' (ibid., p. 81). Brooks expands that feminist standpoint epistemology 'challenges us to (1) see and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women and (2) apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change' (Brooks, 2007, p. 55),

by placing 'women at the centre of the research process' (ibid., p. 56). This not only provides a lens into women's experiences of oppression, but also a 'base from which to change it' (Brooks, 2007, p. 63). Feminist research then not only works to expose women's oppressions, but to challenge them (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994). In demanding the synthesis of knowledge and practice, feminist standpoint epistemology is also a call to political action (Brooks, 2007, p. 55). This research takes a largely postpositivist approach, and one of its aims is to challenge and effect change on the oppressions faced by RASW.

Epistemic oppression

While feminist epistemologies work to challenge the suppression of women's knowledges while privileging those of men, there are other social forces which oppress knowledge production. Feminists of colour critiqued the failure of second wave feminist research to examine the interconnections between categories of difference such as gender, class, and ethnicity (Mohanty, 1988; Hooks, 1990). To recognise 'epistemological diversity' is to understand that all knowledge is situated, as the production of knowledge is a social practice (Santos, 2014). Both postcolonial and Global South feminist discourses have questioned the exclusion of marginalised subjects from processes of 'valid' knowledge production, what Santos calls their 'subalternization' which amounts to 'epistemicide' (ibid., p. xliv).

In the colonial dichotomy, the South is underdeveloped/ ignorant/ learner/ actor, while the North is developed/ knowledgeable/teacher/ thinker (ibid., p. xxxviii). The racist mechanisms of colonialism operated by destroying or reducing local knowledges to being irrelevant or inferior (ibid.). The subjugation of the identities of colonised peoples and the knowledges they produced in effect erased voices of those who live at the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. The anti-racist feminist framework employed in this project is one way in which to address this erasure of those like RASW, who live at these intersections.

Appadurai describes the 'right to research' as a capacity which is unevenly distributed (2006, p. 176). In other words, the capacity to create new knowledges remains within the confines of usually male dominated academia and other white knowledge-based institutions in the Global North. Their methodologies repeat the racist colonisation of knowledge production by excluding not only women but people of colour, and particularly women of colour from the Global South who have been represented as 'oppressed.' The postcolonial standpoint is

explicitly non-Western, non-male, and/or nonhegemonic, and suggests that epistemology and methodology have the potential to reinvent research practices that disrupt colonial continuities.

Duran draws attention to 'the intersection of postcolonial concerns and concerns about women's knowing' in what she terms global feminist epistemology (Duran, 2001, p. 9). She encourages a move beyond white Eurocentric feminist theorising in so-called developed countries, to understand 'the role that knowledge, knowers, and knowledge gathering' plays in local cultural traditions around the world (ibid., p. 17). A feminist anti-racist epistemological framework critically engages with forms of racialised power and its legacies (Mohanty, 2003), as experienced by RASW.

Collins agrees that credible knowledge claims about women must be based in the concrete experiences of women (Collins, 2000, p. 285), and that an intersectional, situational, and standpoint epistemology can challenge epistemic oppression by centering subjugated knowledges. She asserts that 'the knowledge gained at intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender' can oppose oppression, which the dominant systems work to suppress (Collins, 2000, p. 8). Collins' 'matrix of domination' conceptualises difference through the socially constructed and interrelated inequalities of race, gender, and class (Collins, 2000). She posits black feminist epistemology as having four key aspects: basing knowledge in lived experience, assessing knowledge in dialogue with the community, having inclusion criteria for the members of that community, and assessing the adequacy of those making claims to knowledge (Collins, 2000).

There is a distinction made between those who possess knowledge and those who produce knowledge (Dotson, 2015), which raises questions about this doctoral research that will be discussed below. This project takes an intersectional and participatory approach based on Collins' criteria, in order to make sense of the experiences of RASW living at numerous intersecting oppressions. This particularly important as they are often excluded from knowledge production due to not only gender or race, but both and numerous other intersections that are used to invalidate the knowledge the possess and produce.

Methodology

A feminist methodology connects the epistemology to the methods. This research employs interpretivist methodologies, interpreting data to examine gender and race as socially

constructed and unequal power relations. Self-reflexivity is key, and I have attempted to remain aware of and explicit about my role in gathering knowledge, the interpretation of data, power imbalances in the research relationship, and my biases in coding. Westmarland and Bows (2019) stress the importance of flexibility with research methods in order to adapt to the population participating in research. This includes careful consideration for the questions asked of participants and how they are framed (Beckman, 2014, p. 167), a willingness to use mixed methods in response to complex social contexts (ibid., p. 168), and critical self-reflection on the part of the researcher.

A strong reflexive practice enables a feminist researcher to 'recognize what she or he brings to the research and how participants may interpret what the researcher brings' (ibid., p. 169), including privilege, power imbalances, and ethical issues (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2012). This practice was central to my methodology. In addition to institutional requirements for consideration of ethical concerns, feminist researchers are particularly wary of the potential for exploitation. I asked myself who would benefit from the research, and how to challenge the traditional participant-researcher interaction which can position the participant as passive subject, as opposed to active co-creators of knowledge (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2012). To include participants as collaborators could contribute to feelings of empowerment (Beckman, 2014, p. 170), a core aim of feminist research (Beckman, 2014, p. 170). Activism and advocacy are at the centre of feminist methodology (ibid.), putting research into practice in order to facilitate real world change in women's lives, which I hoped to achieve.

Hesse-Biber contends that exposing subjugated knowledges by researching women and other oppressed groups is the principal drive of feminist research (Hesse-Biber, 2012), which is best served by qualitative research. For this research qualitative methodologies were the only form of inquiry considered to adequately address my aims and objectives, as surveys and questionnaires would not have been likely to provide rich enough data on the subjective experiences of RASW. The use of qualitative inquiry has been strengthened by feminist research in countless fields, allowing space for the voices of women and the discussion of sensitive topics (Oakley, 1981; Harding, 1987; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002), such as sexual violence and torture.

Methods

Research methods are the techniques by which information is gathered, as informed by my constructivist ontology, feminist standpoint epistemology, and interpretivist methodology. Qualitative methods common to feminist inquiry are interviewing, ethnography, observation, and discourse analysis. Participatory methods are one way in which feminist researchers seek to connect with women's struggles on the ground rather than remaining 'safely within academic institutions and texts' (Enslin, 1994).

Feminist participatory action research

Participatory research asks scholars to engage in community-based, participatory methodologies that include community members in the research process (Sullivan-Catlin, 2004; Koch and Kralik, 2006; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). Some believe that research should be fully collaborative with participants in order to empower women and improve their lives (Gorelick, 1991), while others argue that reflexivity, reciprocity, and 'giving back' to the community are more significant (Jacobs, 2004). Participatory action research (PAR) is characterised by researchers working with oppressed communities, by working towards transformative social change with the community, and by its collaborative process (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). This approach was well suited to my research aims, as PAR aims at 'empowering the powerless, exposing the inequalities of the status quo, and promoting social changes' (Cancian, 1996, p. 187), with an emphasis on political action and community control over research. PAR also offers space for the consideration of exploitation in research, and reciprocity as a potential remedy as favoured by feminist research.

Researchers who work at the intersection of feminism, participation, and activism 'embrace a continuous and iterative process' which aims to 'foreground women who live at the intersections of oppressions and social inequalities' like gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and language (Lykes and Hershberg, 2014). As such there is a recognition of women's multiple ways of knowing, the silent or silenced voices, and 'it presses to develop "just enough" trust among coresearchers to initiate shared action-reflection processes' (ibid.). PAR is concerned with the processes as well as the outcomes of the research process, where there is collaboration between those affected by an issue (participants or insiders) and others with formal knowledge (researchers or outsiders) in order to facilitate knowledge construction, collaborative learning, and transformative action (Lykes and Hershberg, 2014). Feminist PAR

aspires to foster knowledge situated at multiple intersections, and support actions for change, matching the epistemology of this project.

I was not able to pursue PAR to the extent that I had hoped. Throughout the numerous evolutions and (re)construction of research questions, my focus on prioritising the experiences of RASW remained constant, as did my aim to co-create knowledge with RASW. The narrowing of this focus to the hostile environment and the redefinition, control, and dehumanisation of RASW developed out of multiple consultations with participants. The formulation of the research questions, methods for gathering data, and the one-to-one conversation guide were collaboratively created with the RASW community and focused on what they stated was important to them so there was a cohesion between my research and the reciprocity I engaged in. However, due to numerous factors I was not able to follow through co-researching with RASW into the coding, analysis, and write up stages.

The closure of the Meena Centre was a significant obstacle as it removed a safe, central location where I would meet with RASW weekly. Without this physical space which offered RASW opportunities to advocate, socialise, learn, and rest, I was left with few options. Attempting to find another suitably safe space was difficult and costly, a common issue for many support groups working the Midlands. I was also concerned that I would be asking participants to dedicate time and energy to sessions that would solely be focused on this project, rather than the usual once weekly visit to the Meena Centre which many women relied on for the numerous benefits it provided, including a refund of their travel costs. This raised concerns about reciprocity for me.

While many participants spoke about being eager to contribute to research with the aim of creating change, I was acutely aware that their availability (physically, emotionally, and intellectually) was severely impacted by the challenges they faced at various points in their asylum claim. Their priorities were understandably, survival. Additionally, the nature of the asylum system means that some ASW participants were dispersed out of Birmingham at short notice, went in to hiding after their claim was refused, or became understandably overwhelmed with the practicalities of being granted leave to remain.

After transcription and coding, I was able to contact 14 RASW participants who were still in the West Midlands. Six responded that they were willing to discuss my initial findings through online meetings. The logistics of arranging this were quite difficult, and ultimately two RASW joined one conversation about detailed data chapter plans I had sent to them. My ambition to

shift from 'my project' to 'our project' (Lykes and Hershberg, 2014) was not fully realised into the final stages. I had wanted to undertake a lot more consultation with the community as the 'knowers,' to co-create knowledge about their lives 'in dialogue' (Collins, 2000) as I wrote up the thesis. The knowledge contained in this project has inevitably been impacted by my position, filtered through my experiences and knowledge. I was acutely aware of staying grounded in the words of participants in order to create space for their voices in telling the stories of their experiences. In consultation with two RASW research participants I was also able to create a space for participants to voice their reflections on what I was saying and how I had interpreted the data.

Data Collection: one-to-one conversations & observations

Interviews and focus groups 'have often been favoured by feminist researchers as a method that allows for the reduction of hierarchical power relations' (Westmarland and Bows, 2019, p. 13). Campbell agrees that these methods offer the 'potential for personal connection between the researcher and the research participant, which can contribute to a setting of open disclosure and dialogue' (Campbell, 2002, p. 119). This research utilises interview research to produce knowledge out of encounters that centre 'telling about experience,' traditionally linked to social justice work and bringing forward neglected voices (DeVault and Gross, 2014). I favoured open-ended, semi-structured interviews, with an awareness that accounts of experience are constructed relationally and linguistically, shaped by both the telling and the listening (DeVault and Gross, 2014). I approached the participant as the experiential expert, and myself as aiming to enable them to express their experiences (Eatough and Smith, 2017).

I wanted to approach 'interviews' as more like a conversation, and I avoided using the word 'interview.' This was primarily to avoid causing anxiety to RASW who immediately associated the word with the Home Office, hostility, and punishment. The word also implies distinct power dynamics in terms of who is positioned as the interviewer and the interviewee. I therefore invited participation in one-on-one conversations, to enable participants more space to define what they considered as important. This was while maintaining a reflexive awareness that identities and power relations would play a role in all dialogue, and any data would be an interactional product. During each 'conversation with a purpose' (Mason, 2018), I employed active listening, theorised by antiracist feminists as having transformative potential (Lorde, 1984). This involved fully engaging with and actively processing what was heard. I paid

attention to both what I was being told, and how it was being told, for example silences, hesitation, signs of discomfort, and gestures.

The research design enabled a flexible approach. Although taking a loose structure, the one-to-one conversation guide was carefully drawn up and revised in collaboration with the core group of Baobab community advocates and interpreters (see Appendix 5 for one-to-one conversation guide). The basic structure meant that I had room to adapt and fit the conversation to the participant's responses regarding what they wanted to prioritise and what they did not wish to discuss. I intentionally asked open questions to encourage participants to direct the conversation, and I was open to unexpected topics introduced by participants.

When the opportunity arose, I employed sensitivity and empathy in probing participants on their meaning making. For example, if they were speaking about the unfair decision to hold them in detention, I asked them why they believed immigration detention was used in the UK. As a number of potential topics were very sensitive (e.g. sexual violence, torture, destitution, homelessness), I did not directly ask about these experiences unless the participant directed the conversation there. The one-to-one conversation guide for allies who were not RASW differed, was slightly more structure, and focused on their work with the RASW community in the West Midlands (see Appendix 6 for guide).

I opened conversations by outlining the research project and talking participants through the consent form and demographic information. Once the paperwork was completed, I asked if participants had any questions and reminded them that they were free to end the conversation at any point, or decline any topics of conversation they did not wish to engage in. I found one-to-one conversations to flow well, and to be rich informative experiences. I refrained from making any notes during the conversation so that I was fully present with the participant. I made notes in an anonymised notebook immediately after each conversation, reflecting my impressions, key themes that struck me, my internal reactions to things the participant had said, and any adjustments I thought I could make for future meetings. I also used this notebook to make my observations after each volunteering session for Baobab, events at Meena, and events I attended for refugee rights organisations across the West Midlands over the year.

All one-to-one conversations were recorded on a digital recorded placed in plain view. Over half of RASW were uncomfortable about this, again concerned that the information could be utilised against them and prejudice their asylum claim. I spoke with participants about how I would anonymise and safeguard this information and offered to transcribe and delete the voice

recording within 7 days if they wished. Half of RASW requested that I do this and were happy to proceed. With a concern for re-traumatisation, I messaged each participant 24 hours later to thank them and check if they had any questions or feedback. This was a debriefing of sorts, and I offered to call those who wished to discuss anything. I did this with three women, and they requested their recordings be deleted. I called them to confirm that would be done and talk them through the procedures I had in place to safeguard their identity.

Research site and participants

In an effort to make my research more reciprocal, I focused on first developing a relationship with organisations who worked with RASW, whether through advocacy, campaigning, legal support, or wellbeing services. I contacted 120 organisations across the UK via email in 2018, with an introduction to the project, and skills that I could offer to the organisation as a volunteer. They ranged from large national NGO's to small community groups. I attached a participant information sheet, consent form, and poster. As I had anticipated, very few responded, and of those who did, the majority were concerned about researchers 'taking' from their service users. I simultaneously began attending events organised by organisations in the West Midlands, including The Meena Centre, End Deportations Birmingham,[17] and Restore.[18] Events ranged from the launch of a volume of poetry written by RASW, and training for a refugee befriending scheme, to fundraising events, campaigning events, and skills sharing workshops.

I contributed to sessions I attended, as well as observing and taking notes. I spoke with organisers and attendees about my previous work with refugee rights organisations, my research, and my commitment to contributing to the refugee rights community in the region. It became clear that focusing on organisations in the West Midlands was the most effective way to build a relationship, as I could be physically present to make a contribution to the organisation. Ultimately all research participants were connected to the Meena Centre, as service users, through partner organisations, and some RASW who had been dispersed out of Birmingham to Coventry. My focus was primarily on those with experience of living through the asylum system in Birmingham, and organisations who worked with RASW in Birmingham.

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[17] End Deportations Birmingham was a collective set up to challenge mass deportations by charter flight.
[18] Restore was a project of Birmingham Churches Together, aiming to support refugee and asylum seeker integration through befriending and mentoring.

Meena was formed in 2015 as a grassroots initiative to support women and unaccompanied children in the Calais refugee camp in northern France, providing basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. They campaigned alongside Lord Alfred Dubs and Help Refugees for the passing of the Dubs Amendment in May 2016, to enable a number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children without family links to be relocated to the UK; and identified and registered the first children in Calais eligible for the Dublin III transfers to the UK through Citizen UK's Safe Passage legal programme. Following the demolition of the camp, the Meena Centre was set-up in Birmingham to provide ongoing support to our friends from Calais who had "made it" to the UK and other refugee and asylum- seeking women, children, and young people in the West Midlands as they attempt to navigate the complex and hostile asylum system in the UK.

I chose the Meena Centre as my primary research site, and the Baobab Women's Project in particular, where I volunteered weekly for ten months. Both groups focused on working with women, utilising feminist ways of working, and agreed to develop a reciprocal relationship. This was also a practical choice as I was easily able to travel to the Meena Centre. There was a synthesis between my research aims, design, and methods, and their feminist ways of working which created confidence that we could support each other's work. Discussions with Shay (Baobab co-ordinator)[19], and later with Laura (Meena Centre manager),[20] revealed that we shared common goals of supporting RASW by working alongside them, and being led by their needs. Identifying myself as a feminist researcher with previous experience of working with RASW was advantageous in building a relationship with Meena and Baobab. The project and the centre were well-established and well-known spaces to RAS women in the local community. As gatekeepers, Shay and Laura supported my presence and research activities. They were reassured by my concern for minimising re-traumatisation and my commitment to contributing to the community.

I attended an event held at the Meena Centre in September in September 2018, the launch of a poetry collection, with live music, readings, and artwork by refugees and asylum seekers aiming to provide 'some perception about the experience of being a refugee from a country ripped apart by war, who are forced to flee, and give up everything for liberty' (Laura). The Meena Centre was formed in 2015, as a grassroots initiative which aimed to support women

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[19] Community ally research participant Shay co-ordinated the Baobab Women's Project, from securing funding, to recruiting and training community advocates. She regularly shared her home with RASW who had been made homeless.

[20] Community ally research participant Laura was a founder of Meena in Calais and secured funds for the project to continue in Birmingham. She fostered unaccompanied children who were seeking asylum. A constant presence at Meena, centre users referred to her as 'Mama.'

and unaccompanied children in the Calais refugee camp, 'the Jungle.' After the camp was demolished, the Meena Centre was set up in Birmingham in 2016 as a community interest company (CIC) to continue supporting RASW, children, and young people who had arrived in the UK. The Centre's primary objectives were to provide a safe space in the West Midlands, and act as a community hub and central access point for support services.

I met Shay at the poetry event, the co-ordinator for the Baobab Women's Project, who recognised me from other events and invited me to forward my CV to her for consideration as a volunteer. The following week I began volunteering every Monday as an advocate for the Baobab drop-in sessions, which I continued to do for 10 months (September 2018 – June 2019). Six of these months were spent on the Meena Centre premises, a largely women-only space. Housed in a former bank at the edge of the city centre, the building was in need of repair, and was ultimately forced to close down in early 2019 after repeated theft of the roof and subsequent rain damage made it unsuitable for use. This caused a lot of distress to attendees who spoke about their reliance on the Meena Centre and its activities as the only 'safe' space they were able to access.

The Meena Centre was set up after community consultations concluded that funding would be most valuable by providing 'a good, safe space' for existing projects across the region. Manager Laura explained the 'mission to support women' in a meaningful way: 'it's quite serious, women are isolated in accommodation, they are trapped in these tiny rooms, with no money, nowhere to socialise or network, get peer support, with a toddler that is climbing the walls because you haven't got any money to go out and do stuff.' The Centre's priority was 'providing a welcoming, dignified, friendly space where we can support women socially, psychologically, and emotionally' and to 'work as a collective' by 'supporting expert groups' who do not have funding for premises to operate from.

> Here in this group, it's good, but not outside. I'm not myself but thank God for the charities, all the activities, we meet people, it's what helping us. It's good for our health. I feel at home with the charity groups that I have, so I feel like I have a new family now. When I'm there I feel like 'oh this is home' and I see other people. The groups and the charities and the church make you feel hope. Outside, there is racism, and they're doing it and covering it, but it out there (Esi).[21]

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[21] RASW research participant Esi was a woman in her forties who fled Ghana after experiencing persecution due to her sexuality. She was dispersed to Coventry with her young daughter, where she became involved with CARAG. Esi spoke about feelings of hopelessness, having been denied asylum numerous times.

Dellina,[22] Mahum,[23] and Aaminata[24] were some of the RASW research participants who agreed that the only people they had contact with by choice was through charity groups. Many spoke of the Meena Centre as the closest they had to 'home,' as 'it's safe, and also you feel like you can be with people who have been through their own situation like you.' The space offered the opportunity to experience shared humanity, 'better than those people who are judging you outside.' Laura intended the centre to 'offer 'some sense of consistency, some kind of sense of familiarity, some kind of sense of dignity' in opposition to the threatening buildings and faces of the Home Office. She described the organisation of the Centre as feminist and anti-racist.

> People are so disempowered, this is happening to you, psychologically to you, to create that resilience they need to have some kind of ownership, on a day-to-day functional level, muck in and take some ownership. That I value you because I need you to help me clean the kitchen. Weirdly, by picking up a mop, you're going 'don't worry, I'll help you,' and it changes the dynamic (Laura).

The Meena Centre also offered practical solidarity as a central store for furniture, toys, clothes, toiletries, and other essential items that were donated across the city. RASW were able to choose and make use of necessary items that they could not otherwise access, including children's prams, mattresses, winter coats, cutlery and crockery, shoes, and nappies, which volunteers would deliver to them. The donation and delivery of these items was an act of resistance to the policies of enforced destitution which means that ASW cannot access the basics of everyday life. In addition to this, lunch was cooked every day at the centre by a volunteer and shared among anyone who attended. These acts of everyday resistance challenged the dehumanisation of RASW.

A number of activities for RASW and children were hosted every weekday at the Meena Centre, including weekly English language classes, yoga, tea ceremony, film screenings, children's play sessions, and training workshops. Organisations who delivered sessions and

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[22] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.

[23] RASW research participant Mahum was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties with 3 children. She escaped slavery and had been granted 5 years leave to remain. Her focus was building a good life for her children.

[24] RASW research participant Aaminata was a Nigerian woman in her early thirties with a ten-month-old baby.

one-off events included the Hope Projects,[25] RSVP,[26] Shelter,[27] West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network,[28] Lift the Ban,[29] CARAG,[30] Birch Housing,[31] and individual specialists in trauma recovery, healthcare, and housing. I experienced the Meena Centre as being a very welcoming and inclusive space, with a focus on collaborative working. The emphasis on feminist ways of working manifested in the Meena team being transparent about their decision making, valuing feedback, and encouraging service users to lead in determining which activities took place at the centre. Again, the Meena Centre's approach to working alongside marginalised communities mirrored my research aims and methods, as I sought to be transparent about my research, engaged in iterative feedback processes with participants, and evolved the project according to participants' priorities.

The Baobab Women's Project was set up in 2016 as a community interest company, aiming to support undocumented, asylum seeking, and refugee women to 'learn about and navigate the system in a positive way, stand in their own power, and draw on supportive people and networks' (Taal, 2019a). Advocacy activities had been funded by Lush[32] and the BIG Lottery Fund,[33] and focussed on the key areas of legal support, health and wellbeing, housing and benefits, and destitution. The aim was to provide women with information, knowledge, and support to enable them to make informed decisions within the complex asylum system. Baobab recently received funding for an additional specialist homelessness project and a therapeutic wellbeing project. There was a cross-fertilisation between the organisation's work and my own feminist epistemology: to see and understand the experiences of oppressed women and utilise this knowledge to create positive change in their lives.

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[25] The Hope Projects charity offered housing in Birmingham and the Black Country to those left homeless and destitute by the asylum system. A destitution fund offered weekly cash grants, as well as peer support groups, and access to legal advice.
[26] The Rape and Sexual Violence Project offered support services across Birmingham and Solihull.
[27] Shelter support those struggling with bad housing or homelessness with advice, support, and legal services.
[28] The West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network works in collaboration with partner organisations to end modern slavery, human trafficking, and exploitation in the region.
[29] Lift the Ban is a campaign by a coalition of charities, trade unions, businesses, faith groups, and think tanks working to overturn the Government's ban on asylum seekers being able to work.
[30] The Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group is a grassroots migrant-led community organisation in Coventry.
[31] Birmingham Community Hosting Network is a volunteer led charity offering befriending services and accommodation to those experiencing destitution.
[32] Retailer Lush offers funding to small, grassroots groups that aim to create long-term change in the areas of human rights, the environment, or animal protection.
[33] The National Lottery Community Fund distributes over £600m a year primarily to projects that work with their community.

A total of eight community advocates were trained by Baobab, two of whom went on to enter full time employment. The six community advocates were women who had lived experience with the asylum system, some of whom also made up the group of eight community interpreters. As with my approach in this research, Baobab valued refugee and asylum seeking women as experiential experts with knowledge of living at numerous intersections of oppression. In the year 2018 – 2019, the project advocated with 200 women of 42 different nationalities, as well as 147 dependent children (Taal, 2019b). The 1,885 appointments over the year included one-to-one, drop in's, and follow up actions on legal support cases, housing and subsistence cases, health support cases, and referrals to other organisations such as the British Red Cross trafficking national referral mechanism, Freedom from Torture, The Refugee and Migrant Centre, and Shelter (ibid.). Baobab's feminist work centred RASW as agents of change who should be collaborated with rather than spoken 'for.'

In January 2019, the group (of advocates, interpreters, and volunteers) moved to the larger room in the Meena Centre as the offices were unfit for use, which enabled more open conversation. There was also a shift in their openness towards me, I believe as a result of having gotten to know me, met my family through their volunteering at the Meena Centre, and experiencing my consistent presence at the Centre. Informal conversations became more open, and during one conversation women shared their experiences of racism in the UK. I was asked to join the discussion, and sharing my experiences elicited surprised and interest. I believe this conversation in particular marked a turning point in my relationships with the RAS women, as we found commonalities in our experiences as well as noting differences. I observed that on the numerous occasions when discussions about race took place, it was between women of colour. My personal biography and experiences enabled me access to communicating with RASW in the group in a way that I had not observed with other volunteers who were British white women. I later learned that the RASW feared newcomers as potentially passing information to the Home Office which would lead to their deportation. Sharing my experiences and opinions of race relations in the UK seemed to contribute to assuaging this fear.

Drop-in sessions were not as busy or frantic during December due to restrictions on use of the Meena Centre following damage to the roof. Shay and the core group of community advocates agreed that thirty minutes of each Monday morning briefing could be used to discuss my research. At times, a number of community interpreters would also be in attendance and contribute to the discussion. This conversation was usually a starting point that would be revisited later in the day, if RASW had questions or suggestions to make. The

aim was to avoid this research being yet another call for RASW to give to 'agendas set by external interests' (Cornwall, 2011), and encourage a more democratic approach. During the previous few months, I had answered many questions about my privileged educational background, always with the clarification that I did not consider myself an 'expert' on the lives of RASW as they were the experts on their own lives.

I would start by asking the group what they wanted to prioritise in research about their lives and what they wanted the outcome to be. In conjunction with extensive notes that I had taken about drop-in session appointments and many informal conversations with RASW during the previous three months, clear themes emerged. RASW unanimously spoke about the violence of the asylum system, the hostile environment and its impact on them, and more specifically the ways in which they were constructed as liars, the ways in which every aspect of their life was controlled, and that they were often not treated as human beings. Respondents described their desire for the project to lead to greater awareness of the harm they experienced at the hands of the asylum system, which they hoped would reduce the violence of the system. This played a significant role in shaping my research questions and the conversation guide.

Community advocates and interpreters expressed their surprise on a number of occasions at my lack of 'pursuit' of research participants. I explained my concerns about exploitation, re-traumatisation, and the 'tyranny of participation' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Although the group spoke of me as a member now, having consistently contributed to their activities, actively listened, and remained transparent about my work, I remained acutely aware of my privilege and did not want to create an 'obligation' to participate. My commitment to engaging with participants and the wider community of the research site with respect and sensitivity meant that I was prepared to persevere and be patient. The Meena Centre had displayed posters about my research to be clear about the presence of a researcher, but the group suggested that they would be best placed to gauge which RASW were at lower risk of re-traumatisation and were more likely to be interested in participating in research projects. They were knowledgeable about which RASW would not be comfortable to be approached, who would not wish to use certain interpreters, and those who would not like their participation to be disclosed to others.

The group advised that one-to-one conversations with RASW would be the most valuable due to concerns about privacy, confidentiality, and the potential risks of publicly disclosing private information. While group discussions are a popular strategy in PAR (Lykes and Hershberg, 2014), I learned over the months that for RAS women living in fear in a hostile environment,

this was not necessarily an empowering situation in which to speak about their lives. I followed the lead of the Baobab group as they suggested community members I should approach or more often, those who they referred to me as my research had arisen during a conversation. I chose to speak with women over the age of eighteen, primarily out of concern for the safeguarding of children. I would have required a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, and the data collected from children would not have essential to answering my research questions.

I undertook one-to-one conversations with twenty-five RASW, twelve of which took place at the Meena Centre. Two took place at the Coventry Peace House and two at the Library of Birmingham. The closure of the Meena Centre presented a challenge, as there was no longer a familiar, safe space for one-to-one conversations to be conducted. I was also very aware of not asking women to utilise limited funds to travel to another location to meet with me. I carried out home visits for nine RASW, seven of whom I had met and spoken with at the Meena Centre before it closed. The other two had indicated their agreement to participate and arranged a home visit. I asked Shay to accompany me to make introductions and check that the participant was happy to continue one-to-one, which they were. As a safety measure, I informed two individuals in my personal life about the nine meeting locations. I messaged them upon my arrival and then my departure, after which they deleted all details from their phones.

Conversations with eight allies took place in their private workplace offices, quiet coffee shops, or in a side room at community events. These one-to-one discussions were not carried out to take focus away from the voices of RASW, but as a way for me to gain more contextual insight from those who were familiar with the minutiae of various facets of the immigration system. They were able to provide a different perspective on the bureaucratic aspects of the hostile environment, informed of course by their own politics but also by their knowledge and experiences of having worked with hundreds of RASW through different aspects of the asylum system during their careers.

Appendices 7 and 8 detail the key demographic information of the 33 research participants who joined one-to-one conversation with me. They comprised of 5 women with an active asylum claim, 8 who had received refusals, and 11 refugee women who had been granted leave to remain. The 8 community allies comprised of an advocate, a modern slavery support worker, a campaigner, a community interpreter, 2 immigration lawyers, the Meena Centre manager, and the Baobab Women's project co-ordinator. Conversations ranged from 30

minutes to 2 hours and 10 minutes, with the average length being 1 hour and 30 minutes. Three women utilised a community interpreter, Eva, who was known to them through Baobab and the Meena Centre (Aster,[34] Ayana,[35] and Nadia[36]).

Transcription, coding, and analysis

Once data had been collected from all participants, the next step towards coding was transcription. I gave priority to those RASW who had requested their recordings were deleted within 7 days of being made. By using Dragon Naturally Speaking software, I was able to transcribe an hour of recordings in two to three hours. I had underestimated how difficult I would find the monotony of transcribing and trying to maintain concentration. I also had not anticipated the impact of repeatedly listening, for intense periods of time, to distressing details that RASW had shared.

Being so submerged in stories of rape, torture, and imprisonment affected my emotional wellbeing, requiring me to take more breaks from transcribing and lengthening the process. I listened to all recordings once before beginning transcription, and then several times during, to try to achieve a high level of accuracy. Another difficulty was the sound quality in recordings that had been made at the Meena Centre. Rooms were partitioned and therefore a lot of ambient noise was picked up in the recordings. These required even more intensive and repeated listening to decipher.

Coding can be descriptive, topic based, and analytic (Richards, 2009). Descriptive coding refers to information stored about the participant (see Appendices 7 and 8), while topic-based coding separates themes within a paragraph or a section. The final stage, analytic coding, explores what the participant is saying. I began coding during the transcription process, from the first listening of recordings through to when all were completed. I added an additional column to transcripts where I noted my initial thoughts and patterns I observed. Once all transcripts were finished, I repeated this manual coding with different coloured texts and grouping the themes that had emerged from initial coding. While I had knowledge of using

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[34] RASW research participant Aster fled religious persecution in Eritrea and was a solo parent to a toddler. In her twenties, she relied on the Meena Centre as an opportunity to socialise with others.
[35] RASW research participant Ayana was in her twenties and had fled religious persecution in Eritrea.
[36] RASW research participant Nadia experienced extreme violence and political persecution in Egypt. Granted 5 years leave to remain, her focus was on trying to recover from her experiences in Egypt and the UK. In her mid thirties, she described being fearful of public places and unknown men. She took great enjoyment in cooking lunch for Meena Centre visitors.

Nvivo, my personal preference is for manual coding as I am better able to visualise the interconnectedness of the themes.

The data collected through one-to-one conversations with RASW and allies totalled over 100,000 words, and I found that I had a large amount of rich, directly relevant information. I found it very difficult to decide what would and would not be included in my analysis. My instinct was to include large sections of data so as to provide a fuller picture of women's narratives. It was of course problematic trying to retain so much detail and balancing that with discussion and analysis. My concern was to centre the stories of RASW and maintain the coherence of their perspectives. Many profound issues arose about the violence of the asylum system and its impact on RASW, but rather than discard the data not included in this project, I decided to keep it for future use in creating reports and articles. I focussed on the key themes that addressed the research aims and questions.

Data anonymisation and storage

My data management plan focused on securely storing confidential data. I used consistent, unique, and descriptive file and folder names when saving research data on my laptop, which is password protected. I classified my data as one of three types: confidential, highly confidential, and unclassified, backing up all data to the cloud and to an external hard drive daily. Audio data was stored in MP3 format and password protected and deleted within the agreed timeframe for those research participants who requested it. I also completed the online GDPR module offered at Warwick.

In an effort to create more autonomy, I asked participants at the end of each conversation if they would like to choose a pseudonym, and a third did so. I gave all remaining research participants pseudonyms, related to the region of the world they described as 'home' in order to retain more of a sense of their identity while ensuring they were not identifiable. In my handwritten notebook, I used my own unique form of shorthand that I developed as an undergraduate. All details were undecipherable to others, although I was also extremely careful to only have the notebook on my person when in the field. I had guaranteed anonymity to all participants, which was of particular concern to ASW whose claims had been denied as they feared detection and punishment by the Home Office. It was therefore even more important that I employed robust data management processes.

I obtained consent from each of the organisations who are named in this thesis, who were happy to waive anonymity. The two immigration solicitors had the consent of their practice managers to speak with me on the condition that the firm was not named. While community allies did not request anonymity, I decided to remain consistent across all participants and give them pseudonyms too.

Thematic content analysis

I undertook thematic analysis (TA), widely used to analyse qualitative data in the social sciences (Braun and Clarke, 2006). TA acknowledges my subjectivity as the researcher being integral to the process of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). My starting point was familiarisation with the data, before moving to theme development, and then to coding. I moved between these phases iteratively, taking a flexible and organic approach by repeatedly engaging with the data in a detailed way (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I recognised that the resultant analysis would be created primarily by me as the researcher, at the intersection of the data, my conceptual framework, and my research skills, through immersion and reflection (Terry *et al.*, 2017).

TA has a theoretical independence, underpinned in this project by a constructivist feminist ontology and a feminist standpoint epistemology. I undertook a data-led analysis, inductively coding and developing themes 'bottom up' from the data (ibid.). This method of analysis was appropriate for my epistemology and methodology as it is grounded in participants' voices, seeks to provide insight into the experiences of refugee and asylum seeking women, explores interpretations provided by participants, and does not endorse perspectives imported from outside of the text (i.e. top down interpretations). TA enabled me to prioritise producing knowledge that exposed the oppressions RASW experience and could be used to create change, while being reflexive about the role of my inevitable biases and assumptions.

In the first phase of TA, I familiarised myself with the data, beginning during data collection. I was observant of patterns, relistening to recordings and re-reading transcripts to immerse myself in the data with curiosity. I carried out detailed analyses of each participant's transcript, before proceeding to a thorough examination of similarities and differences between and across texts within the dataset. As patterns of meaning and reflections on shared experiences became clearer, I was careful not to discard the specific nuance of the individual's voice or the socio-historical context of their experiences.

These early analytic observations were noted in a separate notebook, both for individual transcripts and for the entire dataset. I did experience difficulty initially with moving between my immersion with data to looking at the dataset as a whole, for fear that I would become disconnected from the richness of individual participants' lives and commit epistemic oppression. I worked to minimise this by repeatedly returning to Collins' principle of basing knowledge in lived experience (Collins, 2000), while acknowledging that I was not able to assess knowledge in dialogue with the community to the extent I had hoped to.

In the second phase, I deepened my interpretative engagement, probing for meaning that the participant may not have made explicit, and moving towards more conceptual readings while still being led by their account. I began generating codes by identifying specific parts of the dataset that had meaning in relation to the research questions and attaching a label (Terry *et al.*, 2017). These began as descriptive codes mirroring what participants were saying (for example, 'dislikes reporting in Solihull') and went on to become more interpretative codes that reflected patterns in the dataset and concepts that helped to explain the data (for example, 'fear instilled by surveillance'). Some sections of data had multiple labels, while other sections had none as I did not code every line of data. The codes were meaningful to me, and my interpretation of the data.

Coding was iterative and flexible for me, and I revised codes as different concepts developed out of the dataset each time I went through it (Terry *et al.*, 2017). I did this numerous times as part of the familiarisation phase, but also to ensure coding consistency. I completed this phase by compiling a list of codes that identified patterns of meaning in the dataset. I then moved onto the third phase of TA, that of developing themes. I built on my immersion with the dataset and was guided by my research questions in determining what was relevant. I grouped codes together into larger, more meaningful patterns across the dataset in constructing the themes (Terry *et al.*, 2017). This was also an iterative, reflective practice, as early attempts at theme development were not the final ones that I used. I made use of visual mapping to support my construction of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2013), primarily large A1 spider diagrams with colour coded post-it notes that could be re-arranged. This was extremely helpful in allowing me to consider how potential themes related to each other, while still being distinct.

The next stage involved reviewing and defining themes with reflexivity, to clarify that this iteration worked well and told a story about my dataset that answered my research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I checked that the data extracts for each theme related to the central

organising concept of the theme, while continuing to reread the dataset to ensure I had captured the most meaningful information. I did have some difficulty initially in a blurring of some themes, as some codes were allocated to more than one theme. In reviewing my construction of themes, I had to make decisions about the clearest boundaries for inclusion so that the key themes were distinct (Terry *et al.*, 2017). This process of review was to ensure that the story told through my themes answered the research questions in a clear and cohesive way. I used working titles for the themes, which were repeatedly refined to better reflect the theme. The final stage was to produce my analysis in my data chapters, weaving in the data and relevant literature, to answer the research questions. I utilised data extracts illustratively and analytically, as well as to remain grounded in the voices of research participants.

Voice and power

As Roy has stated, 'we know of course there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard' (2004). Colonising powers spoke for the colonised 'other' just as men have historically spoken for women. Postcolonial theorists like Spivak and Mohanty insist that complex, multiple, and intersecting identities must be recognised as part of the project of ensuring the voices of subaltern groups are heard. Subaltern refers broadly to colonised peoples, and more specifically in postcolonial thought to those who are the most marginalised, denied agency and voice. If white Western men have held the power to create knowledge and determine what knowledge is valid, the voices of those at the margins of society are excluded. In the UK, this would include asylum seeking women, extremely marginalised by gender, race, nationality, class, and ethnicity, and rejected as creators of knowledge.

Spivak considers who speaks and who is heard, with a focus on recovering the voices of subaltern women who have long been silenced (Spivak, 1993). In a discussion about power and epistemic violence, Spivak recognises the denial of the subaltern voice as a reproduction of colonial power. This project is particularly concerned with the voices of refugee and asylum seeking women, who may be 'visible' in some senses but are largely silenced (Horsti, 2016; Malkki, 1996; Didier, 2005). The refugee is spoken of as a powerless victim without political voice (Horsti, 2016), a suffering subject requiring compassion (Didier, 2005), or incapable of making decisions about their own lives as they are traumatised (Nyers, 2006).

Refugees and asylum seekers are further marginalised by reductive representation that turns 'refugee lives into a site where Western ways of knowing are reproduced' (Sigona, 2014). The management of who speaks and how has been described as 'symbolic bordering,' whereby practices of exclusion work to marginalise refugees in terms of how they are represented, and as unwanted bodies within Europe's borders (Georgiou, 2018). As Spivak has pointed out, being able to speak and write in hegemonic spaces is a privilege and cannot simply be exercised by those who desire to do so. The relationship between knowledge and power operates to actively exclude oppressed voices from social institutions of knowledge validation.

The intention of this research was to amplify largely excluded voices from different perspectives of the lived experience of being an asylum seeking woman in the UK, which informed the epistemology, methodology, and methods employed. The greatest struggle I faced during this research was in considering my own privileged position as a member of the academy, an institution that constructs and disseminates knowledge 'that has persistently marginalised or even silenced non-Western intellectual traditions and subaltern voices' (Steans, 2013, p. 36). I grappled with questions that arose out of Spivak's work, such as how can I speak for, but not further silence those whose voices have long been marginalised? As Collins points out, when I am seeking to produce knowledge while not possessing that knowledge (as I have never been an asylum seeking woman or refugee) how do I avoid committing epistemic violence?

> The researcher is an active presence, an agent, in research, and she constructs what is actually a viewpoint, a point of view that is both a construction or version and is consequently and necessarily partial in its understandings (Stanley and Wise, 1993, p. 6).

It was important I accepted that while I wished to create space for silenced voices to be heard as a challenge to power, ultimately what I produced would be heavily informed my own reflections and representations of reality due to the inevitable presence of my personal intersectional feminist beliefs, and my lived experiences as a woman of colour in the UK. I reject the absolute dichotomy of researcher/ subject, as in relating to research participants I was affected and changed by the people I communicated with, and vice versa. I was deeply impacted by the personal stories that refugee and asylum seeking women shared with me over the course of a year, and in building relationships with them I shared some of my own life experiences. Attentive to the power differential between me as the researcher and participants as respondents, revealing some aspects of my identity introduced more reciprocity. While the

balance of power remained in my favour, I believe that this approach contributed to creating a little more balance by building a respectful rapport over the course of the year.

While not a refugee or an asylum seeking woman, my position as a woman, a person of colour, who had grown up locally, from a family of migrants, with a history of working and volunteering in refugee rights, added constantly shifting nuance to how I related with research participants. I was to varying degrees, and at different points, treated as an outsider (a researcher, not a refugee or asylum seeker, a part of the academy etc) and an insider (a woman, a person of colour, a child of migrants etc). Many RASW asked direct questions about my ethnicity and my parents' background. As a British Indian woman my identity intersected in differing ways with my age, education, and marital status. I acknowledged my privilege in possessing a British passport and having access to postgraduate education among other things, while also being invited to contribute to conversations about how misogyny and racism operate in Britain. This kind of strategic disclosure is a dimension of reflexive feminist interviewing, which develops the relationship with participants by explicitly acknowledging both similarities and differences in social location (DeVault and Gross, 2014). My experience was not strategic, but rather a natural part of developing relationships with those I spent time with every week.

I was acutely aware of the power dynamics in the research process, and research participants spoke themselves of researchers 'taking' from them for their own purposes and then 'disappearing.' The epistemic privilege of the traditionally white, male, Western, middle-class researcher was described by RASW participants as angering them, leaving them feeling objectified, and without any positive impact on their own lives. My aim was to maintain my integrity in working to avoid repeating the colonisation of knowledge production for my own gain before 'abandoning' the community.

Conclusion: developing reciprocity

The process of generating data for this thesis was based in feminist research methodologies, acknowledging that social reality is constructed in racialised and gendered ways. The aim of such methodologies is not only to expose the experiences of oppressed women who live at many intersections and are subjected to much silencing, but to apply this knowledge to the creation of change in women's lives. This chapter documents how these methodologies were chosen, the epistemological underpinnings, and why they were most suited to obtaining information that answered my research questions. The final issue I will discuss is that of

mitigating the potential for exploitation (Abu-Lughod, 1990), which does occur in feminist research (Stacey, 1988), leading me to the incorporation of reciprocity.

Used by feminist researchers to challenge 'hegemonic practices of traditional, hierarchical research' (Huisman, 2008), reciprocity is tied to issues of power and positionality in feminist research, necessitating reflexivity to avoid supporting the epistemological violence of colonial ways of knowing (Mohanty, 2003). The 'ethics of reciprocation is to give back both ownership of knowledge and material benefit to those participating in research' (Swartz, 2011). I worked to utilise both approaches, collaborating with research participants in the production of knowledge to the greatest degree that was practically possible, and 'giving back' through contributing to the needs of the community with the advocacy skills I possessed. My concern was to avoid a transactional exchange, and instead engage in reciprocity as a core value in my relationships as I researched with, and stood with, the community (Millora, Maimunah and Still, 2020).

The ways in which I collaborated with research participants in the production of knowledge is discussed earlier in this chapter. I also engaged in reciprocity by becoming a regularly present member of the community who offered my skills and knowledge where they were required. I focused on my role as a volunteer advocate for the Baobab Women's Project, taking one-to-one appointments with refugee and asylum seeking women to assist with issues relating to housing, health, legal support, and destitution. Without time or resources for training, it was necessary to learn very quickly about organisational procedures, local organisations, regional and national referral processes, as well as the many intricacies of the asylum system. Sessions were very intense, busy, and demanding. On average I would assist three service users per session. Over the ten-month period, I advocated with 40 different women, most of whom I met numerous times at drop-in sessions to support them with ongoing issues. I also undertook home visit advocacy sessions with two women.

I was proactive in volunteering for the Meena Centre too, from welcoming attendees, cooking lunch, and childcare, to moving furniture, cleaning, and organising donations. When funds were announced for a social event, I planned and organised the Christmas party, securing over 100 gifts for RASW from local businesses and organisations. I responded to the call for support in producing a shadow report regarding asylum seeking women in the UK in relation to Home Office decision making, destitution, and mental health, for submission to the 72nd session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Baobab Women's Project 2019). I undertook 10 short structured interviews with RASW about

home office decision making, and authored the report section titled 'Nationality' (Baobab Women's Project, 2019).

Shay took the report to the 72nd session in Geneva 'to raise the voices of women which are far too seldom heard or considered' (Taal, 2019a), and Refugee Rights Europe offered to publish a report based on the CEDAW submission. I authored and edited large parts of the report, 'Seeking Asylum: Women's Experiences of Home Office Decision Making, Destitution, and Mental Health Issues' (Reehal, Taal and Maestri, 2019). Lift the Ban invited Baobab to present the report at the University of Birmingham, and I coordinated with three RASW contributors on what they would like to present and how. They reached a consensus on three strands to present and requested that I present one alongside them.

I remained painfully aware of my privileged position in the community of the Meena Centre that I entered. This discomfort was greatest during the 12 months of field work, as I wanted to avoid committing exploitation, to work slowly in developing relationships with the community, and 'give back' to the community in a meaningful way, which was at odds with completing my thesis in a timely manner. I certainly experienced a tension between wanting to create something mutually beneficial to research participants and to academia. I knew that I would benefit by gaining a doctoral degree, and I was very concerned about the benefits for participants.

I knew very early in the PhD process that reciprocity was as important to me as the research, and I engaged in forms of reciprocity that were congruent with my research aims and feminist ontology and epistemology. Over the 12 months that I volunteered with Baobab, I undertook activism and advocacy, which are at the core of feminist methodology (Beckman, 2014). I heard the experiences of oppressed RASW and put my skills into practice to create some positive real-world change in their lives. This included reporting unsafe asylum accommodation for causing illness to support an application to be rehoused, filling out applications for asylum support, making referrals to Freedom from Torture for medico-legal reports, and speaking with NHS staff to ensure access to services for RASW.

In developing genuine reciprocity, I found that I could not remain detached or dispassionate towards the individuals I was spending time with. I struggled with emotional exhaustion after advocacy sessions, and this slowed my pace of work much more than I had anticipated. I also felt immense amounts of guilt when I inevitably withdrew from the Meena community as the Centre had closed down, and from the Baobab group when they too struggled to find premises.

As I became preoccupied with transcription and coding, I was less able to commit to travelling across the city on the occasions that a venue could be secured.

There had been a blurring of the distinction between 'researcher' and 'friend' with some participants in particular, which while genuine, was inevitably altered as I left the field and withdrew into academia. This ethical tension caused me great concern over my 'abandonment' or 'betrayal,' and the power differentials I had worked to redress through reciprocity seemed to have been overshadowed by leaving the field to focus on my role as a researcher. I reflected a great deal on the ethical issues I faced, and how trust can be built with a marginalised community while lowering the risk of abandonment. This is an aspect of my research that I will endeavour to learn from and develop in future studies I undertake.

Chapter 4. The construction of asylum seeking women as 'crimmigrants': '*They treat you like a criminal*' (Iftin)[37]

Introduction

In this chapter I outline how legal frameworks define asylum seeking women and inform a system that should enable the protection of ASW, but instead criminalises them through the racist and sexist redefinition of ASW. They are constructed as 'crimmigrants' who have committed immigration crimes by seeking asylum (Bhatia, 2020; Billings, 2019; Franko, 2020; Garcia Hernandez, 2018; Šalamon, 2020; Stumpf, 2006). The practices and process of the asylum system act on this assumption and reinforce it. I will expand on this conception of immigrants as criminals by focusing on the impact of gender on the production and reproduction of the 'crimmigrant' through the asylum system. The misrecognition and criminalisation of ASW is racialised and gendered, and used as justification for the perpetration of state violence against those who have been constructed as not belonging to the nation i.e. women of colour. The hostile environment is therefore legitimised, and ASW as deserving of violence, placed in a category of oppression ('crimmigrant') rather than protection, and subjected to everyday 'immcarceralities.' This criminalisation is a form of structural violence itself. ASW are even more vulnerable to this violence as they experience life at intersection of multiple social forces including gender, race, language, ethnicity, and nationality.

I will start by discussing how ASW are defined and labelled in the UK, before outlining the bureaucratic production of the 'crimmigrant other' through asylum processes that assume criminality including the screening interview, accessing legal support, and the substantive interview. I go on to explore the barriers that research participants spoke about experiencing during these processes, as they are informed by the racist and sexist redefinition of ASW: the aggressive interview setting, the hostile interviewing officers who lack trauma and/or gender informed approaches, little childcare provision, and inadequate interpreters. I then turn to the

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[37] RASW research participant Iftin was trafficked into the UK from Pakistan in 2014 in her late twenties. She was granted 5 years leave to remain, and described herself as shy, private, and fearful of developing relationships with other people. Iftin was incredibly softly spoken and proud of the independence she had developed.

more bureaucratic aspects of the asylum claim process, and the difficulties that research participants described, such as the requirement for supporting evidence, the use of country information, and waiting times, borne out of, and reinforcing the redefinition of ASW as criminals. The production of fear takes a role in the creation of the 'crimmigrant,' both fear of asylum seekers as threats but also instilling fear in ASW of the bureaucracy that criminalises them. Finally, I conclude the chapter by reflecting on how RASW critiqued the asylum system as a whole.

Defining and labelling asylum seekers in the UK

The state creates, maintains, and reproduces 'asylum seeking women' as a monolithic category of the oppressed and violated. The UK's stated commitment to providing asylum is not enacted through its systems and processes, and the implementation of the asylum system is in fact racist and sexist, as I will demonstrate in this chapter. Political discourse and media narratives come together to construct ASW as not belonging within the state so that the violence of the hostile environment becomes justifiable. This takes place within the transnational context of redefining refugees and asylum seekers as a 'suspect population' that must be controlled, which has a long history (Bowling and Westenra, 2020; Hillyard, 1993) in Europe especially. The supposed pursuit of security in an era of global migration is how states justify identifying suspect populations as a necessity (Hillyard, 1993; Kapoor, Kalra and Rhodes, 2013), doing so based on visible differences such as race. The multidimensional politicisation of migration and asylum in the European Union has taken place within a framework of 'insecurity' whereby human security is pitted against the security of citizens, and liberty against national security, in defining the nature of threat and who is threatened (Huysmans, 2006). This has become more prominent since 9/11 (Huysmans, 2006; Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015), predicated on the idea that liberal migration regimes enable cross-border risks (Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015).

The redefinition of migration as tied up with deviance or illegality of some sort, including as a threat to the security of the state and its citizens, has given rise to the criminalisation of those who migrate, and the creation of the 'crimmigrant.' The state enacts and enforces criminalising processes against the non-citizen to reinforce their redefinition and justify their removal. These processes are a form of punishment imposed on the 'crimmigrant other' (Stumpf, 2013). Rather than individuals fleeing persecution and seeking refuge, ASW in the UK are redefined as criminals in part through processes informed by a culture of disbelief, including access to

legal advice, home office interviews, and the use of evidence in asylum claims. This criminalisation of ASW who experience life at the intersections of gender, race, and nationality, is enacted in service of 'crimmigration' control measures, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

> It is hostile environment…the law is made just comfort themselves. The law is not equally distributed by individual cases… Where did you put the law? (Ria).[38]

In Europe, 'immigrants are no longer people in need of protection, or a potential source of labour; they have been turned into rule-breakers and criminal offenders, or what can be termed "crimmigrant others"' (Franko, 2020, p. 3; Stumpf, 2006). This identity is continuously produced through media and political discourse, but also 'deeply ingrained in the minutiae of state bureaucratic procedures' (ibid.), such as the asylum system in the UK. The construction of these anxieties about the dangerous enemy are racialised, and the hostile environment is 'designed to manage/filter out racialised 'others' due to their perceived lack of belonging to the (imagined) national community' (Bhatia, 2020, p.38). The resultant racist violence is directed at foreigners and minorities who are considered inferior, in the form of 'institutional, collective harm against subordinate racial groups' (Blee, 2005, p. 606). Research participants spoke about immigration policy as being one such form of harm production, more severe as they live at the intersection of asylum seeker, racialised 'other,' and woman. RASW described the ways in which they were criminalised and dehumanised, having a racialised public identity imposed upon them which served to marginalise them, subject them to violence, and exclude them from society. By associating asylum with crime, the exclusion of asylum seekers is justified, and its human cost deemed inevitable.

> There is a hope of crossing the channel, claiming asylum, we'll get our papers, and then you come here and it takes forever, they refuse you, they write letters that are insulting to you, they criminalise you… (Aleah).[39]

As an asylum seeker in the UK, claimants do not have access to the same rights as refugees or other British citizens. Research participants were unequivocal in asserting that the UK falls far below the minimum standard of protection it claims to offer, which begins with the very

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[38] RASW research participant Ria was a community advocate for Baobab. She was dedicated and passionate about supporting women going through the asylum system. She spoke poetically about the grief she experienced for all that had been lost while trying to seek asylum in the UK.
[39] Community ally research participant Aleah was employed as a Modern Slavery Support Worker for Birmingham Women's Aid. She also participated in End Deportations Birmingham, and regularly shared her home with asylum seekers who were made homeless.

category of 'asylum seeker.' The refusal to acknowledge refugees and assign them 'asylum seeker' status immediately implies disbelief as the starting point before claims are judged. Zetter's conceptualisation of refugee labelling as identity formation within institutionalised regulatory processes is based on the formation, transformation, and politicisation of this identity (Zetter, 2007). These labels 'discriminate and detach claimants from the core attribute of being a refugee - international protection' and 'are now formed (and transformed and politicized) by government bureaucracies in the 'global north,' not humanitarian agencies operating in the 'global south' as in the past' (ibid., p. 176). States like the UK have transformed and politicised interpretations of the 1951 Convention's label of 'refugee' in increasingly more restrictive and derogatory ways. The interests of the state dictate these processes of categorising and differentiating refugees, resulting in a 'fractioning of the label' (ibid., p. 181). Research participants spoke about experiencing the asylum system that indicated the category of 'asylum seeking woman' in the UK had been subverted to exclude, marginalise, and isolate them through the hostile environment.

In order to marginalise a group through particular policies and practices, institutions must be able to identify them. The derogatory vocabulary that has come into popular use over the last few decades in doing this includes 'illegal asylum seeker,' 'illegal migrant,' 'bogus asylum seeker,' 'economic refugee,' and 'overstayer,' almost exclusively used against racialised groups. Media discourse has overlapped with the ways that UK institutions treat RASW. The most significant politicisation and transformation of the label that RASW spoke about was the creation and maintenance of the 'asylum seeking woman' as dishonest and undeserving. This begins before asylum seeking women even arrive in the UK. Research participants spoke about extremely risky journeys they undertook when fleeing persecution, while politicians, policy makers, and the public have seized upon a rhetoric of 'illegal asylum seekers,' who are actually 'economic migrants' targeting the UK for access to employment and welfare benefits (Crawley, 2010).

The implication is that asylum seekers are well informed about European welfare systems, opportunities for work, and engaged in 'asylum shopping' (ibid., p. 13). There is in fact no evidence to support the assumption that asylum seekers are influenced by these so called 'pull factors' as part of a systematic exploitation of host countries welfare provisions (Neumayer, 2004; Thielemann, 2004; Crawley, 2010). This project supports those findings, as almost two thirds of participants, including those who were trafficked into the UK, did not choose the UK as their destination, or have any knowledge that their destination was the UK. The remainder of participants knew of a friend or family member in the UK and spoke about

being motivated by the possibility of a support system. They had little to no knowledge of employment opportunities or the benefits system, and certainly no information about the asylum system in the UK.

The institutional processes that research participants spoke about facing were complex and confusing and did not support their access to protection. The next section will explore these institutionalised regulatory processes which are utilised in the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of asylum seeking women as 'crimmigrants.' The racist and sexist processes of the system seek to confirm the presupposed criminality of non-citizens, exhibited in Home Office interview policy and practices, the focus on evidence, and the pervasive culture of disbelief.

Claiming asylum in the UK: screening and legal aid

While there are Home Office and legal requirements to the process for claiming asylum in the UK, all except one research participant described how they 'didn't know nothing,' that 'no one explained' (Mahum)[40] the process, even wondering: 'maybe you are meant to get a solicitor before you go to the interview?' Particularly for those who did not speak English, there was very little information provided about claiming asylum: 'what does that mean? What do I have to do?' (Ina).[41] This section will explore participants' experiences of the first few steps of the process, starting with a screening interview, and trying to access legal support. The Home Office expects people to claim asylum immediately upon entering the UK, at the port at which they arrive (Right to Remain, 2019). An immigration official should be informed of the intention to seek asylum, when the person will be asked about their claim in the form of a 'screening interview' on that day, or within five days (Gbikpi, 2018). Research participants pointed out that this assumes that the asylum seeker is aware of the UK asylum system and how it operates, when in reality they spoke about having little understanding of the complex system even after having been engaged with it for many years.

In most cases, participants described only developing some understanding of the asylum system when they made contact with a charity group, who would most often refer them to the Right to Remain Toolkit, available in a number of languages. Even then, every RASW

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[40] RASW research participant Mahum was from Eritrea and had 3 young children.
[41] RASW research participant Ina was an Albanian woman in her early thirties who had fled sexual violence and trafficking.

participant used the word 'confusing' to describe the process. This disrupts the narrative of 'asylum shopping,' or that the UK is somehow 'targeted' (Iftin)[42] when in reality the complex and opaque system is difficult to comprehend, inaccessible even to lawyers and judges (Yeo, 2018b). This of course functions as a gendered and racialised barrier of exclusion to those attempting to seek asylum, preventing women who do not speak English, who possibly have children with them, and may need urgent support for gender-based violence, from accessing assistance.

If claiming asylum after entering the UK, the person needs to telephone the Screening Unit in Croyden to make an appointment to claim asylum (Right to Remain, 2019). If detained when claiming asylum, the screening interview will take place in the detention centre. The brief interview consists of taking biodata, and questions about why the person is claiming asylum and their journey to the UK. The Home Office will categorise the case as general, 'non-suspensive appeals' (no right to appeal any future refusal of the claim), 'detained non-suspensive appeals' (detained immediately after the screening interview), Dublin/safe third country, or unaccompanied minors (ibid.). At the point of making a claim and the screening interview, asylum seekers are unlikely to have legal representation. Legal aid is available for asylum claims, detention issues, and for challenging a refusal of asylum support.

RASW research participant Ria[43] spoke passionately about the legal aid cuts introduced by David Cameron's government in 2012 resulting in the removal of advice services from almost all social welfare cases except, supposedly, for homelessness, asylum, and domestic violence cases. For Ria, this resulted in the devastating forced removal of her terminally ill mother. By 2018, legal aid was all but eroded as the hostile environment established barriers within the justice system. The changes discouraged providers from offering representation for asylum cases, with the number of these providers falling by more than a half in a decade. As the cost of immigration applications increases and asylum seekers are forced to consider paying for private legal advice, they are effectively being priced out of protection. During the course of this project, it became evident that the majority of asylum seeking women found it extremely difficult to access the legal assistance that was necessary to applying for protection, with almost all having had numerous solicitors.

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[42] RASW research participant Iftin was trafficked into the UK from Pakistan in 2014 in her late twenties.
[43] RASW research participant Ria was a community advocate for Baobab.

With fewer providers stretched even further, numerous research participants experienced exploitation at the hands of unprofessional and/ or unethical legal practitioners. Sachini[44] reported that her 'solicitor took thousands of pounds' from her and did not submit her paperwork in the hope she would be deported, only to find that he was not a qualified solicitor. Every research participant spoke of experiencing financial exploitation, incompetence such as the failure to submit essential paperwork, or to prepare for court appearances. For Nadia,[45] her solicitor's ineptitude resulted in her being returned to detention. Inadequate legal advice has a significant impact on asylum seeking women's life course, contributing to RASW being caught in cycles of refusals and fresh claims with the accompanying risks of exploitation, detention, and deportation instead of protection. The intentional removal of legal aid is another aspect of the structural violence committed by the hostile environment, placing RASW who are already more likely to have experienced gender-based violence at risk of further exploitation.

The asylum interview: policy and practice

This section will explore a significant part of the asylum process, that of the substantive interview and the barriers that research participants faced during it. RASW research participants spoke extensively about the interview as a harrowing experience, which the UK is legally obligated to carry out in assessing asylum claims. Rather than an opportunity to support asylum seeking women through their claim for protection, the substantive interview was described as hostile and interrogatory, entrenched in a racist and sexist culture of disbelief based in the construction of ASW as criminal. The merging of criminal and migration controls is highly visible in these situations. One way in which the bureaucracy of the asylum system produces and politicizes the pejorative category of 'asylum seeking woman' in order to justify racialised violence is to embed these labels in asylum discourse, policy, and practice e.g. the asylum interview. The consequences of the implementation of these practices and procedures are to prevent asylum seeking women from securing protection, who are a population more vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

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[44] RASW research participant Sachini worked for many years as a solicitor and human rights defender in Sri Lanka, which ultimately led to the murder of her mother and the urgent need to flee in 2012. Now in her early fifties, she worked as a community advocate for Baobab, and after many refusals and periods in detention was recently granted 5 years leave to remain. She shared her artwork which she created as part of recovering from her trauma.
[45] RASW research participant Nadia experienced extreme violence and political persecution in Egypt.

RASW participants described the contact they had with the Home Office as being 'terrifying,' and the practices utilised during interviews as being designed to reflect and reinforce the criminality of seeking asylum. Aaminata[46] believed that the 'complicated' interview process has been constructed to put asylum seekers 'under pressure, in a country that you don't even know how it works here.' Immigration solicitor James[47] described the initial reaction from all clients as 'shock at how the Home Office treats them,' having arrived with the 'idea that the Home Office will help and protect.' Instead, they invariably find that the institution does not 'want to help people to present their case.' These experiences are contrary to Home Office policy for asylum interviews that claims the asylum interview is 'a co-operative process' and 'the main opportunity for the claimant to provide relevant evidence about why they need international protection and for you, as the person conducting the interview, to help draw out and test that evidence' (Home Office, 2019a).

The substantive interview follows the screening interview, which the Home Office claims will take place 'soon' after screening, although this did not reflect the experience of research participants. Dellina[48] waited for seven months to receive an interview date, while Thabisa[49] waited two and a half years, living with uncertainty for that period. RASW described being 'completely' unprepared for the interview during their first claim, receiving little guidance from the Home Office or their solicitor. Immigration solicitor Jess[50] described trying to prepare her clients 'for not being believed' during the 'traumatic' interview. These experiences are gendered, as women experiencing long wait times are at greater risk of exploitation through destitution, more likely to be supporting dependent children, and not receiving support for gender-based violence they may be fleeing.

The Home Office policy on gender-based asylum claims states that the substantive interview must be conducted with knowledge of the role, status, and treatment of women in the country from which they have fled, while being sensitive and thorough in order to establish the 'material

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[46] RASW research participant Aaminata was a Nigerian woman in her early thirties with a ten-month-old baby.
[47] Community ally research participant James had spent many years working as an immigration lawyer in Birmingham. He led the End Deportations Birmingham group, and often shared his home with homeless asylum seekers. He spoke passionately about the need for political and legal reform of the asylum system.
[48] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.
[49] RASW research participant Thabisa was trafficked out of Eswatini in 2010 and her most recent application for asylum was refused. Now in her early fifties, she spoke of her faith and church as sustaining her through her struggle for asylum.
[50] Community ally research participant Jess had been working as an immigration solicitor for a year. She spoke about the inability to have only 'professional' relationships with clients without caring for their wellbeing, and the emotional toll of this kind of work.

facts of a claim, the credibility of past experiences and the reasons why protection is sought' (Home Office, 2018). Stating that 'financial, logistical, social, cultural and other factors may mean that women face particular difficulties' indicates an understanding of the gender-based forms of persecution that will impact asylum seeking women and the potential obstacles they may face in disclosing these experiences (ibid., p. 26).

> A reassuring environment will help to establish trust between the interviewer and the claimant, and should help disclosure of sensitive and personal information relevant to the claim. It can be very difficult for claimants to disclose some parts of their account as they may be difficult to talk about or sensitive in nature. How you respond may affect whether they disclose further relevant information. You must not ask intimate or insensitive questions during an interview (ibid., p. 31).

Research participants instead unanimously described Home Office as employing a number of specific barriers to the disclosure of essential information during the asylum interview, contrary to its own policies to 'not prejudge the claim' (Home Office, 2019a). These barriers to disclosure, such as aggressive questioning and a lack of gender sensitivity which will be discussed in detail below, hinder the 'credibility' of asylum claims as a means of maintaining and reproducing the asylum seeking women as members of a category of oppression. A number of racist and sexist practices come into play during Home Office interviews which continue to criminalise asylum seekers, but particularly impact women, such as a failure to safeguard children and the lack of appropriate interpreters. Living at the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, language, and nationality, asylum seeking women are particularly impacted by the violence of the asylum interview. The reality of interview practices as described by research participants is based in, and reproduces, ASW as 'crimmigrants' to be 'immcarcerated' and excluded from the asylum process.

Barriers to disclosure

This section will discuss the specific barriers to accessing asylum that research participants described facing in the substantive interview, including the interview setting, the interviewing officer's behaviour, the lack of childcare, and inappropriate interpreters. RASW spoke about believing that these barriers were put in place in order to prevent a successful claim for asylum, with punishingly long and hostile interviews that started from a point of suspicion towards RASW. This is reflective the misogynist tendency of the judicial system to disbelieve women,

and indeed of patriarchal societies to dismiss the narratives of women. Challenging this dismissal informed the methodology for this project, to be one that centres women and what they choose to speak about.

With a reliance on the Dublin Convention and the use of Eurodac[51] to return asylum seekers to the first point of arrival in Europe, immigration solicitor James[52] believes that the Home Office takes the stance that 'if you were really afraid you would've claimed asylum in the first country you entered.' While acknowledging that the questions posed in the substantive interview are no longer as 'formulaic' as they once were, solicitor James spoke from his experience of hundreds of asylum cases over the last decade to outline the three key areas of questioning he has observed in interviews, aimed at 'undermining credibility.' Firstly, why are you claiming asylum, and what would happen to you as an individual were you to be returned. Secondly, why are you in danger (which could be due to indiscriminate violence as opposed to persecution due to being a member of a particular social group). Thirdly, why have you 'chosen' the UK.

Firstly, the interview setting presents a barrier. James, who works exclusively on asylum claims, asserted that 'the system is designed to make you feel like a criminal,' even in the organisation of the physical environment. The building where Home Office interviews take place is 'anonymous' in appearance, and entry is only permitted through a metal detector once all entrants have been searched by 'guards with stab vests.' More akin to a 'police station,' the interview room consists of 'chairs and a desk chained to the floor, designed to shock you so it's hard to answer questions.' James describes supporting clients through the 'exhausting' interview which can last between 2 and 6 hours, and even up to two days. The process 'immediately dehumanises' asylum seekers, by creating an 'aggressive environment' akin to criminal proceedings. The organisation of the physical space contributes to the construction of ASW as 'crimmigrants' who pose a threat.

This is particularly traumatic for asylum seeking women who are more likely to have already experienced violence, sometimes at the hands of state actors like the police in settings such as prisons. This is far from a reassuring environment designed to support ASW in their claim. Converse to its stated policy of providing 'a reassuring environment,' the Home Office

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[51] The European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database is an EU asylum fingerprint database used to identify whether asylum seekers have entered the EU via another Member State or made previous applications for asylum.
[52] Community ally research participant James had spent many years working as an immigration lawyer in Birmingham.

intentionally organises the physical environment to mimic criminal institutions to instil fear through intimidation. Governance by fear is a central aspect of the 'crimmigration' regime. From their first contact with the Home Office, ASW are exposed to the merging of the immigration and criminal justice systems in the UK (Bhatia, 2020). By subjecting them to an aggressive setting, that state is reinforcing the formulation of ASW as suspect and seeking asylum as a criminal act, which must be investigated and possibly 'punished.'

The second barrier is in the form of Home Office staff who conduct the asylum interviews and are tasked with gathering enough evidence to determine the claim. They should be 'open and relaxed and non-threatening' in order to encourage disclosure during interviews (Home Office, 2019a). Research participants described the reality of being 'interrogated' by interviewing officers who were 'very rude' (Esi)[53] and the detrimental impact this had on their ability to disclose information essential to their claim. The hostility of interviewers, their failure to inform ASW of their rights, and the intentionally aggressive questioning contributed to building a barrier to accessing protection based upon the redefinition of ASW as dangerous 'crimmigrants.'

According to policy, interviewers must take a 'focused, professional and sensitive approach to questioning' (Home Office, 2019a). Twenty-four research participants spoke about confusing and interrogatory questioning and being made to feel as though they had 'done something wrong by being here,' and 'are not saying the truth.' Iftin[54] recalled that 'they were changing the topic, and there were trying to ask the same question in a different way' in an attempt to 'catch' her out, which was echoed by numerous AS women.

> They've been asking all the story, how did you come, why did you come, just too much stress. Makes you cry every time when you go to the Home Office. That was quite stressful, because they been asking me the same questions again and again and again, the whole story from the beginning. It was quite hard for me to answer every time. They might not trust people, don't know. They think that I'm lying, or other people are. I remember it was me and [advocacy worker] there, we went there at 5 AM because it was in Croydon so we had to catch a train. They started at 9 AM and it was finished at 2 PM I think. It was quite long… (Iftin).

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[53] RASW research participant Esi was a woman in her forties who fled Ghana after experiencing persecution due to her sexuality.
[54] RASW research participant Iftin was trafficked into the UK from Pakistan in 2014 in her late twenties.

This aggressive questioning caused ASW 'anxiety' and 'fear' and made it significantly harder for them to share personal and sensitive information about their experiences, while already being disadvantaged by having little understanding of the system or procedures. The Home Office asks that interviewing officers be mindful of the demanding nature of undertaking an asylum interview (Home Office, 2019a) and make interviewees aware of their right to take breaks (ibid., p. 21). Participants all described the 'long' and 'stressful' interviews, and only one of them was informed of her right to request breaks. The unprofessional behaviour of interviewers was far from uncommon. James[55] described innumerable instances of Home Office staff not being aware of their own guidelines regarding the asylum interviews, and solicitors having to print these documents from the Home Office website to present to interviewing officers.

Only one participant was aware in advance of her legal right to have the interview audio-recorded and transcribed (Home Office, 2019a), without which refusals are difficult to contest as there is no evidence of what the Home Office claims the applicant said during the interview. Despite this, numerous participants spoke about recordings not being made, or waiting 'weeks and months' for the recording and transcript to be sent. James concurred that tape recordings were often not made or incorrectly transcribed, interpreters were inadequate, and interviewing officers repeatedly 'try to interrupt, distract, and discredit' interviewees. Interview techniques form part of broader Home Office practices which RAS women described as being rooted in the 'culture of disbelief.' The redefinition of RASW as 'crimmigrants' is perpetuated by, and in turn contributes to, a baseline of suspicion against the racialised 'other,' more so when gender, language, ethnicity, and nationality also intersect.

James noted that these strategies were particularly harmful for women who may have experienced gender-based violence and be suffering from PTSD. While the Home Office policy acknowledges the impact of the interviewing officer's gender on the interview (Home Office, 2019a, p. 13), most research participants were not made aware of their right to request a female interviewer. Consequently, ASW like Dellina[56] asserted there was 'no way' they would disclose details of sexual violence to a man, compounded by cultural norms and shame which would make this an even more distressing prospect.

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[55] Community ally research participant James had spent many years working as an immigration lawyer in Birmingham.
[56] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.

A lack of sensitivity and lack of appropriate services…when a woman has been a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation and they go to…the Home Office, and their interviewer is male, the interpreter is male, or the police, the police it's constantly the same thing, 'we're all well trained.' Yeah, but you're male! You're a very, very white middle class male interviewing someone who has had very particular experiences because of their gender and because of their origin and their ethnicity (Aleah).[57]

The success of asylum claims related to sexual violence are severely impacted by the systematic violence of expecting that racialised AS women could disclose such information to hostile male interviewing officers in an aggressive scenario, while knowing that this strategy will impede their access to protection. Even when provided with a woman interviewer and/ or interpreter, research participants pointed out that this alone did not support disclosure when the female staff member was also hostile and aggressive. The racism and sexism of the asylum system are again exposed as it is well known that the behaviour of interviewers has a significant impact on the disclosure of sensitive personal information essential to the asylum claim (Bögner, Brewin and Herlihy, 2010).

The lack of understanding about the impact of sexual exploitation in women with regards to their capacity to disclose and provide details about the exploitation…affects your credibility sometimes and that obviously affects the outcome of your claim. At what point did you disclose that, did you not disclose that at the first appointment you had with your solicitor or with the Home Office, did you not disclose that at the screening interview, did you not disclose that upon arrival to the UK? The most common thing is…you don't mention it because you're so traumatised and terrified and overwhelmed (Laura).[58]

The late disclosure of sexual violence or torture is cited as evidence of ASW's lack of credibility (Bögner, Brewin and Herlihy, 2010), taken as a sign of dishonesty rather than an exposure of systemic barriers that ASW face within the asylum system. The Home Office guidance advises staff to be 'responsive to the trauma and emotion of claimants' (Home Office, 2018, p. 31) and remember that claimants 'may suffer trauma that can impact on memory and the ability to recall information' (ibid., p. 32) during the substantive interview. Just over half of the RASW who participated in this research had experienced forced marriage, FGM, sexual violence,

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[57] Community ally research participant Aleah was employed as a Modern Slavery Support Worker for Birmingham Women's Aid.
[58] Community ally research participant Laura was the founder of Meena Centre.

torture, and/or trafficking. Yet not one of them reported being treated with sensitivity to their trauma, and the impact of this on memory recall, during the substantive interview. Interviewers insisted that details were fit into a neat chronological timeline, jumping between events to create confusion, with 'inconsistencies' in dates given by ASW used to doubt their credibility.

Research participants also reported having never spoken about their experiences to anyone, and their shock at the expectation that they would disclose details of this violence in an aggressive environment, to hostile staff, through an interpreter, while under great stress, without regard for cultural barriers, the shame that can accompany sexual violence, perhaps without the vocabulary to describe an experience they had never verbalised. The Home Office does not practice its own policy which states: 'it is important not to re-traumatise the individual during the interview and to recognise the emotional impact the interview may have during, and after this meeting' (Home Office, 2018, p. 32). All research participants spoke about the substantive interview as being incredibly retraumatising, which Elean[59] described as being an expectation of a performance of trauma as the price of admission to the UK.

The substantial imbalance of power in the interview situation ruthlessly disadvantages women of colour who have very little knowledge of the system, are unexpectedly being treated as criminals, have been traumatised, and fear being returned to a place of persecution. The interrogatory techniques employed by Home Office staff reinforce the representation of asylum seeking women as dishonest, which is predicated on racist beliefs about the 'other' seeking illegal entry to the state. As a result of the Home Office's hostile interview processes and procedures successfully constructing asylum seeking women as 'suspect,' ASW are prevented from securing protection as refugees.

This is far from keeping with the Home Office's own guidance for the careful and sensitive consideration of all gender-based asylum claims (Home Office, 2018). In short, ASW are disproportionately impacted by interviews becoming increasingly 'psychologically violent,' having been at higher risk of being traumatised in their home country and on their journey to the UK. ASW face distinct challenges in the hostile asylum interview as their race, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, and nationality intersect to increase their vulnerability to

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[59] RASW research participant Elean fled Cameroon in her forties due to persecution based on her sexuality. She was an outspoken advocate for LGBT+ asylum seekers, and critical of the burden placed on RASW by the asylum system. After her most recent refusal, she decided to take the risk of the Home Office locating her to start a public campaign on the injustice of her pending forced removal.

structural violence. The chasm between the Home Office policy intention for gender-based asylum claims (ibid.) and the practise of interviewing ASW is exposed as a deep one.

Having considered the internal mechanics of the asylum interview such as the setting and interviewing officers, there are further obstacles in relation to the statutory provision of childcare and interpreters, which is often woeful and further restricts the ability to fairly access asylum. The Home Office policy guidance on Gender Issues in the Asylum Interview states that interviewers 'must not expect parents to give an account of past persecution in front of their children,' and should be flexible in rearranging the interview or provide 'childcare at or near Home Office premises' (Home Office, 2018). Only as recently as 2018 did the Home Office make a commitment to providing childcare for single parents for their substantive asylum interview in Glasgow, Liverpool, Leeds, Newcastle, Solihull, Cardiff, Hounslow, and Croydon (Right to Remain, 2018). However most research participants did not benefit from this policy change, and others described that it had not been put into practice for their interviews since 2018.

> Now I think they provide childcare, but before they didn't. She [baby] was crying for almost 2 hours, and my back was paining me, they gave me this injection for the C-section, epidural, so I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't even concentrate and I kept on standing for 10 minutes and then sitting, while I was holding her. And they were enjoying it, she was crying and I was in pain, and I didn't want to postpone it because they were gonna take more time. They just say if you need time to rest, take your time. But what time? I needed someone to take her somewhere until I finish the interview (Hiyab).[60]

The pressure of attending Home Office interviews is significantly higher for women who are pregnant or have young children attending interviews with them. Two research participants described being extremely reluctant to disclose distressing details of the violence they had suffered, primarily because their baby or young child was in the interview room with them. Sexual violence is already very unlikely to be disclosed by women during the asylum application process (Bögner, Herlihy and Brewin, 2007; Baillot, Cowan and Munro, 2012), even less so in an aggressive, dehumanising environment with their own child present.

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[60] RASW research participant Hiyab was an Eritrean woman in her early thirties who fled political persecution while pregnant with her daughter. She worked as a community interpreter for Baobab and was an outspoken critic of the unacceptable condition of asylum accommodation.

Additionally, Home Office Asylum Interviews guidance states that pregnant women should not be interviewed in the six weeks before their due date, or for at least 6 weeks after giving birth while being mindful of their health (Home Office, 2019a). They further state that discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity is prohibited under the Equality Act 2010 (ibid.). Yet again research participants spoke of the discrepancy between policy and practice, and Ruta[61] was one of a number of women who attended while heavily pregnant and overdue. She found that 'the interview, it wasn't easy, sometimes I forget, they push us a lot. All the questions they ask me, it wasn't for helping me.' Although offered breaks, Ruta found the relentless questioning particularly difficult as she was so physically uncomfortable in a hard chair and concerned that she would go into labour. Home Office staff were attempting to meet the minimum requirement for offering rest breaks while disregarding their broader policies of treating claimants with dignity and respect, at best displaying a lack of empathy and at worst committing discrimination.

The failure to make provisions for asylum seeking women who are pregnant or have young children is a type of inaction which creates further barriers to the disclosure of necessary information in the substantive interview, especially for women. As Ruta asserted however, the purpose of the interview is not to support women to make strong applications for asylum, but to perpetuate the categorisation of asylum seeking women as 'frauds' undertaking criminal activity. The misogyny and racism inherent to asylum interview practices are exposed by the failure to support women who are pregnant or have children, further damaging the prospects of a comprehensive interview and successful asylum claim.

The use of inadequate or inappropriate interpreters was a common theme that research participants drew attention to, another gendered and racialised aspect of seeking asylum. ASW spoke about the racist practice of being provided with interpreters who were deemed to speak a language or dialect 'approximate' to theirs, a lack of confidentiality, the failure to provide women interpreters, and the risk of interpreters being connected to traffickers. The Home Office are required to provide an interpreter who 'must conduct themselves in a professional and impartial manner, and respect confidentiality at all times' while following a Code of Conduct during the substantive interview (Home Office, 2019a). While the state loosely meets the requirements it is legislated to, interpreters are an aspect of the asylum system intended to support ASW through it but in fact act as another barrier to ASW securing

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[61] RASW research participant Ruta was a solo parent to one son, who had fled political persecution in Eritrea. In her twenties, she spoke about feeling very isolated and the difficulties of building a life even after leave to remain was granted. Ruta was a wonderful host who prepared a home made lunch of her favourite Eritrean dishes to share with me.

protection. As with interviewing officers, ASW have the right to request female interpreters. Half of research participants who made this request were not accommodated, which became a further barrier to disclosure (Baillot, Cowan and Munro, 2012).

Thabisa[62] was told that female Swazi interpreters were difficult to find and provided with a male Zulu speaking interpreter instead. She was unable to express her inability to understand Zulu, and certainly did not feel able to share her experiences of trafficking with a male interpreter. At best negligent, and at worst deeply racist, this practice was also experienced by four other research participants who were left feeling powerless over the huge impact this would have on their asylum claim.

> The interpreter was not good with me, she was a…harsh, I couldn't understand her language. There is dialects…I couldn't understand. At that time I didn't know I have the right to ask 'I don't want her.' I didn't have any idea, no one explains this or what is my rights. When I said, 'I don't understand,' she said, 'what do you understand.' Cursing, and raising her voice, 'I'm speaking Arabic how come you don't understand.' I start to cry, I was so scared (Nadia).[63]

Nadia was vulnerable and traumatised having experienced torture in Egypt, and caused even further distress by being dehumanised and verbally assaulted by the interpreter. Numerous ASW also shared experiences of their interpreters failing to adhere to strict confidentiality requirements. Dellina[64] was ostracised within the Eritrean asylum seeking community in Birmingham once an interpreter identified her as a survivor of sexual violence. Zala's[65] interpreter shamed her for speaking against her country, while Ina and Kesandu[66] were horrified to learn that their interpreters were connected to the trafficking community:

> There was one interpreter…she's working with the people [traffickers]… God I saw the name of the person who trafficked me, in her phone. So, the person is saying to her,

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[62] RASW research participant Thabisa was trafficked out of Eswatini in 2010.

[63] RASW research participant Nadia experienced extreme violence and political persecution in Egypt.

[64] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.

[65] RASW research participant Zala fled persecution based on her ethnic group in Ethiopia in 2015. With two young children in her mid twenties, her most recent refusal had left her homeless. She was incredibly fearful of being forcibly removed and separated from her children.

[66] RASW research participant Kesandu was trafficked from Nigeria into slavery in the UK in 2017. In her forties, she was dispersed to Dudley and felt extremely isolated, but more than anything else feared that her traffickers would locate her.

just make sure Ina is not telling the truth and the police will not find out who they [traffickers] were (Ina).[67]

Ina and Kesandu's fears of leaving their asylum accommodation or even answering the door in case their traffickers had located them were well founded. The gendered consequences of inadequate interprets can be devastating. Decision making on asylum claims and the immediate safety of ASW is impacted by the conduct of interpreters. Race, gender, language, ethnicity, and nationality intersect within the hostile environment to place ASW at the greatest risk of being adversely affected by the Home Office's intentionally poor implementation of its own policies regarding interpreters. Refusals often point to discrepancies in vocabulary or terminology to undermine applicants' credibility. The Home Office in fact relies on these discrepancies to refuse claims, failing to provide consistently suitable, appropriate, and professional interpreters to justify refusals. ASW are further silenced and disempowered, whilst the hostile environment frames these refusals as being based on credibility issues in claims made by 'crimmigrants.'

The bureaucracy of the asylum claim

Research participants highlighted a number of bureaucratic processes that both created and maintained their redefinition as 'crimmigrants,' in addition to the specific issues related to the asylum interview. The section will discuss the obtuse requirements for the submission of evidence in support of the asylum claim, the inconsistent use of country information, and the extremely long wait times for a decision. RASW described experiencing these aspects as yet more confirmation of their undesirability by the state, and as a type of punishment for seeking refuge. Research participants described this as having a disproportionately negative impact on RAS women due to the challenges of evidencing very personal gender-based violence while traumatised, the distress of being disbelieved, and the impact of long wait times on health and life choices.

Firstly, the requirements for supporting evidence. Almost all research participants had received refusals to a previous claim with the lack of evidence given as the reason, implying that claims were false and the claimants, untrustworthy. The identity of the 'crimmigrant other' is reproduced by the bureaucracy of the asylum system through its focus on credibility and

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[67] RASW research participant Ina was an Albanian woman in her early thirties who had fled sexual violence and trafficking.

demanding the demonstration of credibility. Institutional racism and sexism however act to hinder ASW from establishing the integrity of their claim for protection by creating and maintaining numerous barriers to the presentation of this evidence, as discussed above, and the inconsistent and opaque assessment of this evidence. Institutionally poor practice regarding the assessment of evidence for ASW's claims enables the asylum system to continue criminalising claimants, positioning their supposed lack of evidence as proof that they are suspicious.

The UNHCR states that 'no documentary proof as such is required in order for the authorities to recognise a refugee claim' and that it is 'important to recognise that in relation to gender-related claims, the usual types of evidence used in other refugee claims may not be as readily available' (UNHCR, 2002, p. 10). The Home Office 'Gender Issues' guidelines similarly state that 'when assessing credibility, you must consider all evidence in the round, taking into account the interaction of factors such as lack of documentary evidence, difficulties in disclosing traumatic experiences and the ability of a claimant to provide evidence of particular forms of gender-related persecution that may take place within a domestic setting' (Home Office, 2018, p. 33). There is an entire section dedicated to 'Credibility and gender issues,' and repeated reference to a separate document entitled 'Asylum Policy Instruction: Assessing credibility and refugee status' (Home Office, 2015a).

Research participants spoke about the practice of assessing credibility as being far removed from the policy commitment. The most significant issue that ASW faced in their asylum claim, and the most oft cited reason for a refusal, was that of evidence: 'you have to bring proof of this or proof of that' (Mahum).[68] In other words, RAS women's requests for protection are discredited by a supposed lack of verification as the asylum system works from a starting point of disbelieving 'crimmigrant' women. Solicitor James agreed that from the perspective of preparing a legal case for asylum, it is problematic that there exists no recognised measure of 'sufficient' evidence. Mahum was frustrated that the Home Office insisted on her providing paperwork to justify her application for protection, disregarding the realities of fleeing persecution and travelling to the UK. Aaminata[69] agreed:

> It's a bit complicated here because they will be asking you for evidence which you can't even think about, how can you think about bringing evidence? It doesn't pass through

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[68] RASW research participant Mahum was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties with 3 children.
[69] RASW research participant Aaminata was a Nigerian woman in her early thirties with a ten-month-old baby.

your mind. The only thing that you will think of is to put yourself safe, first, so you have to leave. You don't think about having all these documents for your safety. Very very difficult to be protected. You know, they give you another hard time to pass, to go through. They want evidence like proof that what you are saying is true. For example, if you have been persecuted you have to show a newspaper or pictures that you have been persecuted, something like that. Not easy to find, and when you are leaving you won't even think about those things. You run away and save your own life.

The demand for evidence is intentionally obscure in terms of the type, amount, and quality required, an ambiguity which aids the denial of asylum claims. RASW described having whatever evidence they did provide discredited by the Home Office, contributing to their experience of being criminalised and dehumanised. Hiyab[70] submitted photographs of demonstrations and articles evidencing her involvement with a political opposition group, only to be accused of fabricating the information. Blessing[71] was criticised for using information from the internet to support her claim and questioned the hypocrisy of the Home Office being able to do the same.

Secondly, the Home Office produces country policy and information notes, including legal guidance for a particular country or a particular group of people in that country. However, participants reported this information being used selectively or not at all. Ina was told, 'sorry you are not from Syria, from countries that are in war.' Upon disclosing her 'very painful' experience of FGM and fears for her daughter, Esi[72] was told that 'Ghana is a peaceful place' and that it 'is not part of the FGM, it's too small.' She questioned how accurate country information could possibly be compiled by 'experts,' as 'what goes on underground is different from what hear on the news.' Hannah[73] and Ina both battled against the Home Office telling them that Albania was a safe country: 'I don't know where Home Office is taking information... Of course, government will put wrong information because they don't want for others to know what they are doing in this situation.' The repeated insistence that RAS women's countries of

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[70] RASW research participant Hiyab was an Eritrean woman in her early thirties who fled political persecution while pregnant with her daughter.
[71] RASW research participant Blessing fled political persecution in Nigeria in 2010. A journalist and volunteer at Meena, she was a solo parent to an 8-year-old daughter, and in her forties. She spoke about living with disability and shared the eloquent poetry she has written about experiencing asylum in the UK.
[72] RASW research participant Esi was a woman in her forties who fled Ghana after experiencing persecution due to her sexuality.
[73] RASW research participant Hannah arrived in the UK 2013 with 2 small children and heavily pregnant, having fled sexual violence in Albania. She was concerned for the impact of these experiences on her children. Lively and talkative, and now in her thirties, Hannah spoke about her ambition to become a judge in family court.

origin were safe to return to simultaneously erased women's experiences of persecution and criminalised them for seeking something to which they are therefore deemed as not being entitled to. This disbelief and dismissal are both racist and sexist, making a return to persecution a reality for ASW.

Numerous RASW described being further dehumanised by blanket use of country information in silencing and denying their claims, rather than being heard as individuals with unique life histories as a feminist approach espouses. Hiyab's first claim was denied as the Home Office informed her that they believed she had left Sudan legally with a passport. Dellina[74] was scrutinised for being Eritrean but being unable to speak Tigrinya, despite having explained that she fled to Ethiopia with her father as a child to avoid persecution and therefore grew up speaking Amharic. She despaired that the Home Office 'don't understand all things,' but Mahum suspected that in fact they do not 'want to understand.' The misuse of country information is an intentional strategy by the Home Office to discredit RASW an 'illegally' claiming asylum, and thereby deny their asylum claims.

> 'Why didn't you tell, so you are a liar.' It feels… I feel… It feels so… When you know that what you are saying is the truth, you made me look like what I'm not. I just think it's a way of saying no to you, it's just the way to just say no to you. Because if they call you a liar, because you can't return what has already happened, it's there and they're recording, and it's there on the paper – this is what you said, and you are adding another when they are telling you, you are saying another thing (Esi).

Esi describes the pain of being misidentified as criminal, her own words used against her without regard for language barriers or cultural gender norms which can hinder communication, in service of 'catching out' the 'crimmigrant' woman. Like Dellina, Aster[75] was penalised because the Home Office accused her of being Ethiopian instead of Eritrean as they deemed her evidence falsified, while Elean[76] pointed out that, 'if really we are the liars, as we been told, I'm sure most of us would have gone back.' Aaminata was at a loss, asking 'what do I have to do to prove to them that what I'm saying is not a lie?' In fact, the 'credibility' of AS women's claims becomes irrelevant within a hostile environment that seeks to create, maintain, and reproduce ASW as belonging to the category of 'crimmigrant,' used to justify

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[74] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.
[75] RASW research participant Aster fled religious persecution in Eritrea.
[76] RASW research participant Elean fled Cameroon in her forties due to persecution based on her sexuality.

why they do not belong. The resultant violence is more severe for those who live at the many intersecting social forces of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, and nationality.

While demands for the provision of evidence and the inadequate use of country information are two difficult aspects of the bureaucratic process, perhaps the most difficult aspect that RASW spoke about was the long wait times in relation to decision making. The complex processes of asylum and incredibly long wait times keep RASW in what solicitor Jess[77] described as 'endless cycles of failing,' with refusals and fresh claims punctuated by periods of having financial and accommodation support withdrawn. Almost all research participants spoke about being powerless over their own life course, and 'considering the long period that you have to wait, some of us find ourselves at the end of it, not realising our dreams' (Elean). Numerous RASW expressed sadness and anger at the time they had 'lost' to the asylum system, unable to realise their ambitions of having families, careers, 'just a normal life' (Aster). A number of research participants expressed despondency and dejection at the realisation that they were at the 'mercy' of a dehumanising system that would 'let them die' (Thabisa).

In 2014, the Home Office made a commitment to reaching decisions on straightforward asylum claims within 6 months of the substantive interview, which it did for 87% of claims that year (Walsh, 2020, p. 9). By the end of 2019, this had fallen to just 20% (ibid.) and the Home Office abandoned its six month 'service standard' (Allison and Taylor, 2019). On 30th June 2020, approximately 54,000 were awaiting an decision initial decision on their asylum claim, 70% of whom had been waiting longer than six months (Walsh, 2020, p. 10). This was reflected in the experiences of research participants, none of whom had received a decision in under two years. Morgan et al found that being refused asylum was the strongest predictor of depression and anxiety in the UK, having had access to basic services restricted even further (Morgan, Melluish and Welham, 2017). The impact worsened with repeated refusals. Ria's[78] first claim was not decided on for four years, after which she restarted the entire process, while Thabisa[79] had spent a total of 14 years in the asylum system and still not been granted leave to remain.

> At the back of my mind was what's the point, I might be refused again, just be refused, refused, refused again. They don't send me anywhere, but they keep refusing. You're not going anywhere, we are not going to let you be free here, you feel like trapped (Mahum).[80]

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[77] Community ally research participant Jess had been working as an immigration solicitor for a year.
[78] RASW research participant Ria was a community advocate for Baobab.
[79] RASW research participant Thabisa was trafficked out of Eswatini in 2010.
[80] RASW research participant Mahum was from Eritrea and had 3 young children.

The misogynist culture of disbelief which is endemic in the asylum system has far reaching consequences for the lives of ASW asking for protection from persecution. It informs decisions which are made about the survival of women fleeing violence, and yet ASW are subjected to aggressive interviews with unprofessional interviewers and negligent interpreters, face institutional barriers to presenting their case, only to have the final decision resting in the hands of individuals who are part of the same hostile machinery. Research participants expressed frustration and helplessness in the knowledge that the racist and sexist system which marked them out as not belonging due to their designated 'criminality' would not make fair decisions about their applications for protection.

As a number of RAS women highlighted, without any formal regulation of what types of evidence are sufficient, decision making was dependent on individual staff members. Lizi[81] reiterated a mistrust of the system and the incomprehensible decision taken by individuals: 'their opinion, someone's opinion, you can't have control over that. I think it's just based on his opinion instead of whatever that he had in front of him. Whatever you decide, that's it.' Hiyab agreed that the system was far from robust as 'when you're telling the truth and they don't believe you and when you're lying and they do believe…' Nadia[82] was angry that instead of being afforded her 'right as a human,' her evidence of imprisonment and torture in Egypt was dismissed as a lie. She came to believe that telling the truth had little value in the asylum system when fraudulent cases are believed: 'they may have made up the case, and when it is real and it happened to you all this, they don't believe it.'

While undertaking advocacy work after being granted leave to remain, Ro[83] asked Home Office staff: 'why do you think asylum seekers are liars? The culture of disbelief, false claims, there is this idea that people's claims are false, why do you think so?' An employee quickly responded:

> He said: 'How on earth could I ask you five questions and you all get the answers right and you expect me to think this person is always telling the truth?' I was like: 'what kind of questions?' He said: 'I asked for the postcode in Africa, you give me wrong answer. I ask for your date of birth, you tell me date of birth is first of January. I ask for the date

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[81] RASW research participant Lizi fled Malawi due to persecution based on her LGBT identity. She was a campaigner and volunteer for CARAG, in her forties, and regular attendee at Coventry Peace House. Currently homeless, she spoke about missing her son in Malawi.
[82] RASW research participant Nadia experienced extreme violence and political persecution in Egypt.
[83] RASW research participant Ro fled political persecution in Uganda in 2010, now in her thirties. She spoke about the violence she experienced in the UK and hopes to work in politics.

of birth of your brother, you get it wrong. I asked for your parent's details, you get the wrong. How would you believe that the rest of the questions could be correct?'

The racialised dehumanisation that ASW suffer positions them as being incapable of making 'genuine' asylum claims, with a wilful disregard for the cultural and linguistic factors which impact their engagement with a system that is far from robust. This intentional ignorance enables the criminalisation of ASW and therefore their rejection from the state through poor decision making. Ten research participants spoke about trying to use their right of appeal against a refusal from the Home Office, a process which they found as complex and exclusionary if not more. The First-tier Tribunal decides whether to allow an appeal, which can be contested by the Home Office and taken to the Upper Tribunal. Lizi and Sachini[84] were among the RASW who described being caught in numerous cycles of 'waiting, refusal, appeal, refusal, waiting, fresh claim, waiting, refusal, appeal' (Aaminata).[85] They described these processes as inefficient, when in fact the appeals procedures expose once more the efficiency of a system that aims to reject those it deems do not belong, those women redefined as 'crimmigrants.'

Conclusion: a racist and sexist system

This chapter has explored what RASW research participants described as the sexist and racist redefinition of ASW in the UK means that rather than having their protection needs met as legal frameworks and policies dictate, they are criminalised in response to and in support of their redefinition as 'crimmigrants.' The label of 'crimmigrant' drives the exclusionary aspects of the asylum system such as access to legal aid, and aspects of the asylum interview in particular, like the hostile physical setting, aggressive interviewing staff, a failure to provide childcare, and inappropriate interpreters. The system operates from a misogynistic starting point of disbelief of the 'suspect' criminal ASW, assumed to be guilty of breaking immigration laws by seeking asylum. The bureaucratic facets of the system disproportionately impact AS women, often from the global South, as the Home Office refuses to support them in disclosing the details gender-related persecution or acknowledge the impact of trauma and the inadequacy of country information. Perhaps most dehumanising are the extended wait times,

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[84] RASW research participant Sachini worked for many years as a solicitor and human rights defender in Sri Lanka.
[85] RASW research participant Aaminata was a Nigerian woman in her early thirties with a ten-month-old baby.

during which AWS are forced to continue living as 'crimmigrants' at the margins of society, unable to move forward with their lives. While RASW spoke about the detailed difficulties they experienced with specific aspects of the system, they also critiqued the process as a whole. Aaminata eloquently stated:

> I don't know really with these people. On one hand it's racism. What I do know is it's not a good system which is really helpful. They don't care about people, they don't care about how people feel. They don't put themselves in the shoes of other people. It's their job, they have to refuse most of the cases, 90% of the cases have to be refused unless that you have really something, strong evidence. Even those people that have strong evidence, they don't believe them. You don't know really how they are working, they just copy and paste or what.

RAS women expressed a high degree of mistrust in the asylum system, which remains incomprehensible and inconsistent. The dismissal of RASW's experiences reveals the racist and sexist basis for hostility towards a group that has been deemed undesirable by the state. Research participants reported feeling unwanted as their status as asylum seeking women has been made synonymous with criminality in the UK's hostile environment. Iftin[86] asserted that 'if you're not British they just don't care, they're trying to get rid of you.' The focus of immigration status obscures 'the pain that women are suffering' as asylum seekers in the UK, rendering invisible their further trauma of living within the hostile environment as 'crimmigrants.' Iftin believed that RASW are subjected to greater scrutiny without regard for the particular harms they experience, 'they don't believe people, especially women, they don't know how they struggle in this country.'

> Sometimes they treat you like a criminal too. They treat women very unfairly. They never think about her, never ever. They just think that… a woman wants to come to the UK, she wants to see this country, there is not any other dream, which is totally wrong. A woman will never destroy her life just because of this country… suffering in this country for no reason (Iftin).

Iftin was angered that RAS women are not treated as autonomous human beings with ambitions beyond obtaining British citizenship, for which any amount of suffering should be accepted as the price of admission. As Aaminata suggested, discriminatory immigration

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[86] RASW research participant Iftin was trafficked into the UK from Pakistan in 2014 in her late twenties.

controls operate by identifying and excluding groups based on their country of origin, nationality, ethnic group, essentially by race. Ria[87] believes that the hostile environment has its origins in colonialism, whereby race and nationality determine who is to be excluded, based upon fears of the 'other.' Nadjet[88] 'didn't expect this racism' as the perception 'is this country is wonderful, but being here…they want you to leave, they make it hard.' The persistence of imperialist views is exposed by the assumption that ASW's ulterior motive is possession of a British passport.

Mahum[89] likened her first refusal to being 'banned' as a person, somehow invalidated as a human once her experience was rejected. She believed that the damage of being dehumanised is done very early in engagement with the asylum system in the UK, and even an eventual grant of asylum is 'really late' and not any kind of meaningful 'acceptance.' Mahum suggested that the redefinition as 'crimmigrant' does not alter with leave to remain. A client of solicitor Jess'[90] described feeling as though she was 'less than nothing' and 'still a slave' within the asylum system, which posits suffering as the price of legal status:

> She said, 'I feel like I'm still not worth anything.' she is an entirely broken human being and the dehumanising aspect of the Home Office's approach to her is to entrench that instead of putting in place these mechanisms to support these vulnerable people. It's almost like guilty until proven innocent, and at the point at which you're innocent, okay we'll give you the help, have some benefits, and take your time, have some employment support allowance, and go to counselling sessions, but before that point you're a liar. You're not feeling very well, it's not our problem. Stick around, then we'll sort it out.

Blessing[91] agreed that she is merely 'among those numbers that were issued these last year' and that RASW are 'seen as numbers' but 'not seen as humans.' She warned that the 'danger' of 'dwelling' on being dehumanised in innumerable ways only contributes to the work of the sexist and racist hostile environment: 'keep away from their thinking and think for yourself as a human, as an individual, do what makes you happy.' Blessing asserted that surviving the hostility of the asylum system is a priority over acceptance in the UK, believing that the latter is close to impossible. She agreed with Mahum that the redefinition of RASW as 'crimmigrants'

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[87] RASW research participant Ria was a community advocate for Baobab.
[88] RASW research participant Nadjet fled Egypt with her children. She spoke about the difficulty of adjusting to life once leave to remain has been granted.
[89] RASW research participant Mahum was from Eritrea and had 3 young children.
[90] Community ally research participant Jess had been working as an immigration solicitor for a year.
[91] RASW research participant and journalist Blessing fled political persecution in Nigeria.

is not time limited, evidenced by the ongoing bureaucracy of reapplying for leave to remain after specified periods of time: 'no matter how much you even try…they just won't accept you.' James found that his clients expected to feel that they had 'achieved something by being accepted' whereas the reality was 'more often is people who are still angry at the system, and that anger burns for a long time, as opposed to people who say to me, 'oh, I feel accepted now.'' So thoroughly racist and sexist has the construction of the 'crimmigrant' other been that a positive asylum decision does not enable them to shed the label, especially women who face greater risks of violence and even greater barriers in 'evidencing' these experiences. This focus on 'evidence' could be seen as a colonial practice, whereby the authoritative (white male from the global north) will judge the veracity of claims made by the other (woman of colour from the global south).

The UK asylum system intentionally creates, maintains, and reproduces 'asylum seeking woman' as a monolithic category of oppression and therefore violence in the name of 'security.' Attempting to criminalise the act of crossing borders and those who in engage in this action, the state has created the 'crimmigrant other,' a suspicious, deviant, law-breaker. This production of racist othering has deep historical and cultural roots based on the political project of excluding unwanted bodies of colour, giving rise to the creation of state categories, an inheritance of the coloniality of power (Carastathis *et al.*, 2018). Merging criminality and migration enables the state to identify asylum seekers as 'crimmigrants' through the asylum system, deciding who does not belong and subjecting them to punishment and violent removal from the nation. This subversion of the label 'asylum seeker' supports the political discourse of the 'threat' from racialised asylum seekers, which in turn reproduces the same political discourse.

Assumptions of danger are imbued in exclusionary practices in the UK, designed to reinforce the construction of asylum seekers as suspect, and justify their subsequent exclusion as well as the incorporation of structural violence into the British asylum system. As discussed by RASW research participants, the culture of disbelief permeates institutional practices such as aggressive interviews, unprofessional staff, and a lack of transparency in decision making, hindering ASW's ability to secure protection. The state has redefined asylum seeking women as 'crimmigrants' and embedded this definition in political discourse, policy, and practice. While the asylum policy may describe a fair and respectful approach to assessing asylum applications, research participants exposed the implementation of these policies as ensuring that the unwanted mobility of ASW is curtailed. The hostile environment is a manifestation of a system that is not broken but functioning precisely as it was intended to. So thorough and

explicit has the redefinition of the 'crimmigrant' been, that they are considered to be easily identifiable by race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, so that their bodies can then be disciplined. Once they have been redefined as 'crimmigrant' and subjected to institutional practices designed to reinforce this demarcation, asylum seeking women are subjected to racialised and gendered 'crimmigration' control measures which will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. 'Immcarceration' and the control of ASW's bodies:

'In the system, even if you are not detained, it's like a prison' (Sachini)[92]

Introduction

This chapter will discuss how the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of ASW as 'crimmigrants' outlined in the previous chapter has positioned them as necessitating management by a 'crimmigration' regime, both within and beyond the nation's borders (Franko, 2020; Stumpf, 2006). The 'crimmigrant other' has been made identifiable through their redefinition, and is then subjected to racialised immigration control procedures, which have increasingly merged with crime control measures (Stumpf, 2006; Franko, 2020). I will discuss the ways in which RASW research participants spoke about their bodies, the bodies of 'crimmigrant' women, as being made to endure punitive measures before they arrive at the UK's borders. Racialised and gendered exclusion seeks to keep migrants of colour as far from the UK as possible through the externalisation and privatisation of immigration management, using measures such as pre-entry border controls. These controls include being forced to undertake irregular travel to seek asylum, and exposure to dangerous conditions, the risk of death, and trafficking.

I will then discuss the ways in which RASW research participants described the 'crimmigration' regime as acting on the bodies of ASW at the UK border, namely the racist and misogynist physical examination of the bodies of women of colour who have been redefined as dangerous criminals. Finally, I turn to the crime control measures that ASW spoke about being subjected to once they are inside the UK's borders through the hostile environment. As undesirable bodies in white public and private spaces, 'crimmigrant' women are subjected to detention and the threat of forced removal as part of a 'system of quasi-punitive immcarceration' (Kalhan, 2010). Intended to discipline certain individuals (Foucault, 1977), 'immcarceration' policies

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[92] RASW research participant Sachini worked for many years as a solicitor and human rights defender in Sri Lanka.

normalise such punitive measures for all undesirable migrants to the UK. I will go beyond this understanding of 'immcarceration' to encompass what research participants spoke about as everyday aspects of 'crimmigration' control which limit the freedom, movement, and agency of ASW bodies in the UK. I assert that everyday 'immcarceralities' are comprised of accommodation dispersal policies, enforced destitution, home office reporting, and surveillance measures, which are concerned with controlling the spaces that 'crimmigrant' women's bodies are permitted to occupy. The bodies of the 'other' are used as sites of enforcement of state authority (Weber and Bowling, 2004), within, at, and beyond the border (Bowling and Westenra, 2018). These bodies are regulated at various sites within the nation, primarily through spatial confinement, but also through the production of fear (Franko, 2020). The suffering caused by the threat of punishment for their designated 'criminality' is intended to act as a deterrent. The first part of the chapter will consider the impact on RASW research participants of punitive measures prior to the border and at the border, and the second part of the chapter will consider their experiences of large scale and everyday 'immcarceration' within the border.

Vulnerable bodies: pre-entry border controls

Pre-entry border controls have placed increasing limitations on migration to Europe, removing many safe, legal routes to travel to the UK for the purpose of claiming asylum (Crawley 2010). Such measures have forced asylum seekers to enter the country illegally by undertaking irregular travel and riskier journeys. The 1987 Carriers' Liability Act (1987) and its extension in the 1993 Act (1993) had a significant impact on limiting who could arrive in the UK to apply for asylum, whereby carriers were fined heavily for transporting those who did not have legal documentation. Designed to reduce the number of people arriving in the UK, the harsh policies extended the duties of immigration officials to airline and shipping company staff, and impacted asylum seekers the most (Bloch 2000). A measure that highlights the privatisation and externalisation of migration management, checks are usually carried out at ports of departure as an extraterritorial control measure. Intended to act as another deterrent measure against the 'crimmigrant other' in Europe, carrier sanctions are tied to visa regimes and policing borders (Baird 2017).

This presents an obstacle to those seeking refuge by regular travel, as well as being 'harmful to international legal and human rights obligations' (ibid.), as asylum seekers who are unable to obtain a visa cannot enter the country legally. Border control regimes have strengthened,

without the will or ability to distinguish between those who require protection and other types of migrants (Crawley 2010). Worst affected are the most vulnerable asylum seekers, women and children, who are overwhelmingly people of colour. The racist policies of excluding certain bodies from entering the UK have continued to grow and expand as part of a model of commercialised global migration (Betts 2013).

The protection of vulnerable groups like women is not a priority, and in 'trying to get through to any European country' (Mahum),[93] asylum seeking women who participated in this project described the danger to their lives and personal safety, the threat of violence, and the agency that private actors in the migration industry exercised over their bodies. As border controls have become more sophisticated and widespread, refugees have been forced to rely on agents, brokers, and smugglers (Castles, Crawley et al. 2003, Papadopoulou 2004, Collyer 2005, Reynolds and Muggeridge 2008). Primarily motivated by profits, these actors are engaged in the commodified control of migration on a global level, including irregular migration (Betts, 2013b). Half of the RASW who participated in conversations spoke of brokers, always male, who they were passed between, and who exercised control over the decisions made about the geographical movement of their bodies. The state is effectively creating conditions for traffickers to thrive, as women in particular are exposed to exploitation while seeking asylum.

> We come from Libya illegal, after we out from this Mediterranean Sea, we come that way. Small plastic boat, water come like this inside, then the other side. People also fight about space. When they fight, we all fall. Still I afraid of water. Some people dead you see near to you, some people dead (Dellina).[94]

Like Dellina, numerous research participants described extremely dangerous journeys to Europe, when it seemed that death was more likely than 'miraculous' survival, and even to live meant women faced the threat of sexual violence, illness, and hunger. The Mediterranean has become a site of racial violence, border death, and vulnerability on a mass scale (Squire, 2020). Although gender-disaggregated data about those fleeing across the Mediterranean sea is very challenging to obtain, research suggests that women are increasingly attempting this journey to reach Europe as conflict, violence, and persecution escalate in their home countries (Freedman 2016). Gendered analyses indicate that women die in disproportionate numbers

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[93] RASW research participant Mahum was from Eritrea and had 3 young children.
[94] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.

at physical land and maritime borders between nations (Pickering and Cochrane 2013), in addition to the specific risks of violence faced by women (Marchand 2008). Racialised migration governance systems abandon migrating bodies to biophysical violence as they are deemed to be less than human, their death and vulnerability normalised (Squire, 2020).

> The broker tell you, you go inside [the lorry]. It was really difficult because we wanted to breathe, and they tell you like not to breathe… If someone cover it [the drum], you die inside. Not enough oxygen. All the week, they are coming and die, half die (Selat).[95]

The one-to-one conversation with RASW research participant Selat was the shortest as she became distressed when remembering the nightmarish journey out of Calais. Two thirds of participants spoke about coming to the UK via the Calais Jungle in France, none of whom had a choice of destination. Their existence in Calais was one of extreme restriction, both in the marginal physical space they occupied in the camp and their access to basic essentials. Women described the immense fear they felt on repeated attempts to travel via lorry as instructed by brokers, without knowledge of their destination: 'It's quite hard, it's not your choice as well, it's all controlled by someone' (Mahum). Two ASW were placed in very cold refrigerator trucks, while one participant found herself in a truck carrying dangerous chemicals, and another was discovered after her companion went into labour while hiding in the back of the lorry.

The externalisation of migration control by the UK contributes to the proliferation of the global migration industry, within which RASW of colour are at greater risk of experiencing violence and death before reaching the UK, their bodies subjected to movement over which they have little control. The racist and sexist violence committed against women's unwanted migrating bodies even before they reach the UK has become the price of potentially reaching safer shores.

'Crimmigrant' women's bodies at the border

The externalisation of migration control is not a new phenomenon, and nor is the extent of its impact of women who experience discrimination because of their gender, race, ethnicity, language, and/or nationality. The immigrant woman's body has historically been marked and

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[95] RASW research participant Selat was a woman in her thirties who had fled religious persecution in Eritrea. She was recently given 5 years leave to remain.

controlled in myriad ways, believed to be the source of accuracy while the 'crimmigrant' is assumed to be untruthful (Franko, 2020). One example is the revelation in 1979 that throughout the 1960's and 70's, South Asian women had been subjected to gynaecological examinations by immigration control staff in the UK and at British High Commissions in South Asia, so-called virginity tests (Smith and Marmo 2014). Forced gynaecological examinations were undertaken from the 1860's onwards in Britain's colonies to ensure the sexual purity of sex workers and lower caste women so that their bodies could be deemed of use to the Empire.

As with the present-day hostile environment, these women were dehumanised as inferior bodies that may serve the Empire. The credibility and trustworthiness of South Asian women became tied to their virginity, the truth of which could only be located in their bodies, as judged by white male medical personnel. The long-formed sexist and racist Victorian ideas permeated later immigration policies and practices (Smith and Marmo 2014), enacted in the regulation of the bodies of women of colour.

> Legal and medical scrutiny was essential to form a judgement of the veracity of the applicant. And this scrutiny was based on traditional societal and medical stereotypes of moral and sexual expectations held by British society about Indian subcontinent fiancées. These women were seen by the immigration authorities as bodies to be 'consumed' by other men, for sex, marriage and domestic duties (Smith and Marmo 2014).

An intrusive physical examination of South Asian women's hymens at the border of the state was posited as the price for being granted the 'privilege' of entry to Britain, which sought to protect itself from the racialised 'other.' The evidence gathered from her body was the only evidence believed to be valid, as the racist and sexist colonial construction of the South Asian woman's untrustworthiness was positioned as a threat to 'whiteness' (Smith and Marmo 2014). It is easy to see a progression along a continuum of dehumainsing women of colour from Empire to the current disbelief of asylum seeking women and the immediate suspicion they face from the Home Office, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Historically, gender, race, nationality, age, and socio-economic status have been markers used by UK immigration to determine who is a 'threat' to the state and must not be granted access to it. When the controversy broke, the British government sought to deny abuses of the human rights of South Asian women and normalise medical examinations, including the

use of x-rays in South Asia to determine age (Smith and Marmo 2014). The Home Office in fact resisted investigations into their sexist and racist immigration control practises, stating that 'discrimination was necessary to ensure the effective control of immigration' (ibid.).

The virginity testing South Asian women were subjected to is an especially revealing example of the colonial construction of racialised women seeking entry to the UK as untrustworthy, their bodies unwanted. The continual redefinition of the 'other' entering the UK is a prominent feature of its immigration policy, recreated and maintained in accordance with who, and in what context, the state is working to exclude. From South Asian women marked as a threat to the health of the white male in the 1970's,[96] to the present-day construction of asylum seeking women as untrustworthy 'criminals,' a common feature of redefining women of colour in particular as an outsider, is her supposedly intrinsic ability to lie, that the truth can only be known from her body as judged by an agent of the state. The 'crimmigrant' woman's body is redefined as inherently dangerous and used as a site for the exercise of state sovereignty.

While the exposure of these practices was met with shock, this treatment of 'crimmigrant' women's bodies is not a relic of the past. Having circumnavigated pre-entry controls with false travel documents in 2013, the only option available to escape sexual slavery, RASW research participant Hannah[97] and her children were stopped at Heathrow airport upon disembarking. Nine months pregnant, Hannah was threatened with immediate removal when she attempted to explain that she was unwell and in pain, only for the police officers to tell her that they did not believe her to be in pain or heavily pregnant.

> I feel so shy when I was in airport, the police, they tried to check me. They take off my clothes and they say okay let us see if you are… They take all the clothes and they put me on the ground, on the floor, not even a blanket. They say to me, sit down, just let us see. They wanted to see me, I don't know what they wanted to see, because baby was not coming on that time. I was nine months, but baby was not coming but maybe they thought I had something in my tummy, I don't know. They just take me off my clothes, everything, and they say just sit. It was lady and man together… My daughter was with me in the same room. It was not room, it was waiting area, they just put some

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[96] Smith and Marmo (2014) discuss the Immigration Act 1971 clause about the use of medical examinations to guard against migrants who could endanger the health of the local population (Smith and Marmo, 2014, p.103). Virginity clearly does not fall into this category, and so the Home Secretary's use of this clause as justification for testing is insufficient. It points instead to the racist abuse directed at the bodies of women of colour in an attempt to exclude them from the nation, and maintain racial segregation.

[97] RASW research participant Hannah fled sexual violence in Albania with her children.

jumper not to see me. The policewoman off my clothes and open my legs and just tried to see. I don't know what they wanted to see.

Fearful and exhausted, Hannah was subjected to an unlawful and undignified search of her body because she did not present the correct documents. She spoke in great detail of the distress that was caused to her by this dehumanising inspection of her body, witnessed by her small children, with an unknown male present, and while in physical pain. Hannah described being unable to prioritise her competing thoughts for the safety of her children and her pregnancy, the gendered abuse of her body, and the overwhelming fear of being returned to the sexual violence she was trying to escape.

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 states that a strip search 'may only take place if it is considered necessary to remove an article which a detainee would not be allowed to keep' and should take place where 'they cannot be seen by anyone who does not need to be present, nor by a member of the opposite sex' (Home Office, 2016). Furthermore, the search must be conducted with 'regard to the sensitivity and vulnerability of the detainee' (ibid.). Hannah was not given the grounds for the search, its purpose, or the identity of the officers, and was clearly subjected to an invasive examination of her body due to her race, nationality, and gender. Before any contact with the Home Office, border guards such as airport staff acted from a starting point of disbelief and treated Hannah as a threat that must be defended against. They diminished her bodily autonomy, assuming the privilege of access to her body to assess its truth.

As Hannah attempted to request asylum, one such airport official told her: 'it's not the first time I'm hearing these words. Every single woman, when we ask, they say the same thing, so it's not the first time I'm hearing that one, just stop playing and making excuse.' Again, Hannah was reduced to being yet another untrustworthy woman. Staff called three different doctors in an attempt to find one who would certify her as fit to fly on the next available flight back to the country she had fled, so certain were they that she was not deserving of refuge in the UK and that her body must be removed. Hannah described hearing the doctors 'argue' with police, asserting that they were responsible for her welfare and would not facilitate her immediate removal. Having confirmed that she was heavily pregnant and concerned about her level of pain, the doctor advised she be sent to hospital, when one of the police officers said: 'she just came now, when she came she was pregnant so if we send her back nothing will happen.' There was an urgency to remove a woman and her children, without any regard for their humanity, facilitated by a culture and history of disciplining and regulating the bodies of the

'crimmigrant other,' namely women like Hannah who are more vulnerable to sexual violence and fleeing with dependent children.

As has always been the purpose of immigration controls, all migrants of colour are categorised as not belonging to the state and met with increasingly aggressive measures at the border, especially women of colour as identified by their bodies. Agamben's biopolitical concept of the unprotected body is useful to understanding the abandonment of asylum seeking women as they are reduced to 'bare life.' The hostile environment has so successfully acted as a mechanism of redefinition and of the control of bodies as seen above, that stories of vulnerable women being subjected to assault by agents of the state are not uncommon. Upon arrival at Heathrow Airport, Nadia[98] was also subjected to a 'disgusting' body search by 'a man and a woman' who did not identify themselves. Having fled torture in Egypt, Nadia spoke about being too afraid to breathe as she had no control over what was happening to her body or by who.

These utterly dehumanising experiences expose the expansion of immigration controls beyond Home Office officials to airport staff and medical professionals, who are not trained immigration staff, which disproportionately impacts women. The regulation of women's bodies as a tool to exclude them from white spaces, whether territorial or imagined nationhood, has a strong continuity over the UK's history of immigration. Increasingly, this exclusion is also being enacted by other citizens. The violence enacted upon women's bodies at the border serves to inscribe state power, and in fact the border (Mountz and Hyndman, 2006), on those bodies as a clear marker of who does not belong. Namely, the bodies of women of colour.

'Immcarceration' inside the UK: detention and forced removal

The enforcement of the racialised 'crimmigration' regime, which has merged crime control and immigration measures, is undertaken through practices of 'immcarceration.' This section will discuss the practices of 'immcarceration' that seek to remove 'crimmigrant' women's bodies from society and from the country, through detention and forced removal. RASW research participants spoke of these 'deterrent' measures as some of the most traumatic things they experienced. These direct measures are very literal practices of displacing bodies of colour from white spaces, before removing them altogether. Large scale 'immcarceration,' like immigration detention, is part of the lucrative industry which creates these spaces as having

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[98] RASW research participant Nadia experienced extreme violence and political persecution in Egypt.

'a distinctly punitive and criminal character' (Bowling, 2013). They are a means to achieving exclusion, deportation, and deterrence through state institutions.

The policy reasons given for immigration detention are to mitigate the 'perceived risk of people absconding or being a danger to the public, uncertainty over identity, the facilitation of the resolution of immigration claims, or removal from the country' (Griffiths, 2015). This punitive exertion of state authority against certain non-citizens was consolidated by the 1971 Immigration Act (*1971 Immigration Act*, 1971), and further expanded by the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act (*1999 Asylum and Immigration Act,* 1999). In the year ending March 2020, 23,075 people were taken into immigration detention (Home Office, 2020). Over half of detainees had claimed asylum, and without a statutory upper time limit for the period that an individual can be held in immigration detention, approximately one third were held for longer than 28 days (ibid.).

As one of the few countries that can hold asylum seekers in detention indefinitely, the UK has one of the largest detention estates in Europe, and individuals rarely know how long they will be held there (BMA, 2017). RASW research participants certainly did not know how long they would be detained, which added to the trauma they experienced for what they described as punishment for seeking asylum. Even people imprisoned for serious crimes cannot be held indefinitely, indicating the state's priority of detaining the 'crimmigrant other.' Home Office data does not enable tracking of release and re-detention, nor does it provide statistics for which policy grounds detainees are held on, or whether they are then removed from the UK.

> [T]he production of illegality is strongly connected to the production of deportability. The crimmigrant other is both punishable and deportable. The state will often choose both avenues, or may choose deportation with punitive intentions (Franko, 2020, p. 37).

In reality, detention is another mechanism of the 'crimmigration' control system (Bowling, 2013, p. 292), whereby the state asserts it's ability and desire to control the bodies of irregular migrants (Marfleet, 2006) in the name of security. The increased use of detention for 'administrative purposes' has continued to rise, utilised against applicants at any point of their immigration claim (Griffiths, 2015). Rather than a mechanism of bureaucracy, research participants who had experienced detention, or the remainder who lived with the threat of detention, believed it to be a form of punishment which dehumanised and depersonalised them, causing physical and psychological harm. Two RASW chose to speak about their

experiences of detention for this project, including Sachini[99] who was detained after her screening interview.

> I had to be in detention for seven months. Seven months. I didn't have the strength to fight this battle, I didn't have the strength. My mind is completely… I was completely broken so I just…detention is another trauma. It made it worse. So many sad things in detention… I felt so depressed, so intimidated, it's a condemnation. I think they want to separate genuine people from the… Every government, all systems have their own strategies. It's a strategy. Strategies have a lot of consequences (Sachini).

It was necessary to pause the one-to-one conversation during this part of the discussion as Sachini spoke about detention as having permanently changed her, and living with a constant fear that she could be returned there, severely damaging her mental health. Sachini was deeply traumatised by her experiences, and understood detention to be a judgement on her, a denunciation of her humanity in service of, and as a result of, her redefinition as a criminal. Having become socially integrated with deep community ties, Sachini experienced 'immcarceration' as a punishment. From the descriptions that Sachini and Nadia gave, detention centres certainly look and operate like prisons, where movement and space are regulated to the extreme:

> Every room is only 2 m, always the sound of the door closing, you move, door close, door close [locking sounds]. The only thing I hate is the doors…every time close after you, close after you, loud. I used to dream about these things. In the prison they have different levels, so blue level is for the single and the families, so they put cards, card with a different colour. So for us was blue. In the night, every time when they pass they see people sleeping, every 2 m its always doors [noises]. In the room there is a toilet and…shower, but the door is open. I didn't expect…it was shock. The first blue card is you be alone, you not meeting anyone, but then now they change it to purple so the purple card is 'can be with Arab people.' Everywhere is camera, the only thing in the room they don't have, but everywhere you go is camera (Nadia).

Nadia also described how she believed it was not possible to recover from the experience of detention, and still struggled with the sound of doors banging in close proximity to her. Within the carceral space of the detention centre, women's bodies are subjected to further spatial

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[99] RASW research participant Sachini worked for many years as a solicitor and human rights defender in Sri Lanka.

regulation. There are constant reminders that detainees do not have the right to freedom of movement, with no time limit on this punitive experience, and additional distance placed between them and legal representation. RASW research participants believed the impact of detention was far more severe for women, as they were moved into evermore restrictive spaces where the power dynamic became evermore stacked against them.

Nadia and Sachini both described the disconnect between the daily management of their 'immcarceration' by private actors like G4S and Serco, and the off-site decision-making by immigration agents that determined their future. Nadia spoke about a particular room, 'the room where they give you the decision from the Home Office…on the phone, you don't see the interviewer in detention, you don't see the person.' This room became associated with fear, as ASW were informed about their removal from the country without any direct contact with the Home Office. The government has created 'distance between a decision and its consequences' which puts these decisions 'beyond the reach of moral impulse' (Bowling and Westenra, 2020), and reinforces the recipient of the decision as less than human.

> This Serco officer, this man, guards, that man got angry with me because they have all the power. We are like, we are like things, like material. He… Well… He… I don't know, very very very very…intimidating. He suddenly took my telephone because he thought I would record it [violent incident]. I didn't have any strength to record. This is how they do (Sachini).

Sachini feared violence as the norm rather than an exceptional event in detention, and believed that staff were clearly demarcated as fulfilling a 'prison guard' function. Unlike the criminal justice system which positions incarceration as a site of reform and rehabilitation resulting in eventual inclusion in society (Aas, 2013), 'crimmigration' control seeks exclusion and expulsion (Aas, 2013; Bosworth, Franko and Pickering, 2018). Transformed into criminal threats, asylum seekers' bodies are subject to control in the carceral space without prioritising their wellbeing.

Sachini described systemic abuse in these 'traumatic' centres, with the consequences including severe physical health harms, and even death. On her third day in detention, she witnessed another asylum seeking woman die, either because 'didn't get the proper treatment for something' or 'she commit suicide.' She described the inhumane treatment of incarceration as worse than the care given to 'livestock', which is deemed to be of value and therefore afforded healthcare, while in detention: 'many women have a lot of illnesses, but they don't

give proper medicine, proper tests. They don't take care of us. We are just… They just want to push us out, get rid of these people.' While Nadia was very aware of the constant monitoring via cameras, she survived for her first two weeks on water and fruit alone as no one provided her with information about mealtimes. Made explicit in the carceral space of the detention centre is that the woman of colour's body is of no value.

Nadia was placed in handcuffs at the airport and taken immediately to detention, with no knowledge of what was happening to her. Extreme distress at being treated like a suspect individual gave way to Nadia becoming severely depressed and suicidal while in detention. It is well known how negatively detention impacts the mental health of asylum seekers, deteriorating further the longer that detention lasts (Priebe, Giacco and El-Nagib, 2016; Werthern *et al.*, 2018).

Use of the practice continues as a warning to deter new arrivals as well as creating fear among unwanted populations, a public performance of securing borders (Leerkes and Broeders, 2010). The objectification of asylum seeking women serves to position the violence of detention as an unavoidable consequence of their designated criminality. As Sachini points out, the strategy of detaining vulnerable asylum seeking women is understood to subject detainees to severe harm, but has been constructed as a proportionate response which detainees are deserving of. Disempowered and dehumanised, ASW in detention have harm inflicted upon them by the state as punishment, causing additional trauma to a population who is already more likely to have experienced gender-related persecution and sexual violence. This is also achieved through the threat of forced removal, another mechanism of the 'crimmigration' regime whereby the state again enacts its power on the unwanted bodies of 'crimmigrant' women by demonstrating the ability to remove them from spaces within its borders.

The threat of 'administrative removal' is another dehumanising and disempowering practice of 'immcarceration,' whereby a non-citizen can be removed from a jurisdiction and prevented from returning. The Home Office will enforce the removal of those whose application for leave to remain has been refused or has expired, by commercial airline or private charter flight. Removal orders are a more extensive method of control over refugees and asylum seekers, seeking to permanently expel the bodies of undesirable migrants. In the year ending March 2020, 6,778 asylum seekers were removed (Home Office, 2020). The Home Office reports that there were 10,421 voluntary returns in the same period. When asked if she believed this figure to be accurate, solicitor Jess responded: 'voluntary return…absolutely not, and those

that do [take it] quite often have been duped into it: 'I didn't understand what the papers said.'' So little humanity is afforded to ASW that it is not an uncommon experience for them to unknowingly be deceived into another carceral space.

Iftin[100] was asked to attend the reporting centre and believed that this was her substantive interview. After several hours she was shocked to realise that staff were trying to enforce her removal, and only after insisting that she speak to her solicitor was Iftin permitted to leave the building. Her solicitor confirmed that 'they were trying to send you back, that's why they were doing this,' referring to a well-known practice of calling asylum seekers to report unexpectedly at Solihull, without legal advice, before presenting them with voluntary return paperwork. With very little information being provided to asylum seekers, the coercive technique relies on vulnerable asylum seekers being unable to advocate for themselves in a harsh and hostile atmosphere.

The reporting centre becomes a quasi-carceral space operating to enforce the movement of 'crimmigrant' bodies into more exclusionary spaces like detention centres. This has potentially dangerous consequences for ASW who may not speak English, may face cultural barriers in speaking up as women, or are traumatised by gender-related violence into being subservient to authority figures. Predicated on the misogynistic disbelief of women, these practices disregard the reasons that ASW have fled.

> [I]f we do that to them maybe they will go back, maybe they will change their minds, because in every refusal they put voluntarily return. If you want to return, they will give you this, something like that but will you return where you know that when you came from is not good for you? No, you won't! You will try to stay here even if you have to hide, you will have to stay here until you can get something that will help (Aaminata).[101]

One aim of the hostile environment is to dehumanise and punish asylum seekers to the point that they will 'choose' to leave the country, motivated in part by the average cost of a voluntary return being £1,000 in comparison to £15,000 for an enforced return. Voluntary returns have fallen sharply since 2015 (Home Office, 2020), another indicator that the hostile environment is failing in it's aims. Certainly with regards to asylum seeking women, as in the period 2010–

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[100] RASW research participant Iftin was trafficked into the UK from Pakistan in 2014 in her late twenties.
[101] RASW research participant Aaminata was a Nigerian woman in her early thirties with a ten-month-old baby.

2019, most returnees were male (71% to 74% each year) (Home Office, 2020). Research participants spoke about the numerous times they were advised to take voluntary return at various points during their claim, based on an assumption that their claims for asylum were not genuine and therefore disregarding the threat to safety ASW would face upon their return. The Home Office persistently asked Hannah[102] to arrange a date to return voluntarily, applying pressure when she was caught in cycles of refusals and waiting to submit a fresh claim. These practices expose the urgency with which the Home Office prioritises removing the 'crimmigrant' woman's body from society, into 'immcarceral' spaces and eventually beyond the border. Nadia[103] experienced this urgency during the first attempt to remove her, from the detention centre.

> That day they came, when they took me, the man…came to take me…man was very tall…and big, very tall. Before that, they told me, some of my friends, they can give you injection so they take you, don't take any tablets if they give you, maybe you will faint. Always there is this rumours, because they do this when you refuse to go, they give you something, they inject you so they take you force. They was telling me this and when I saw him, I was so scared I fainted. One is holding me here, the other was holding me here [underarms]. From the room they take me, forcibly they took me from the room. I was shouting, 'I don't want to go back! I don't want to go back! Why you do this!'

Nadia experienced extreme distress during the violent aggressive attempt to transport her to the airport, compounded by fears that she would be drugged. The second attempt to remove her was made two weeks later when Nadia was told: 'you are not going to cancel this time, we will take you.' On this occasion Nadia experienced further violence from staff who tried to restrain her:

> What did I do, so why you turning me back, if I go there I'm dead so kill me here if you want to. The room is full of officers and they start holding me, putting me… Because of this, even now my hand is not good, it's numb, damage my nerve and still am not able to feel, sometimes I cannot hold properly. They hold very tight. The other one is holding me like this [arm twisted behind back] and she took me like this…walking me out like this [forced into hunch forward]. They took off my hijab, filming me. They took me different detention, no one even this place they know, it's very alone, different

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[102] RASW research participant Hannah fled sexual violence in Albania with her children.
[103] RASW research participant Nadia experienced extreme violence and political persecution in Egypt.

detention. The room was different, even the bed, there was no mattress, only frame, and the toilet is open [no door]. Ten hours they put me in this, with my hand like this. I just shout and scream and shout and cry. That day remind me… Even in that room they left me, they lie me down, and every 10 hours they coming out, and that reminded me exactly what happened in Egypt.

Nadia was left with permanent damage to her arm, and significantly more trauma. She was returned to detention 'screaming' and 'so scared' without any clear understanding of what was happening to her. So thorough is the racialised dehumanisation of 'crimmigrant' women that they can be subjected to extreme violence through 'immcarceration' that is justified as being necessary to protect the nation. Such violence enacts punishment on the bodies that are assumed to have committed immigration crimes by seeking asylum, are deemed to be of less value than white citizens and should be expelled from the state at all costs – especially women of colour who are believed to be inherently untrustworthy. Forced removal also involves the production of fear, punishing unwanted populations while also reminding asylum seekers within and outside the border what they could be subjected to (Franko, 2020). These forms of large-scale 'immcarceration' were not the only practices of spatial and bodily control that RASW described experiencing. Smaller-scale 'immcarceralities' emerged, which will be discussed in the next section.

Everyday 'immcarceration:' dispersal, destitution, reporting, and surveillance

I will now explore the more insidious forms of control over the bodies of criminalised RASW discussed by research participants, through what I will refer to as everyday 'immcarceration.' Practices of everyday bordering have established alternative sites as carceral spaces in everyday life, enabled by the hostile environment's use of citizens as agents of immigration enforcement. Non-state actors contribute to the everyday carceralities experienced by RASW, from landlords to medical professionals. The state manages the movement of RASW to the extent that they are left with almost no space to occupy, forced to live in non-space as a kind of 'immcarceration.' These unprotected bodies are pushed even further into the very margins of society and out of visibility, though policies of dispersal, destitution, Home Office reporting, and surveillance measures. Patriarchal and racist institutions ensure that the bodies of women of colour are pushed the furthest into invisibility, which an intersectional approach seeks to address in this project.

The 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts (*Immigration Act 2016*, 2016; *Immigration Act 2014*, 2014) vigorously sought to produce deterrence, discomfort, and hostility (Gammeltoft-Hansen, Thomas 2014a; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Hathaway, 2014; Lewis, Waite and Hodkinson, 2017; Kent, Norman, and Tennis, 2020) through 'everyday bordering' practices (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss et al. 2018). These 'bordering and ordering' practices 'create and recreate new social-cultural boundaries and borders which are also spatial in nature' (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss et al. 2018). The 2014 Immigration Act expanded bordering practices further into everyday lives by extending who could carry out border-guard roles, such as hospitals, the DVLA, and private landlords (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss et al. 2018). Conducting 'citizen on citizen' (Yeo 2018) immigration checks, private citizens and public servants potentially face criminal charges if they fail to report someone they suspect of being in the country illegally. Canning points out that legislation and social policy in the UK have recently become increasingly 'insidious and less visible than the physical barriers set against those fleeing persecution, conflict and poverty' (Canning 2017). This section will explore a number of these forms of everyday bordering and their enactment as constituting everyday 'immcarceration,' beginning with accommodation dispersal policies.

> You not allowed to go to different city, they put you wherever they want to put you (Hiyab).[104]

Hiyab is describing dispersal as another Home Office practice of objectification. Under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (*1999 Asylum and Immigration Act* 1999), the Home Office began moving destitute asylum seekers to areas across the UK, supposedly to alleviate pressure on local authorities in London and the South East. The availability of temporary housing increasingly drove the choice of dispersal locations (Stewart, 2012; Bloch and Solomos, 2010), resulting in asylum seekers being housed in areas of social and economic deprivation (Anie *et al.*, 2005; Bloch and Solomos, 2010) where they experienced discrimination and resentment (Spicer, 2008).

The institutionalisation of forced dispersal and no-choice accommodation altered the geography of asylum seeker settlement, as they were placed in areas with limited infrastructure and high levels of social exclusion (Bloch and Solomos, 2010). Without access to social networks and supportive communities (Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona, 2005), RAS have been subjected to harassment and racism in high concentration 'ghettos' (Bloch and Solomos,

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[104] RASW research participant Hiyab was an Eritrean woman in her early thirties who fled political persecution while pregnant with her daughter.

2010). The violence of dispersal policies is gendered, as RASW research participants highlighted that the impact on women is significant. Already more vulnerable to exploitation due to their uncertain legal status, AS women are hindered from forming long-term relationships, or even meeting others who speak the same first language. Research participants described feeling unsafe as women as well as people of colour, particularly those who had experienced sexual violence. This fear is well founded as the latest statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) highlight that in the year ending March 2021, 92% of women were killed by men in England and Wales (ONS, 2022). In the same period, the highest number of sexual offences ever recorded within a 12-month period was reported (ibid.). RASW are often women of colour from the global south, living at numerous intersections of violence which participants described as being worsened by geographical isolation.

Dispersal operates within the restrictive immigration regime as 'a mechanism of exclusion' (Stewart, 2012), also designed to deter asylum seekers who may hope to join family or friends (Morris, 2002; Schuster, 2005). Autonomy and agency are denied in relocating the 'crimmigrant' woman's body to spaces where RASW are unlikely to have personal relationships or access to opportunities that arise from contact with others. This enforced mobility maintains the state's control over the 'crimmigrant' woman's body (as well as her dependent children) and which spaces it is permitted to enter, worsened by seemingly arbitrary repeat dispersals between areas of deprivation. The compulsory movement is itself a form of incarceration as RASW have little control over the geographical spaces they occupy, as they are forced to exist in non-spaces.

> Because I've lived everywhere, this is one of the everywheres. It does feel like that. Even being here in the UK, I lived in more than 10 places from West Sussex, Birmingham, and I moved to Cardiff. So I'm not settled to feel like this is home, and I never hold a home for me. One day, when I'm settled, and my kids are in one place, in one house, I'm living in coming in the same place, same neighbours, you see every day, and then you will feel like that your home. But for me it's not yet happened (Mahum).[105]

This exemplifies the hostile environment's aim of making life as difficult as possible for RAS in the UK, let alone a home. Research participants described repeatedly being moved around the country as a commonplace practice of everyday 'immcarcerality,' as though they were

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[105] RASW research participant Mahum was from Eritrea and had 3 young children.

commodities not humans. RASW like Lizi[106] and Hiyab were told they would be relocated after more than 4 years in the same city, which would serve to isolate and exclude them from important relationships and communities they had developed, as well as hinder access to their legal representative, and feeling 'safe.'. Blessing[107] pointed out that repeated dispersal impacted her daughter's access to education, but also their ability to access support through charity and faith-based organisations.

Research participants spoke about many dispersal areas abeing much less likely than large cities like Birmingham and Manchester to have local charity groups set up to support asylum seekers and refugees with legal assistance, housing advice, advocacy for healthcare, or even the provision of safe communal spaces for RAS to meet. RAS women research participants who were dispersed out of areas where they had found allies and friends were cut off from support that had been essential to their daily survival as well as their asylum claims. Dispersal away from these resources further limited and reduced the spaces in which ASW felt safe and 'human,' leaving them restricted to the physical space of their substandard asylum housing.

As dehumanised 'pieces' moved from one undesirable geographical location to another, RASW spoke about dispersal policies reminding them that they are not 'free' to move within the state as they wish but restricted to certain spaces as designated by far removed decision makers. Enforced relocation seeks to deny racialised 'crimmigrant others' the agency to develop and maintain a place in society, reinforcing that while they are not in detention, they are still subject to 'immcarceralities,' and their lives are still severely limited as non-citizens who are deemed deserving of exclusion. RAS women research participants reported feeling 'unsafe' and 'unwanted' in their predominantly white local communities in areas with very little racial or ethnic diversity. Research participants reported harassment, abuse, and racism in the locality of their dispersal accommodation, reflective of growing anti-migrant sentiment in public and political debate over the last decade. The racism that Ruta[108] experienced meant that for her the UK 'doesn't feel home, but I have to live.' She described the double bind of race and immigration status which marked her as unwanted:

> To be honest, I don't feel that belong to community because especially where I used to live before, it was not a lot of black people in that area and they used to throw eggs and throw glass, anything, so is very hard. Middlesborough…don't like black people

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[106] RASW research participant Lizi fled Malawi due to persecution based on her LGBT identity.
[107] RASW research participant and journalist Blessing fled political persecution in Nigeria.
[108] RASW research participant Ruta was a solo parent to one son, who had fled political persecution in Eritrea.

and the other thing is they don't like asylum seeker…they don't want us as asylum seekers. They don't want anyone to come to their country and live. The way they see you… a lot of people they are not nice to you. Maybe sometimes because of the colour you have, the clothes… (Ruta).

Esi[109] was distressed when describing the harassment she experienced from residents of the surrounding streets of her asylum housing, who would regularly 'bring rubbish from their houses and come and dump it in front of ours' as they knew 'this asylum seeker live there.' The perpetrators were usually white men, and Esi was in no doubt as to their motivation: 'it's racism, this is racism. He's really shown it. There's a lot of racism in the UK, there's a lot, there's a lot in the UK, there's a lot. And they pretend, when you see them, you know. It's a lot going on.' G4S were unwilling to assist Esi in tackling the racist abuse or in moving her to a safer location, so the only spaces she occupied were ones where she was dehumanised, even her home. These experiences of racism are also gendered, as all RASW research participants who spoke about racist experiences described the perpetrators as white men. The regulation of RASW's bodies and movement in white spaces is restricted to the point that they are incarcerated within the pseudo-prison of their accommodation, in an hostile geographical location that was not of their choosing. These 'immcarceralities' are both physical and mental, racist and sexist, as RASW like Ruta and Esi have much of their psychological space taken up with experiences of racism and isolation.

The second type of everyday 'immcarcerality' that research participants spoke about is closely linked to dispersal policies: the policy of enforced destitution. This is a state of extreme poverty, without accommodation, income, or any means of support, inflicted on asylum seekers by the state. Poverty as a form of harm 'causes more deaths, diseases, suffering and misery than any other social phenomena' (Gordon, 2004, p. 251). This kind of deprivation includes not only the inability to obtain sufficient food and housing, but also excludes sufferers from the activities and roles they may otherwise partake in. Even those who are granted leave to remain will have asylum support suspended after 28 days, although though research participants reported that it takes much longer than this to secure housing, benefits, or work. This practice of 'immcarcerality' forces RASW into extremely marginal spaces where they are at greater risk of exploitation and poor health as women, without housing or access to food, potentially with dependent children, and further removed from social relationships.

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[109] RASW research participant Esi was a woman in her forties who fled Ghana after experiencing persecution due to her sexuality.

> For asylum seekers, you're only accorded basic human rights: health care, shelter, and food. If you are denied asylum, your basic human rights are removed. You are kicked out of the house, you are not supposed to fall sick, health is denied, even the 5 pounds given to you for food is stopped. You end up sleeping rough on the streets or maybe some friends can give you accommodation (Ro).[110]

Asylum seekers are denied full humanity as they are redefined as being criminals undeserving of the necessities of everyday life. Their access to their basic human rights are conditional and fleeting. 'Proving' destitution is the measure for the receipt of support from the Home Office, and while a claim is being considered asylum seekers can apply for support under Section 98 (emergency support such as temporary housing), Section 95 (ongoing support made up of housing and £37.75 per week for each person, or Section 4 (support for those made destitute after a refused claim and waiting to submit a fresh claim). Even while in receipt support, asylum seekers experience poverty as the level of support provided is still too low to meet basic needs. The risk of destitution exists at several points of the asylum process but is highest when the applicant has been refused and cannot return to their home country. The Home Office withdraws all support and does not allow employment or access to emergency homelessness services. Yet another measure of deterrence, destitution is an intentional measure taken by the Home Office as a kind of punishment against the racialised 'crimmigrant other.'

Esi explained that it was quite common for women who had been made homeless and destitute to get 'sick, abused, even exploited, during this time. I don't have money, a man can say 'oh I will help you…' and they will not…if you don't think well and keep yourself safe.' She believed that the Home Office 'are pushing us out to be used' as another form of punishment for refusing to 'go home.' Lizi agreed that 'the other thing about living in destitution is about the exploitation, sometimes because you have to survive, you have to find food' and so women are forced into sex work to survive. Dellina[111] was one of ten research participants who spoke about being sexually exploited while homeless and destitute. After being evicted in a dispersal city where she knew no-one, she was approached by a man who offered her accommodation:

> He told me 'you can live here, you can do this.' After, he want relation for me, I see too much things, he want different… Without my…I don't want but… No choice really, cold in outside, no charity, but after that is problem when I come, he say 'you don't go

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[110] RASW research participant Ro fled political persecution in Uganda in 2010.
[111] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.

anywhere.' He called me bad words. Always I cry. I compare from the other, my life. Here also people push me this, people do why.

Having suffered extreme violence in Libya, Dellina compared the similarities in how she was dehumanised, objectified, and marked as being violable in the UK too. Her abuser threatened her life but she feared seeking support should the Home Office locate and deport her. Dellina was clear about the cause of her vulnerability: 'no safety in this country, why, why? Because Home Office out me.' Her eviction exposed her to this violence from someone who knew she was isolated and alone. As a result of these experiences, Dellina described being preoccupied with fears of being made homeless again:

> I'm thinking about house always, because I see problems here also, people not okay, you don't have somebody, not okay, ladies. Still dangerous, they don't think how you do... Now I feel always, what answer and what about the house, always about the house. Always, I think about that always. The government is no, just go out, blanket this go outside. Sleep outside. What I feel? I feel safe? No. This country it's not. I don't want ask another people help, so I stay outside. So what I get next maybe, maybe I get the man again like this. It's not okay. Always I'm afraid about that. Always I'm thinking about the house. Always. Even I have no safe when I go outside, but they out me. Why they do like this? Why?

Dellina highlights the continuum of violence she is experiencing, out of the violence of life in Eritrea, into the violence of life in Libya, and through to the violence of travelling across the Mediterranean and the into violence of life as an ASW in the UK. The failure to guarantee the interconnected basic rights of ASW creates additional vulnerability and opportunities for exploitation. The threat of street homelessness and exploitation is an aspect of the hostile environment intended to deter 'crimmigrants' and encourage 'voluntary' return lest they are subjected to a lack of protection, a punitive measure in what it fails to do. Worst affected by this is the 'crimmigrant' woman, whose body is pushed to the extreme margins of society where her safety and dignity as a human cannot be guaranteed, and she has little recourse to justice. Destitution and its risks are presented as an 'inevitable' consequence of engaging with the asylum system, as opposed to the state's failure to prevent the inhuman punishment of ASW who it has deemed to be less than human.

Lizi pointed out that women had particular health needs that could not be met even when receiving asylum support, as she would be forced to choose between food and sanitary items:

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'there are certain things you need money to buy, pads and this thing. This sanitary things, these basic things.' This is another way in which the violence of destitution is gendered. Laura[112] recalled an AS woman who had escaped modern day slavery but fled again after her refusal for fear she would be deported. She travelled to Birmingham having heard about the Meena Centre through word of mouth.

> She's got nothing, she's fled, she's got no money. She came in and she was distraught, she's come on, you've got blood down your leg on a public bus. Other ladies straightaway clocking, you've bled all over yourself, and deploying to go and find clothes and sanitary products. Only women will understand, only women will know.

A number of research participants spoke about turning to charities 'to beg for this basic thing,' and many described searching bins for food. Zala[113] was saddened that people 'don't see in the UK is going to happen these things. The reality is different, in this cold weather they are outside and they have nothing.' The refusal of the asylum system to meet basic needs forces ASW into extended periods of time living in extreme poverty, with an unquestionable impact on their physical health.

> When you are destitute, definitely you are bound to get sick because you're not eating well, spending time in the cold, you still go to the same NHS isn't it. The illnesses that maybe you wouldn't have suffered when you were working and eating well and staying in a home. It's even worse when you're destitute, that's when more problems come in. If I was paying tax, isn't it that same money that will be going back into the NHS and all of that, but if you are stopped and you get sick, what do you do, because you're also a human being and you need treatment as human being (Lizi).[114]

Lizi was one of many research participants who also described the deterioration in mental health as a result of living with the psychological violence of being pushed to the margins of society: 'it traumatises you' (Elean).[115] The state's failure to provide an adequate standard of living for ASW imprisons them in extreme poverty and poor health, rendered increasingly invisible within the narrative of who is 'deserving' of having their rights guaranteed. This type of 'immcarerality' traps RASW in cycles of destitution and serves to occupy their psychological

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[112] Community ally research participant Laura was the founder of Meena Centre.
[113] RASW research participant Zala fled persecution based on her ethnic group in Ethiopia.
[114] RASW research participant Lizi fled Malawi due to persecution based on her LGBT identity.
[115] RASW research participant Elean fled Cameroon in her forties due to persecution based on her sexuality.

space with concerns for survival. 'Immcarceral' measures limit the physical spaces that 'crimmigrant' women can occupy but are even more insidious in their control of RASW's psychological spaces. Research participants spoke about being overwhelmed with surviving the hostile environment and having little space to think about any other aspect of their lives. A common preoccupation was fear, particularly that caused by the 'immcarceral' practices of surveillance and monitoring.

This is the third everyday 'immcarcerality' that research participants highlighted, whereby the 'crimmigrant' woman's body is placed under state surveillance, in part to (re)create the identity of the 'other' as suspect, establishing non-citizenship in the UK to enable deportation (Franko, 2020). The suspicion and mistrust that the state decrees as inherent to the 'crimmigrant other's' identity are used to justify the surveillance practices enacted on the 'crimmigrant' woman's body, marked by institutionalised 'notions of danger and suspicion' (Franko, 2020, p. 45) which intersect with gender, race, and nationality. Consequently, those most likely to be subjected to crime control measures like surveillance 'are poor, racialised, and marked by colonial legacies' (Franko, 2020, p. 51). This includes gender, as we have discussed the institutionally misogynist ways in which the RASW's body is designated as a site of danger and mistrust.

Akin to those used for those who do break the law, monitoring processes for asylum seeking women are employed to both reinforce their redefinition as untrustworthy 'crimmigrants,' and to justify the need for such hostility. Research participants spoke often of the pervasive monitoring they faced, not only from the Home Office but also through secondary agents of the hostile environment like the police, ranging from how they spent their money to reporting. James reflected that he often heard his clients describe the 'feeling of not having any control over where they live or how they live, feeling that they're monitored.' This is of course the purpose of such measures, meant to be experienced as a form of punishment by enacting 'the carceral in the daily lives and everyday spaces that asylum seekers inhabit outside of detention centres' (Fisher, Burridge and Gill, 2019).

> They are even using the Aspen card to monitor asylum seekers. We have fears that when you go out, everything they are gonna see. So once I collect my money, I just leave the card to home. I don't even have anywhere to go. They use it monitor asylum seekers. I don't even know if I'm safe in the room, when you put your clothes, maybe they are even watching everything. Who knows they are even watching, we don't know,

we don't have any privacy. They give the card and use it to monitor our whereabouts. I don't know what they think (Kesandu).[116]

The use of the Aspen card exemplifies micro-level surveillance enacted by the state. Intended to meet the basic needs of asylum seekers by providing subsistence support, the debit card is a payment system for those in receipt of Section 95 or Section 4 support. In 2017 it emerged that the Home Office was in fact using the cards to monitor cardholders spending on 'unnecessary' items, and their location (Independent, 2019). The implication was that this surveillance measure was in use to 'catch out' asylum seekers engaging in something criminal by tracking their mobility, without any regard for their privacy or dignity.

Far from providing the basics for those seeking protection from harm, the Home Office weaponizes the meagre allowance of the Aspen card as another tool in marking out ASW as 'cheats' who do not belong. Alongside other 'crimmigration' enforcement measures, financial monitoring instilled more fear in ASW as to the lengths the state would go to in order to punish their 'criminality.' The spatial movement of RASW is extremely restricted by limited access to financial means, and the Aspen card acts as another insidious form of everyday 'immcarceration' by further monitoring what they use the funds for.

The final practice of everyday 'immcarcerality,' and the one that research participants spoke about being the most adversely impacted by, is Home Office reporting. Under the 1971 Immigration Act (*1971 Immigration Act*, 1971), the 2002 Nationality, Immigration, and Asylum Act (*2002 Nationality, Immigration, and Asylum Act*, 2002), and the 2007 UK Borders Act (*UK Borders Act 2007*, 2007), a person is liable to be detained for examination, removal, or automatic deportation (Home Office, 2021, p. 8). They are also eligible for immigration bail under at least one condition, such as reporting, electronic monitoring, restrictions to work, occupation, or studies, or a curfew (ibid., p. 11). 'Illegal entrants' or asylum seekers who have made an in-country application for protection are required to report, usually to Home Office reporting centres or occasionally police stations, as per the 2016 Immigration Act (Home Office, 2019c, p. 5).

The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICBI) reported to Parliament in 2017 on the efficiency of the Home Office's Reporting and Offender Management system, particularly it's 'management of the reporting population' (Bolt, 2017, p. 2). He makes it clear that the Home Office understands the purpose of reporting as primarily compliance, aimed at

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[116] RASW research participant Kesandu was trafficked from Nigeria into slavery in the UK.

concluding cases by encouraging voluntary returns, resolving barriers to removal, or supporting enforced removal by detaining individuals upon reporting (ibid.). In short, immigration bail conditions such as reporting are set to assert authority over the spatial movement of ASW, to ensure the compliance of unwanted 'crimmigrant' bodies with leaving the UK and criminalising the search for asylum.

Reporting is a security measure applied to asylum seekers, intended to control their mobility within the UK's borders and ensure regular contact with the Home Office in a space hidden from public view where they can be detained (Fisher, Burridge and Gill, 2019). Failure to comply can result in the loss of accommodation or financial support, detention, or a criminal record. Reporting frequency, which research participants described as seemingly arbitrary, can range from weekly to every 3 months. This kind of enforced tracking is an 'immcarcerality' through which the asylum system marks out who does not belong in the UK, and a continuation of the criminalisation of RAS women. The immigration system and the criminal justice system have become merged in the UK, enabling crime control measures to become part of migration practices (Bhatia, 2020). By subjecting asylum seekers to stringent monitoring processes such as reporting, the hostile environment redefines them as dangerous threats whose whereabouts must be known in order to guarantee the safety of the nation. In reality, reporting requirements are a mechanism by which the state disciplines undesirable bodies of colour, with a significant impact on AS women.

> They just randomly pick people to make them sign [in Solihull]. The system is crap, because they said they will just choose people randomly to sign, it's not because we did something or we are less than the other, which is not fair. When you go there, for me I know I could never be deported, but people who go there they get scared that they will be detained, so why put them through that. It's not protecting, it's destroying people slowly (Hiyab).[117]

Hiyab also believed the reporting requirements to be arbitrary, psychologically violent, and another tool of hostility, the inconsistent and incoherent nature causing additional fear and mistrust. Lizi received 'contradicting letters' about the frequency of her reporting requirements, and upon returning the following week was told that it was a 'system error because on here it's not showing that there is an event so you have to come back next month.' Lizi was far from reassured as she believed this to be another 'test' that she would be punished for failing.

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[117] RASW research participant Hiyab was an Eritrean woman in her early thirties who fled political persecution while pregnant.

'Signing in' as it was known to many RASW, was mandatory at one of the UK's 14 immigration reporting centres, located in Solihull for the West Midlands. Research participants overwhelmingly spoke of this punitive criminal control measure as causing them significant distress, from the journey to Solihull, to the fear of being detained at the centre. Travel to the reporting centre is an imposition on asylum seekers who have limited funds: £37.75 a week for those in receipt of Section 95 support of which £4.60 would be spent on the one-day bus pass on signing in days. This forced Iftin[118] to forgo meals when she was required to report to Solihull twice a week. Sachini[119] undertook journeys of two hours each way from Walsall on public transport, as did Kesandu from Dudley to Solihull. Again the movement of AS women's bodies is heavily controlled.

Esi[120] described 'throwing up because you feel so sick before you get there.' She was one of many RASW who described being physically sick with fear and anxiety about the reporting event, particularly when accompanied by young children who they were terrified would witness them being detained. This enforced journey to Solihull is one way in which the exclusion of ASW is performed publicly, and the repetition forced them to remember this exclusion. As Fisher et al assert, 'with every repeated journey to the reporting centre or police stations, asylum seekers' exception is performed and (re)made visible to them.' Not only are racialised asylum seeking women deemed deserving of such extreme monitoring measures as a member of a suspect community and a criminal, but she cannot escape this redefinition as she is forced to perform her 'other-ness' so regularly and publicly. This psychological violence is designed to reinforce that asylum seekers are prisoners within their circumstances, which are in fact created by the state.

Research participants described being reminded of their substantive interviews when signing in, both in terms of the physically intimidating environment and by often being surrounded by 'big angry' male staff members. This is by design as part of the apparatus which not only terrorises asylum seeking women, but also continually redefines them as criminals, serving to remind them that their presence in the UK is precarious. RASW spoke about queuing for up to two hours outside the reporting centre, and the entire process taking up the whole day. No one is permitted to accompany the signee into the building, they must go through a metal

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[118] RASW research participant Iftin was trafficked into the UK from Pakistan in 2014 in her late twenties.

[119] RASW research participant Sachini worked for many years as a solicitor and human rights defender in Sri Lanka

[120] RASW research participant Esi was a woman in her forties who fled Ghana after experiencing persecution due to her sexuality.

detector, and cannot keep their phones should they take photographs or call for assistance if they are threatened with forced removal. RASW spoke about the entire process of reporting as an ordeal which also exists on the continuum of violence that is the UK asylum system, which itself occupies a place on the global continuum of violence that these women have experienced and continue to endure.

Not simply requiring ASW to sign their name to verify their location, the appointment involves face-to-face meetings with staff who ask questions about the ASW's claim without her solicitor present, or to encourage voluntary returns. Iftin described her fear every week as she went to Solihull, petrified she would not leave the reporting centre, when on one occasion she was asked to step into a private office to have her fingerprints taken. She recalled that, 'they didn't tell me that all they are going to do, but they were trying to send me back on that day and I didn't know that.' Iftin reflected on the abject terror she felt on realising that her solicitor was not aware of what was happening and could not help her, and that she could 'disappear' from the UK without anyone knowing what had happen to her. The violence of forced dispersal and isolation come into play in situations such as these, with research participants fearing they could simply be made to 'disappear.'

The fear of detention and removal after reporting in Solihull plagued all the research participants, and over half had witnessed forced removals at the reporting centre. This takes us back to the production of fear which forms part of the 'crimmigration' regime and 'immcarceral' practices. Maintaining fear of harsh punitive measures in response to perceived illegality is intended to control unwanted bodies and remind them of the state's power. Corporate Watch reported that in the second and third quarter of 2016, approximately 18% of those in detention were detained while reporting (*The UK Border Regime: A Critical Guide*, 2018), a not insignificant number. Lizi[121] described reporting as the 'most scariest thing,' and recalled the experience of an asylum seeker who had been in the UK for 20 years:

> There's no space for you to breathe because you are just, you are thinking 'okay I have to go again.' The fear and the everything else is always there. It is very scary because all the time you hear people's stories, if they come back or they don't come back. Like in our group, you hear that so-and-so has been detained…. Another lady was just telling us that they kept her in a corner for a long time, for over four hours because they said they wanted her to be interviewed with people from her country so they can arrange her travel document…eventually they released her. But she said she was

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[121] RASW research participant Lizi fled Malawi due to persecution based on her LGBT identity.

surrounded by immigration people, some on the door, some were inside. And this is an older woman, she's not a young person.

The performance of holding this woman, who was approaching eligibility for limited leave to remain under the 20-year rule on long residence, for an extended period of time served the purpose of exhibiting the state's power to criminalise and then punish asylum seekers, maintaining fear and uncertainty among the community. Lizi believed that the choice of an older woman was to make clear that those who are most vulnerable are not safe from removal, emphasising state power with the contrast of physically intimidating male staff. Adherence to fair and lawful processes are not the priority, as in this example where the threat to remove someone who would soon be granted their status took precedence. The ICBI investigation found in 2019 that the Home Office had failed to improve on 2017 findings that its reporting processes were inefficient and ineffective, that reporting events were not 'meaningful,' that there were significant deficiencies in record keeping, and that staff were fearful of not meeting their removal targets (Bolt, 2019). This of course fails to acknowledge the severe gendered trauma caused by reporting. Concerns were also raised about the Home Office having little understanding of the reporting population, which is intentional when that population is redefined and treated as criminal and deserving of hostility, and therefore does not need to be 'understood' beyond the imposition of this identity.

The reporting space is a dangerous one where RASW were brought with the intention of facing punishment, or experience the threat of punishment, as a result of seeking entry to the state. Fisher et al assert that reporting centres have increasingly come to do the work of dawn raids, which were more public and reported by the media (Fisher, Burridge and Gill, 2019) unlike what happens inside reporting centres.

We will see other people being detained in front of you…it's scary. I saw those people coming to detain another person… I went to sign the same day, and I was so scared, I thought that they were coming for me. I was crying very hard, saying 'God please please let me out, just today. Just let me out, I will never never go back.' They don't want to come to houses all the time to pick up people, but even if they do that, there, a certain time of night around 2 AM when everybody are sleeping, and come with cars all around the area. It's like they are coming for a criminal, someone who was murdered somebody. If people feel like going there, if they feel safe, they will go to report. But

when you feel, it's a feeling that every person get when you go to somewhere and you don't feel safe by going there, will you go? You won't go (Aaminata).[122]

The intentional hostility of reporting functions to further mark out ASW as 'others' who are deserving of structural violence due to the criminality assigned to them by the state. The process instils fear and serves to remind ASW of their precarious legal status and their powerlessness by limiting and forcing their spatial movement, worsened by the presence of dependent children. Reporting is another bordering practice utilised to control and restrict asylum seeking women, in a space that is hidden from public view that holds the threat of being moved into larger scale 'immcarceral' spaces like detention.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated through the experiences of RASW how their redefinition as 'crimmigrants' has been used by the state as justification to subject them to a racist and sexist 'crimmigration' regime. Increasingly akin to crime control measures, large scale 'immcarceration' practices and everyday 'immcarceralities' are enacted on the bodies of RAS women as sites of state sovereignty in order to monitor, exclude, and remove them. If ASW are able to survive the violence of privatised and externalised border control measures that they face before and upon reaching the UK border, they are subjected to a raft of practices intended to severely limit the movement of their undesirable black and brown bodies in white spaces. The goal is to achieve a permanent removal of these bodies from the state, and before that happens, I have presented 'everyday immcarceralities' as being enacted upon RASW, shrinking the geographical spaces that they can occupy, limiting autonomy, and forcing them to live with fear at the very margins of society. Everyday 'immcarceralities' operate physically and psychologically.

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[122] RASW research participant Aaminata was a Nigerian woman in her early thirties with a ten-month-old baby.

Chapter 6. Dehumanising asylum seeking women: *'Is this the same country that everyone talks about, that it respects human rights?'* (Lizi)

Introduction

Chapter 4 examined the racist and misogynist redefinition of asylum seeking women as 'crimmigrants' for crossing borders in search of safety, positioning them as threats to the state in order to justify the violence that the asylum system inflicts. Chapter 5 considered the 'crimmigration' policies that are enacted through the hostile environment to control the criminalised AS woman's body in order to deter, remove, and restrict her. This chapter will explore how the gendered and racialised labelling of asylum seeking women as criminals for committing supposed immigration crimes which subjects them to 'immcarceration,' results in unequal access to their basic human rights. While not having been convicted of any crimes by the UK judiciary, ASW are forced to live as pseudo prisoners on a daily basis, experiencing everyday 'immcarceralities' without being afforded the same standard of accommodation, healthcare, or social interaction that convicted criminals are guaranteed in prison. Living at numerous intersections of violence means that ASW are disproportionately impacted by these practices.

The 'crimmigrant' is constructed as being outside of human dignity, dehumanised to the extent that she is not afforded access to the basic rights guaranteed to everyone. The sexist and racist deprivation of the human rights of asylum seeking women is the deprivation of their humanity. This chapter will begin by discussing research participants' expectations of human rights protection in the UK in contrast to the reality they faced, before looking more closely at the denial of access to their rights and freedoms that RASW endure as a result of being redefined as 'crimmigrants' and subjected to 'immcarceration' practices. Research participants spoke about being most significantly impacted by the denial of access to healthcare, safe housing, and social inclusion.

UK: defender of human rights or agent of harm?

> They don't want so many people in this country, I don't know. For me it's really hard to understand. I think it's a hostile environment that the Home Office put through, just a mess, just to make hard, just to make life hard for those people, to asylum seekers. Why have you signed treaty saying that you will welcome people in your country? Who started the problems in Africa? Even selling arms to them. They [UK] are trying to put down all these countries… (Aaminata).

Research participants described anger and shock at the hypocrisy with which the UK has colonised lands, exploited peoples, and refused to accept responsibility for their part in modern day refugee flows. Participants named sixteen different countries as their country of origin, of which thirteen had at some point in their history experienced British colonisation. The reality of arriving in the UK and engaging with the asylum system was shockingly far removed from the state's own narrative of being 'a force for good in the world' and 'dedicated to making a real and lasting difference to the poorest, the oppressed, and the most vulnerable' (FCO 2020). Participants pointed to the hypocrisy of the UK's public rhetoric of supporting those who need protection, while in practice finding 'so many ways to block them.'

Promoting respect for human rights in its foreign policy, the UK has led international initiatives like the Equal Rights Coalition for LGBT rights and the Media Freedom Coalition (ibid.). However, policies are inconsistent and contradictory at best, just as Home Office policies that are intended to protect ASW hinder their access to asylum. The public discourses and policy commitments of the UK to human rights are as flawed in practice as the asylum system's implementation. While the UK may claim to support human rights globally, it is unwilling to act against specific countries when there is a conflict of interests, and certainly works to exclude the 'wrong' type of migrant who arrives at its borders (Sirriyeh, 2013), before then working to remove them through the 'crimmigration' regime.

In recent years the UK has been accused of demonstrating a 'willingness to set aside human rights for the sake of political expediency and a worrying disdain for the rule of law' (HRW, 2021; OHCHR, 2018). Institutional racism and the resultant human rights abuses have been exposed anew, from the wrongful deportation of the Windrush generation and the lack of

accountability for the Grenfell fire,[123] to the health inequalities highlighted by Covid-19.[124] The hostile environment could be defined by its attacks on the human rights of undocumented people. Yet the FCO reports that the government is a 'strong advocate' for 'justice,' working 'to end discrimination for all' (FCO, 2020). As part of its counter terrorism strategy, Prevent, the government set out its definition of 'Fundamental British Values' as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance (Home Office, 2015b). Indeed, research participants spoke of their impressions of the UK as 'a big father' (Blessing), offering human rights protection, democracy, and peace; the opportunity for 'safety' and 'support,' to live 'free from fear,' and to 'recover' from the persecution they had experienced.

> They tell you there is freedom of expression but it's not true. The moment they know you know more than they know, they try to gag you up. When you first come, they tell you things like 'there is freedom of expression, freedom of information, there's freedom of so many things,' but you find out at the end of the day, if you're not on their side you're taking a big risk as well. So they give you this impression like 'oh we are the country of human rights,' but it's not true. It is just not true. People have to be very careful when they deal with the Home Office or their agent or whatever (Blessing).[125]

Research participants pointed out that there is a continuity in the imperial superiority of the UK's attitude towards people of colour, which has been sustained far beyond the end of Empire (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Chandra Talpade, 2013; Mohanty, 1988; Mohanty, 2013; Patil, 2013). Lizi[126] condemned the state's treatment of asylum seekers: 'I'm just thinking 'is this the same country that everyone talks about, that it respects human rights?' So certainly, it's for just for certain type of people, certain group of people, and not everybody.' In other words, for white indigenous people. Hostility towards the 'other' has always existed in the UK, whether built upon demarcations of ethnicity, religion, race, or nationality. From being directed at the Irish or Jewish populations, to Commonwealth migrants of colour, through to present day asylum seekers, as evidenced by the narratives of research participants.

In order to justify the violent consequences of this desire to exclude, as with colonisation, the state continuously reconstructs this 'other' as criminal, dangerous, and undeserving of protection. Research participants pointed to a large disparity between the UK's external

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[123] The Grenfell Tower fire in London in 2017 resulted in the deaths of 72 residents, most of who were people of colour. The inquiry is examining the role of institutional racism in the tragedy.
[124] A disproportionate number of deaths from Covid-19 in the UK have been among people from minority ethnic backgrounds.
[125] RASW research participant and journalist Blessing fled political persecution in Nigeria.
[126] RASW research participant Lizi fled Malawi due to persecution based on her LGBT identity.

presentation as having left such practices in the past to become human rights defenders, while simultaneously reinforcing racist discrimination and violating rights through current asylum policies and processes. Indeed, the current asylum system marks a different point on the same continuum of violence.

> When I live in jungle, we have future, you get UK. We sleep in tents, but we did accept we sleep in tents because we have future in UK. Dreaming. Even if you sleep in tent, you say 'I'm going to UK, you have a good life.' Reality was not there, as I dreamed. I will go to UK, I will study, I will do this, I will do this, but come here and Home Office refuse you. Never, UK never home. Where can I go? I have nothing in my home country (Aster).[127]

Failure to guarantee the human rights of both citizens and non-citizens clearly occurs according to racialised demarcation, as highlighted by Windrush, Grenfell, and Covid-19. The criminalisation of asylum seekers enables the UK government to avoid meeting its obligations to those it has designated to be a 'threat' to the nation, and a danger to the human rights of those who do 'deserve' to be here within the imagined white nation. The successful construction of the 'crimmigrant' who necessitates 'immcarceration' measures allows the state to exempt this 'other' from having their basic human rights guaranteed, as they are redefined as 'more' than criminal. The hostile environment has achieved this by expanding its sprawling web of controls to encourage citizen-on-citizen checks and the obstruction of access to everyday essentials.

The reality of the harm experienced by RASW exposes their exclusion from having their basic rights protected, such as access to food, housing, and healthcare, which will be further exemplified in this chapter. So large is the disparity between the image of the UK as a defender of human rights and the reality as a perpetrator of punitive violence committed against the 'unwanted' criminalised 'other,' that research participants compared their experiences in the UK to those in Libya, Greece, and France. RASW's categorisation of EU countries as abusers of human rights challenges Western countries' construction of the Global South as being responsible for violations of human rights, when they themselves are committing violence.

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[127] RASW research participant Aster fled religious persecution in Eritrea and was a solo parent to a toddler.

The rights and freedoms of RASW

The following section will look in greater detail at the rights and freedoms which should be guaranteed to asylum seeking women, and yet research participants described as having unequal access to. Far from ensuring that public authorities do not interfere with the rights recognised by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the UK bolsters the 'crimmigration' regime which in practice is incompatible with their legal obligations under the HRA, especially the right not to be treated in an inhuman way. RASW research participants asserted that the policies and practices of the hostile environment punish them for their constructed criminality far beyond that which any other group experience, including those who have been convicted of a crime. ASW are so thoroughly dehumanised by the hostile environment, made so abject, that they are not afforded the same rights, and barely granted 'privileges' (Webber, 2019) that can be, and are, removed at any moment. In depriving ASW of their human rights, the 'crimmigration' regime is depriving them of their humanity.

Chapter 5 highlighted the UK's disregard for the Mediterranean as a site of racial violence, and death is a strong indicator of how little concern it has for the life of vulnerable RASW. Under Article 2 the State is not allowed to violate the right to life and must enforce effective criminal legislation to protect lives. As has been discussed, the UK claims it is doing just this by constructing asylum seekers as the criminal threat who must be subjected to crime control measures in order to safeguard the imagined white nation. Research participants described numerous breaches of their right to life, as the state failed to meet its positive duty to protect life, and its negative duty not to take life intentionally or negligently. A number of these have been discussed in previous chapters, for example indefinite detention and forced removal.

The understanding of human rights utilised here is based on the Human Rights Act (HRA), passed into UK law in 1998 (*Human Rights Act 1998*, 1998). The HRA enshrines the rights set out in the ECHR, with a basis in the UDHR (United Nations, 1948). The HRA applies to all people living in the UK, whether they are a citizen or a foreign national, a child or an adult, a prisoner or a member of the public. It requires that all public authorities (including the government, local councils, police, schools, the NHS) treat everyone with respect, equality, dignity, and fairness. The HRA gives further effect to the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the ECHR, including the right to life, the prohibition or torture and inhuman treatment, and no discrimination.

Mayblin conceives of this racialised 'unequal access to the idea of humanity' in the context of British colonialism, when human rights law was used in an exclusionary way (Mayblin, 2017, p. 132). She contends that the human rights framework does not in fact guarantee human equality or protection for vulnerable people, but only acts as 'a barrier preventing descent into the worst excesses of dehumanisation' (ibid., p. 173) The present day Conservative government continues to treat 'asylum seekers as less than human in ways that are clearly informed by a long tradition of differential rights' (ibid., p. 148), and this chapter will contend that these extremes of dehumanisation are in fact being experienced by criminalised RASW within the UK's hostile environment. The state's historic refusal to adhere to the spirit of human rights conventions, and barely meeting the minimum standard to avoid sanctions, manifests clearly in the asylum system that subjects vulnerable people, and particularly women, to the worst excesses of being categorised as non-human.

Most pertinent to this discussion is Article 3 of the HRA which states that nobody should ever be tortured or treated in an inhumane or degrading way. This right is absolute and without exemption as it violates human dignity, prohibiting treatment that causes physical or mental suffering, or debasing a person beyond that which is usual from punishment. This must apply in all settings including prisons, immigration detention centres, and state hospitals, and protect everyone including non-citizens, convicted criminals, or political protesters. Article 3 also prevents the deportation of anyone to a place where this right would be violated. Although this refers to the state persecution an asylum seeker would face in the place they are being deported to, the 'crimmigration' regime is itself committing institutional violence through 'inhumane or degrading' treatment of ASW in breach of Article 3.

The hostile environment is predicated upon the construction of asylum seekers as less than human and therefore beyond deserving of having their rights protected. The dignity of prison inmates is protected by their access to healthcare, adequate accommodation, and social interaction, which is not afforded to asylum seekers who have not been convicted of any crimes but have been redefined as 'crimmigrants.' The following section will explore these aspects of the inhuman treatment of ASW, whereby the are denied their humanity by being denied their rights. The discussion begins with the denial of access to healthcare, before exploring the denial of access to safe housing, and finally the denial of access to social inclusion.

Denial of access of healthcare

While the right to health is not specifically protected under UK domestic law, the HRA requires public authorities like the NHS to respect the rights of every person in ensuring there is not a breach of the right to life and the right not to be discriminated against (*Human Rights Act 1998*, 1998). For example, prisoners are afforded the same healthcare and treatment as anyone outside of prison (Ministry of Justice, 2020). This rights-based approach to providing healthcare emphasises the protection of human dignity, vulnerable groups, and the right to be informed of treatment options. The right to health should be an inclusive concept which states are required to fulfil, but it has become subject to exclusionary migration policies by states like the UK who prioritise 'security' over access to health services (Mladovsky 2020). 'Crimmigrants' are not afforded this right as illustrated by the treatment of research participant RASW.

> They are trying to play with people's minds…it's not like 'oh they are going to beat you.' No they play with your mind which is really dangerous. As a human being if at every step that you are trying to fight, they are fighting you mentally, that is very bad... You go crazy, it's finished. They don't care what happens to you. It's really hard to go through the asylum system. The system is setup to block you on every step that you are going through. So it's a way which is playing with your mind, your health. They don't care. Maybe it a way of stopping people (Aaminata).[128]

The report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health points out that there can be no health without mental health, which should be a human rights priority (UN, 2017). Poor mental health is a predictor of a lower life expectancy, restricted access to education, and discrimination (ibid.), which worsens when people live at multiple intersections of oppression. Refugees and asylum seekers are more likely to have poorer mental health than the local population (Bogic, Njoku and Priebe, 2015), having experienced traumatic events pre-migration, during migration, and in receiving countries (Tribe, 2005; Morgan, Melluish and Welham, 2017). This is worsened for RAS women who live at greater intersections of oppression.

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[128] RASW research participant Aaminata was a Nigerian woman in her early thirties with a ten-month-old baby.

Half of RASW research participants spoke about their diagnoses of mental health conditions in the UK (e.g. depression, anxiety, PTSD), while the other half described their mental health difficulties most frequently using the words 'stress,' 'crying,' and 'suffering.' The majority of these conversations were characterised by descriptions of hopelessness and fear, experienced post-migration as a consequence of living within a hostile environment. Four RASW were willing to speak about having been suicidal throughout their asylum claims and beyond. Elean[129] 'wanted to die' as a result of having been 'demonised' and 'exposed to so many things' when destitute, 'reduced to less' than a person. She pointed out that it was 'harder for women' and Mahum[130] agreed that 'women can get easily broken' as they are subjected to gender-related harms. After her first refusal, Esi[131] said 'the idea of taking my life came in, whether to just take my life.' Nadia[132] also recalled when she 'thought yes, I want to die' as she faced the threat of being returned to detention. Ayana[133] reflected on the continuum of violence she experienced while imprisoned in Libya, while surviving the Jungle in Calais, and while engaging with the UK asylum system, noting that the type of violence differed but all made her question: 'why am I living? It is worth living?'

RAS women in particular are more likely to suffer from PTSD and depression, partly due to the increased likelihood of having experienced a higher rate of gender-based violence before, during, and after fleeing (Vu *et al.*, 2014; Woodward *et al.*, 2016; Lever *et al.*, 2019; Kindermann *et al.*, 2020). Pregnancy is also a risk factor for ASW (Morgan, Melluish and Welham, 2017; Lephard and Haith-Cooper, 2016; McKnight, Goodwin and Kenyon, 2019). Recent research has shifted to focus on the significance of post-migratory stress in countries such as the UK, where social isolation and the restrictive policies of the hostile environment are found to be strongly correlated to PTSD (Morgan, Melluish and Welham, 2017). Asylum seekers are five times more likely to have mental health needs than the local population, and over 60% will experience serious mental distress (Eaton *et al.*, 2011), but they are less likely to receive this support (Aspinall and Watters, 2010; Satinsky *et al.*, 2019).

Research participants have described how the extremely punitive nature of the asylum system objectifies them to the point where they question the value of their own lives. The data available on suicide and self-harm among asylum seekers is virtually non-existent (Cohen,

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[129] RASW research participant Elean fled Cameroon in her forties due to persecution based on her sexuality.
[130] RASW research participant Mahum was from Eritrea and had 3 young children.
[131] RASW research participant Esi was a woman in her forties who fled Ghana after experiencing persecution due to her sexuality.
[132] RASW research participant Nadia experienced extreme violence and political persecution in Egypt.
[133] RASW research participant Ayana was in her twenties and had fled religious persecution in Eritrea.

2008), as the ONS in the UK does not hold information on suicide statistics by ethnicity or asylum status (Cohen, Katona and Bhugra, 2020). Despite living with multiple risk factors, asylum seekers are further made invisible and excluded from the UK's suicide prevention strategy, another way in which the state does not prioritise protecting the lives of those it treats as non-human. The hostile environment causes much of this suffering by dehumanising RASW, and further denies the human dignity of ASW by restricting access to treatment for this suffering. It is asylum seeking women who are worst impacted as they experience multiple oppressions in the UK alone, including exploitation, isolation, and having dependent children to care for.

When seeking medical assistance, RASW research participants repeatedly spoke about being turned away from GP practices who incorrectly claimed it was illegal for them to register asylum seekers, citing a lack of sufficient identification or proof of address. Administrative staff at GP practices were making decisions to deny services based on nationality, race, ethnicity, and gender. A third of participants who had been registered with a GP were faced with barriers such as lack of access to an interpreter, and discrimination from the GP themselves. RASW research participants described further challenges they faced as women, namely a fear of male medical professionals, and patriarchal cultural norms which made it difficult for them to advocate for themselves in the face of healthcare being denied. The grave gendered impact for research participants was worsening health and wellbeing. The hostile environment has normalised the denial of basic services to vulnerable populations on sight; potentially life-threatening decisions which are made by administrative staff with no medical training, and certainly no expertise in immigration law, policy, or practice. Citizens have been afforded the authority to act on racism, with the policy enabling the unlawful denial of healthcare, and risking the right to life.

Charging regulations were introduced in 2015 by the Department of Health stating that overseas visitors (including those 'who are in the UK without permission') would be subjected to fees which hospital staff were responsible for managing (Department of Health, 2015). Identity checks became mandatory, which the charging guidelines warn creates ample opportunities for discrimination against those who may 'look' or 'sound' like they are overseas visitors: in other words, who are identified as 'crimmigrants.' Dr I,[134] an NHS doctor in the West

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[134] Community ally research participant Dr I was an NHS doctor and active member of Docs Not Cops, and she liaised with Meena on future campaigns. She was vocal about fatal consequences of restricting asylum seekers' access to healthcare, especially maternal healthcare.

Midlands and member of Docs Not Cops,[135] described observing that women of colour, who spoke with an accent other than English, were significantly more likely to be repeatedly questioned about their identity and right to access services. Healthcare professionals are expected to act as border guards performing citizen on citizen checks, care is denied more often than it should be due to a lack of clear policy guidance, and asylum seekers avoid accessing essential care for fear that they will be detained and deported. Racist inequalities in healthcare in the UK have long existed and were highlighted again by the Covid-19 pandemic, which evidenced that both citizens and non-citizens are impacted.

The Government's review of overseas visitor charging in 2019 included questions on 'whether there was any harm caused, whether people were being deterred from accessing treatment, and whether there was any harm to public health' as a result of the charging regulations (ibid.*Oral Evidence: Government's review of overseas visitor charging*). Despite evidence of 'thousands of cases of harm,' the Department of Health and Social Care insisted that the application of the regulations was at fault rather than the regulations themselves.

> The letter came, 'you have £20,000' for medical treatment which is given on the consent of asylum seeker, that's the law. This bill at the same time as letters about detention, deportation. Where is the law? If somebody is dying, if you know a cancer patient, why don't you give those five years for those British colonies where YOUR was there, taking their parents, why can't? I'm not asking something unfair. That's how hostile environment kill[s]… (Ria).

Dellina[136] was one of a number of research participants who avoided accessing essential healthcare for fear of being charged or 'reported to the Home Office.' Two years later, her health had declined significantly, and she was facing several urgent surgeries which she was still too afraid to consent to should it penalise her asylum claim. The system failed to acknowledge in Dellina's case that her severe healthcare needs were a direct result of the sexual violence she experienced before arriving in the UK, and worsened by the exploitation she experienced in the UK when homeless. Dr I described the trends she and her colleagues were noticing, namely increasing numbers of asylum seekers presenting at A&E with more complex and serious conditions, having been denied potentially life-saving treatment from a GP earlier. She highlighted that this was especially worrying for pregnant RAS women who

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[135] Docs Not Cops is a campaign group of NHS professionals and patients who believe health is a right and not a privilege.
[136] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.

were not receiving essential pre-natal care and were expressing high levels of anxiety about being unable to give birth in hospital, although maternity services are deemed as necessary. RASW have particular unrecognised health needs, not only being a lone parent or pregnant, but possibly suffering the consequences of sexual violence.

The 'crimmigration' regime designates ASW as being less than or non-human, and accordingly inflicts suffering on them that is degrading and inhuman beyond what is usual from punishment, compounded by the denial of access to healthcare. The bodies of brown and black formerly colonised peoples were assigned value as labourers in post-war UK, but the present-day asylum seeker's life is treated as being less valuable, and the loss of this life as a consequence of their criminality rather than the failure of the British state to offer refuge, or even meet its legal obligations. However AS women are at greater risk of poor health and face specific healthcare needs due to the gender-related violence and exploitation they are subjected to. ASW are dehumanised beyond those who have actually been convicted of crimes, and even they are still guaranteed to the dignity of healthcare. The deprivation of their human rights reinforces the redefinition of ASW as being less-than or non-human. Healthcare is the first right that is denied to 'crimmigrant' women, the second is safe housing.

Denial of access safe housing

I will provide empirical examples of how RASW are denied access to safe housing, due to the racist and sexist mechanisms of the asylum system that have been discussed. Although it is not currently an explicit right under UK law, certain articles of the HRA are relevant to housing, including Article 3 (the right not to be treated in an inhuman or degrading way), Article 8 (the right to respect for home life), and Article 14 (the right not to be discriminated against). The UN Special Rapporteur on Housing described the right to housing as 'one of the most endangered rights,' especially for undocumented migrants and asylum seekers (UN, 2010). In part this is due to a lack of cohesive protection within the human rights framework. Eighteen of the RAS women who participated in this research project spoke about asylum accommodation as one of the most problematic aspects of their experience in the UK. Of the 200 women a year that the Baobab Women's Project advocated with in 2019, almost 60% required support with housing issues (Taal, 2019b), which included vermin, dangerous appliances, insufficient security, damp and mould, threatening behaviour, and lack of heating/ insulation.

The Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999 (1999) brought about considerable changes to housing entitlements for asylum seekers by removing the existing rights to housing and benefits, replacing them with a housing and subsistence scheme managed by the UK Border Agency. The racist policy contributed to the redefinition of asylum seekers as a threat, with public misconceptions of migrants being favoured by housing allocation systems when they were in fact discriminated against, failing to hold the state accountable for housing shortages (Rutter and Latorre 2009). These changes formed part of the hostile environment's ambition to deter the racialised 'crimmigrant other' from the UK by hindering access to the essentials of daily life, such as safe housing. The Home Office makes a commitment to treating all those in their accommodation with 'respect, fairness and impartiality' (Home Office, 2019b). By March 2020, the Home Office provided accommodation for approximately 48,000 asylum seekers, estimated to be 30% of the total asylum seeker population (National Audit Office, 2020). While waiting for their asylum claim to be processed, asylum seekers are provided with accommodation on a 'no choice' basis (Home Office, 2019b).

As the Refugee Council pointed out, asylum accommodation is a public service, with a basis in international refugee protection law and the right to shelter in UK law (Refugee Council, 2019). The House of Commons public accounts committee released the findings of its investigation into the 2019 changeover of asylum accommodation contracts and found that persistent failings in policy implementation were causing serious harm to those in the asylum system (House of Commons, 2020, p.3). The Home Office was criticised for failing to 'have effective services fully up and running' after the changeover, which 'had a significant impact on the lives of asylum seekers' (ibid.). The department was further accused of being 'unacceptably vague about its plans to improve services' (ibid.).

The investigation expressed concern that from October 2019, more than 1,000 people each night were placed in hotels rather than dedicated housing for asylum seekers (House of Commons, 2020). At the time of the inquiry, approximately 9,500 asylum seekers were being accommodated in 91 hotels across the UK, and some for far longer than the 35-day limit the Home Office has for providers to move asylum seekers into more permanent accommodation. These findings are in line with what RASW reported during this research project, and have a gendered impact. Ria[137] was frustrated at having been left to stay in a basic hotel for several months with 'no facilities for cooking at all,' while Zala[138] and her three-month old baby lived

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[137] RASW research participant Ria was a community advocate for Baobab.
[138] RASW research participant Zala fled persecution based on her ethnic group in Ethiopia.

in one hotel for three weeks, then another hotel for an entire year, before being placed in unsuitable dispersal housing for three months, and then moved again.

Ruta[139] spent nine months in a hotel with her young children, struggling to feed them balanced nutritious meals without use of a kitchen. Hannah[140] spent 2 months in initial accommodation in a hostel with her toddler and newborn baby in one room. She described being scared, especially having discharged herself from hospital with her newborn to care for her elder daughter. However, on returning to the hostel, she was left for 'five days without food, without water, without nothing. Five days, I stayed in the room because I couldn't walk. I can't walk.'

> Five days. Every single morning we should go to office and sign, yes we are here, every morning we sign, that means we are here, we're living here. If you don't sign in the morning they will think you are not here, you left the hostel. Five days I didn't sign, because five days I couldn't, even urine I done, and I throw it in the sink. I can't go out, I can't go in toilet, I can't walk. Everything I'd done in room.

Eventually the manager came to check on Hannah, and found her 'yellow, five days no eating, no drinking, nothing.' Hannah reflected: 'I was dead, if they left me two days more, I will die and nobody will know what happen with me. I will die for food in UK in 2013.' Alone and without English language skills, Hannah was caring for a small child and a newborn without any post-natal care or support. She spoke in harrowing detail about her overwhelming fear that she would die and her small children would not be found and cared for.

This harmful arrangement not only prevents AS women from accessing the basics of safe and suitable housing for themselves and their young children but acts as another form of punishment at the hands of the hostile environment, inflicted on those who are redefined as undeserving, criminal 'others.' The denial of safe housing reflects the denial of ASW as human enough to be afforded an adequate standard of living, and fails to consider the particular needs of women, such as accommodating children.

The move into dispersal accommodation did not offer research participants more suitable housing. Three quarters of RAS women used the words 'dirty' or 'very dirty,' and described mould, damaged furniture, and poorly installed electrical items. Unhygienic conditions were

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[139] RASW research participant Ruta was a solo parent to one son, who had fled political persecution in Eritrea.
[140] RASW research participant Hannah fled sexual violence in Albania with her children.

commonplace, as were vermin and concerns about fire safety. Hiyab[141] recalled the fire brigade attending her address in response to a fire alarm, whereupon they told her: 'there are so many things that shouldn't be there' as they posed a serious fire risk. One item was an old electric heater, which Hiyab used as the only way of combatting the cold after her housing officer had failed to respond to her reports of broken central heating. A quarter of RASW had children with them and expressed concerns for their children in small unsafe accommodation, being 'contained' and unable to play. Two research participants detailed how their young children had become ill living in unsafe housing, one having developed severe asthma due to damp and another developing eczema due to the proximity of an uncovered hot water pipe to the bed in a very small bedroom. After 12 months of advocating for relocation, neither ASW had been moved to safer accommodation.

Two thirds of RASW participants described neglect on the part of service providers, namely G4S. There was little communication from their housing officer, zero or extremely slow responses to complaints about safety standards, and unprofessional service when it was provided. Hiyab was told that the vermin must be present due to her own lack of hygiene, while Kesandu[142] pointed out that G4S housing was easily distinguishable on a street as they appeared so 'bad outside.' She was also distressed to find that a former resident still had keys and entered the property regularly, causing her to feel very unsafe, although G4S failed to respond to her concerns. Kesandu asserted that 'they are just treating us like we are nobody. G4S are not gonna provide good housing, they don't care about asylum seekers, they don't care about us. They don't care, they just make empty promises.'

As another arm of the 'crimmigration' regime, private contractors also engage in denying ASW their humanity, continuing their racist and sexist treatment. There is little consideration for safety in the context of the UK where 1 in 5 women have been sexually assaulted as adults and the highest ever number of rapes was recorded by the police in the year ending December 2021 (acknowledging that only 1 in 6 rapes were reported to the police in 2021) (Rape Crisis, 2022). RASW live at an even greater number of intersections of oppression, increasing their risk of being subjected to violence due not only to their gender, but also their immigration status, race, and accommodation status.

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[141] RASW research participant Hiyab was an Eritrean woman in her early thirties who fled political persecution while pregnant.
[142] RASW research participant Kesandu was trafficked from Nigeria into slavery in the UK.

There was an asylum seeker here who was burnt to death in a G4S house. So, where she was burnt, it was four houses from my G4S house where I was living. I had just moved and this person dies by fire. So, things like that, you always think it could have been me, same street, just a few houses away (Lizi).[143]

RASW described their contact with G4S staff as dehumanising and racist. Ro[144] found them to behave with 'no respect. They know that they are untouchable, no one will question the type of abuse they are doing.' Staff were 'bullies,' and upon repeated reporting of a washing machine being a fire risk, Lizi was told by a 'so-called welfare officer' that as a person 'from Africa' she should 'use your hands to wash your clothes.' Hannah was told to 'go back' to her country by a G4S contractor who had been called out to repair her boiler. Hiyab believed that 'they don't care about people's safety. When you complain, they become your enemy, they check everything against you.' She is referring to a common fear among RAS women of raising complaints about their accommodation, and it being held against them in their asylum claim. The hostile environment is functioning not only to place RAS women and children in dangerous uninhabitable housing, but also creating fear around the consequences of refusing to accept it. In fact, a number of women spoke about their 'gratitude' at not being homeless:

I'm not happy or excited but I'm not homeless. The house is not home, when you get house you have peace. Your house not good, you don't have peace, not happy. But I'm good because I'm not homeless, I'm not sleep in the road (Aster).[145]

A third of RAS women spoke about witnessing or experiencing some form of abuse in asylum accommodation from fellow residents. Research participants referred to the lack of consideration for cultural and religious differences in placing individuals in shared accommodation. Hiyab was physically assaulted in an Islamophobic attack in front of her child by a housemate and resorted to calling the police when G4S failed to respond to her request for support. Ro was also 'beaten up, thrown out of the house… by a fellow asylum seeker who believed that asylum was given to people from Africa as opposed to from the Middle East.' Acknowledging that issues with asylum housing are 'very complex' and worsened by the behaviour of providers, Ro raised 'issues but no one listens to you. That's why I say, if you want to know your uselessness, claim asylum, you'll know it.'

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[143] RASW research participant Lizi fled Malawi due to persecution based on her LGBT identity.
[144] RASW research participant Ro fled political persecution in Uganda in 2010.
[145] RASW research participant Aster fled religious persecution in Eritrea and was a solo parent to a toddler.

Asylum accommodation in the UK does not represent a safe haven for asylum seeking women, invariably unsafe and unsanitary. The challenges do not diminish once ASW are granted status. Ruta was pleased to receive a positive decision on her claim but panicked on being told she had to leave her dispersal accommodation quite quickly, not knowing 'where to go' or how to secure housing. Community interpreter Ava spoke about these challenges that her clients faced, with the realisation that receiving a positive decision did not put an end to the hostility of the asylum system. Particularly when citizen on citizen checks now require landlords to act as pseudo-immigration officials through the Right to Rent scheme, which introduced criminal sanctions against landlords who failed to check the legal status of tenants. The government effectively incentivised landlords to discriminate against people of colour based on their appearance or accents as high risk, while giving preference to white citizens with local accents. The hostile environment has extended enforcement powers to private citizens like landlords to police asylum seekers access to their basic rights, demonstrating the racist and sexist framework discussed in earlier chapters.

An issue within housing that caused significant harm to research participants was homelessness:

> The time limit, over. The opportunity got failed. Section 95 was discontinued, homelessness came. Crawling, like for the life [cries], no place to sleep, no place to go. It was really bad. How can you put some person… Homelessness, devastation, stress… (Ria).

Refused asylum seekers are at greater risk of homelessness once they are evicted from their asylum accommodation. Without a network of support or assistance from over-subscribed charities, woman and children fall into street homelessness, compounded by the fear that they will be forcibly returned. The majority of RASW research participants had experienced destitution after a refusal numerous times, caught in cycles of having their claims denied and not yet starting a fresh claim. As a result of the culture of disbelief, barriers to disclosure, and poor decision making by the Home Office, research participants experienced repeated refusals, the subsequent withdrawal of support, the inability to meet their basic needs for survival. Dispersal policies worsen the situation as ASW are repeatedly relocated and disconnected from communities of support they may have built. Lizi was told she would be moved from Birmingham to Nottingham but refused to do so as she suspected she 'would receive a refusal and I would be homeless again and I don't know anybody.' By remaining in

Birmingham, once she received her refusal, she was able to turn to friends to avoid becoming homeless and exposed to the accompanying risks.

Ina pointed out that AS women are particularly harmed by this dehumanising practice, as they are often caring for young children, and have different health needs such as pre/post-natal care. Esi[146] was made homeless shortly after discovering she was pregnant. Unable to access pre-natal healthcare as she feared discovery and deportation, Esi spent her pregnancy in fear and moving around the country every few months staying with friends. Zala was informed her claim was refused and her support withdrawn, resulting in her becoming homeless in the winter with a three-month old baby. Iftin[147] voiced the hardship for single mothers, who may be able to 'survive themselves without food but not the kids, it is hard for them to understand the situation, to explain to children.' Blessing[148] began to describe her experiences of homelessness and street sleeping with her young daughter before she became too distressed to continue: 'you do not know real hunger until you have been starving on the street here [UK].' With the sixth-largest national economy in the world measured by GDP (ONS, 2012), scarcity of resources is not the cause of RASW becoming homeless and hungry, but a consequence of intentionally violent asylum policies designed to exclude and remove unwanted bodies of colour.

Having looked at health and housing, the next issue of concern with regards to the denial of access to human rights is the denial of access to social inclusion, including participation in community and relationships.

Denial of access to social inclusion

Esi was pained to recall when shopping and wanting 'to pay, you take that card out, and the way they look at you from up to down, you know that this one knows you are asylum seeker so no regard, no respect or anything.' Esi attributed this dehumanisation to racism: 'even in the shops, are racist there. These are our colonial masters. They just hate us. They just don't like anything about us here.' This resulted in Esi feeling as though: 'I don't feel belonging here, I don't feel belonging because I don't have any work, nowhere to go.' The racist

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[146] RASW research participant Esi was a woman in her forties who fled Ghana after experiencing persecution due to her sexuality.
[147] RASW research participant Iftin was trafficked into the UK from Pakistan in 2014 in her late twenties.
[148] RASW research participant and journalist Blessing fled political persecution in Nigeria.

dehumanisation that RASW experience is not limited to their interactions with asylum institutions as managed by the state but is mirrored and repeated in the communities they are forced to exist in, limiting their ability to access the necessities of everyday life. As well as navigating patriarchal societies as women, they are faced with racism and xenophobia. For what research participants described was not living but trying to survive in the few spaces they are permitted to occupy as determined by their race, gender, and nationality, almost none of which recognised their humanity.

Article 14 of the HRA refers to the prohibition of discrimination (*Human Rights Act 1998*, 1998), which the hostile environment breaches in innumerable ways, and in fact encourages as a deterrent measure. The institutionalised dehumanisation of asylum seekers has become so embedded across British society, that ASW endure the indignity of discrimination in all spaces, public and private. For example, the Aspen debit card is meant to provide basic financial subsistence support, but research participants spoke of it as a marker of their immigration status in public places. Blessing explained that ASW 'don't like to bring out our Aspen card because the moment they see that thing,' others categorise them as an asylum seeker, as dishonest 'leeches' on the state who must accept living in poverty as a form of violence that is justified by their status as 'criminals.'

This right refers to the ability of all people to participate in community and social interactions, another basic right that is guaranteed to prisoners. The concept of 'private life' in the HRA includes the ability to determine your sexual orientation, your lifestyle, and the right to develop relationships (*Human Rights Act 1998*, 1998). The ability to form relationships is severely damaged by the hostile environment and policies such as dispersal, detention, and destitution. With very limited financial means, RASW spoke about their capacity to partake in social and cultural activities being extremely restricted, worsened by the existence of very few spaces they could occupy without being monitored or threatened with removal. Repeated dispersal and detention further damaged the ability of RASW to maintain relationships with other, compounded by the harm that seeking asylum in the UK has done to their mental health.

Research participants were unanimous in speaking about their experiences of racist exclusion and the consequent isolation. Elean[149] believed 'the impact on women could be seen, mental health, loneliness. You spend all your days in your room.' For Hannah,[150] her early

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[149] RASW research participant Elean fled Cameroon in her forties due to persecution based on her sexuality.
[150] RASW research participant Hannah fled sexual violence in Albania with her children.

experiences in the UK informed her choice to isolate herself: 'I never tried, I have no British friend. I don't have friends, I'm scared because I don't know the people here, I don't know what people doing, I don't know what people thinking. I'm scared, I'm scared.' Gendered and racialised oppression pushes women with uncertain immigration status further into living at the margins of society.

Kesandu[151] was so afraid of punishment for her perceived criminality and a forced return to slavery that she remained inside her small damp accommodation: 'I've been living in fear. I just don't want to leave the house often. I've not met anyone here.' Nadia[152] was distressed describing her fear of dehumanising treatment in the community which was based on previous experiences: 'I was so scared to meet people. I'm so scared of crowded places. Now I'm so scared to go out, a lot. This is what I feel, I always feel alone.' So successfully has the asylum system assigned violability to the ASW through the hostile environment, that the state are not the only ones to objectify members of this 'out-group.' Citizens have seemingly been sanctioned by the state to act not only as pseudo immigrant officials, but also as perpetrators of violence and punishment against those who have been redefined as criminal non-humans. An already patriarchal society facilitates this discrimination against women of colour, and more so ASW.

> Everywhere you go you get rejected. I was rejected. Everywhere you go, in the streets, ambulance passes, you think the police is coming for you. Rejection from the Home Office is so powerful, that is when you know you are not wanted (Ro).

RASW described such rejection from government agencies and local communities as all encompassing, successfully excluding them from participating in meaningful individual or communal relationships. Lizi[153] expressed sadness at not being able to feel at 'home' after over a decade in the UK due to the constant threat: 'because you know you don't belong here and any time you might be put in detention.' The marginalisation and exclusion of RASW seeks to strip the 'other' of agency and autonomy with the justification that they are not fully human and not deserving of having their human rights guaranteed. This isolation also serves to hinder access to services which could support ASW in their claims and day to day survival, particularly when travelling to find these resources could cost the daily asylum allowance. The state's interference into the private life of RASW serves to isolate them from essential

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[151] RASW research participant Kesandu was trafficked from Nigeria into slavery in the UK in 2017.
[152] RASW research participant Nadia experienced extreme violence and political persecution in Egypt.
[153] RASW research participant Lizi fled Malawi due to persecution based on her LGBT identity.

mechanisms of support, no doubt in the hope this will act as another deterrent measure. The culmination of these measures reinforces the 'crimmigrant' woman's status as 'undesirable,' placed at the margins of society and 'immcarcerated' there.

Conclusion

The experiences of RASW demonstrate the extent to which they are deprived of their human rights, which is also a deprivation of their humanity. The criminality that is assigned to them as 'crimmigrants' actually goes beyond that of convicted criminals in the UK, who are guaranteed their basic right and freedoms in prison. The racist and sexist construction of ASW as outside of human dignity dehumanises them to such extremes, that contrary to the UK's stated policy commitments, institutional practices hinder their access to healthcare, safe housing, and social relationships. ASW are made so abject that the 'crimmigration' regime places them beyond being criminals, who are subjected to the worst excesses of dehumanisation. The oppression that AS women face is compounded by the multiple intersections of gender, race, and nationality, in a sexist and racist society that does not prioritise the safety and dignity of women, women of colour, and certainly not women of colour with uncertain immigration status.

Conclusion: '*I have made up my mind, I will speak. I will demonstrate*' (Elean)

Introduction

Previous chapters have explored the racialised and gendered criminalisation of ASW (Chapter 4), the violence perpetrated against AS women by the state through 'crimmigration' control measures enacted by the hostile environment (Chapter 5), and how the dehumanisation of refugee and asylum seeking women has served to sever their access to their fundamental individual liberties (Chapter 6). The racist and sexist state utilises the numerous intersections of identity at which RASW live, homogenising them as threats to the state and its white citizens, reproducing this category of oppression in justifying the perpetration of violence through the hostile environment. The marginalisation of non-citizens, and indeed citizens, is predicated on redefining RASW as lesser-than or non-human, excluding them from the right to have rights. State power is enacted to dispossess RASW of their agency, silence their voices, and discredit acts of resistance as an aspect of their criminality. This is in service of marginalising, excluding, and ultimately expelling these unwanted bodies of colour.

This chapter will explore the ways in which RASW research participants discussed responding to their redefinition as 'crimmigrants,' the impact of punitive measures they were subjected to by the 'crimmigration' regime, and their insights into the denial of access to their human rights. They spoke about engaging in individual acts of resilience (such as rest, hunger strikes, and turning to faith), redefining themselves (as active agents in their lives), evasion from the Home Office, and joining collective actions (like advocacy, campaigning, and community building). RASW spoke about the ways in which they countered the denial of their humanity by the hostile environment which seeks to reduce them to less-than human.

Responding to 'crimmigration'

Refugee and asylum seeking women discussed responding to their racialised criminalisation, exclusion, and dehumanisation on a spectrum, from survival to self-definition and more direct challenges. Acts of resistance are informed by cultural and historical context (Greatbatch,

1989; Stanley and McCulloch, 2013). The context under discussion here is an asylum system built upon categories of oppression which reproduce and maintain gendered and racialised violence. This violence is intersectional as it is perpetrated against asylum seekers, often people of colour, and disproportionately impacts women. As discussed in previous chapters, crime control and immigration policies have merged in the present-day hostile environment to subject vulnerable populations like RASW to indefinite detention, destitution, and exploitation.

'Crimmigrants' are defined as such due to the intersections at which they live, and the 'crimmigration' regime is the project of intersectional state violence. Intersectional resistance to the criminalisation of migrant communities of colour aims at 'dismantling systems of oppression' by organising around these intersections of identity (Pomerenke, 2018, p. 249). This is particularly challenging when structural barriers in receiving countries like the UK are designed to limit space for resistance (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Khanlou and Moussa, 2008). Katz conceptualises feminist political action as falling into three categories of resistance, reworking, and resilience (Katz, 2001, 2004). This formulation of resistance is oppositional (Katz, 2001), but others have pointed out that resistance is not necessarily coherent and formally organised, but can occur in the everyday (Hughes, 2019, Pottinger, 2017). A feminist approach demands the acknowledgement that resistance is in fact subjective and can be constantly shifting.

Common in feminist scholarship is Katz's second category of resilience, which she relates to strategies of endurance in daily life that do not change the challenging circumstances (Katz, 2001). Some have argued that resilience to racialised and gendered oppression carries the risk of maintaining social injustice rather than changing it (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013). The third category is reworking, which Katz posits as finding alternative ways of resistance that may exist partly inside and partly outside of structures of power (Katz, 2001). It is useful to bear these concepts in mind and be reminded that they are not discrete categories of feminist responses to oppression, but simultaneous and interwoven.

The next section will explore the ways in which research participants spoke about the forms of action they engaged in, individually and as part of organisations, that addressed race, gender, and nationality as women of colour without citizenship who were the most impacted by the hostile environment. The discussion will be organised around four aspects on a spectrum of the responses of RASW: individual resilience, self-(re)definition, evading the Home Office, and community action. I will begin by looking at daily survival strategies, and individual action in detention centres.

Individual Resilience

Resilience is often contrasted with direct action, rather than being understood as one of the processes of resistance. It has been argued that a concern with daily survival means that there is no space for resistance (Reid, 2012). Resilience 'from below' can represent an infrapolitics of resistance however, which is not simply a way of coping with adversity (Katz, 2001) but as a tactic of resistance (Ryan, 2015; Bourbeau and Ryan, 2018). While not a highly visible or collective struggle against power (Hynes, 2013, Katz, 2001), everyday resilience can support larger, more direct resistances, while also enabling actors to maintain agency and continued physical presence in the UK on a daily basis (Ryan, 2015).

The expansion of the hostile environment's sprawling web of immigration control poses ever greater challenges to everyday life for asylum seeking women, designed to deter entry and settlement and encourage 'voluntary' return. Finding ways of coping despite living within a punitive regime, and protecting the unwanted body from everyday violence, become tactics of resistance, and a way in which RASW can defy the state's desire to remove them from inside its borders. Resilience is necessary to surviving the processes of criminalisation, 'immcarceration,' and dehumanisation that are gendered and racialised.

> You won't believe the strength you've got in you until you're faced with certain situations where you're like, I just have to fight. When it has to do with your life you just have to fight. So, the courage, the fighting spirit, the resilience, like 'no I just have to do this.' I try as much as possible to tell anybody who I come in contact with…if you are in this situation you just have to fight. I've been there, I know what it takes, you just need to be strong (Blessing).[154]

Research participants spoke about enduring and surviving not only the persecution that caused them to flee, but the violence of seeking asylum in the UK as women of colour. As discussed in Chapter 5, it is made clear beyond the UK's borders that certain bodies are unwanted within its borders; this is reiterated at the border and amplified within the UK through everyday 'immcarceralities' designed to limit spatial movement. Having been redefined as criminal, subjected to crime control measures, denied everyday essentials, and excluded and dehumanised, the hostile environment intends for ASW to respond by being deterred from

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[154] RASW research participant and journalist Blessing fled political persecution in Nigeria.

seeking asylum in the UK while/ through threatening their very ability to survive. Blessing described the process as 'survival of the fittest,' and spoke about the hostile environment aiming to 'break you down completely' until 'people just give up.'

The state cannot be relied upon to guarantee the basic rights of RASW, when their bodies are constructed and read as threats. To survive on a daily basis necessitates being adaptive, flexible, and part of a supportive community (Chandler, 2012) as the pervasive nature of the hostile environment restricts every aspect of RASW's lives, from where they live to their ability to access healthcare. This is in addition to living with the ever-present threat of male violence in a patriarchal society. Numerous research participants spoke about their resolve to stay alive when they were forced to endure homelessness, destitution, deportation, or detention; state violence that they understood as designed to threaten their survival. Esi[155] and Hannah[156] were among the RASW who spoke about their determination to adapt so that their children might thrive in safety, by creating a sense of normality.

> Slowly slowly when I started learning English, when I start talking with people, when I start going college, I was feeling more confident and I thought, I will carry on. I will go on with my life, and when I see the kids, they are doing very good in school and they are very happy (Hannah).

RASW spoke about developing resilience in order to survive the psychological violence of engaging with the asylum system. For some this was in the form of accessing mental health services while in crisis in order to survive, access which we have discussed is not an easy task. Dellina[157] found counselling supported her through suicidal ideation when she feared being forcibly removed, while Nadia[158] spoke about Freedom from Torture through her daily 'darkness.' The spatial confinement inflicted on RASW is not only physical but also psychological, as they constantly live with fear of punitive measures being taken against them and subjected to even more violence. As their humanity is erased RASW have little psychological space for self-development or growth.

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[155] RASW research participant Esi was a woman in her forties who fled Ghana after experiencing persecution due to her sexuality.
[156] RASW research participant Hannah fled sexual violence in Albania with her children.
[157] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.
[158] RASW research participant Nadia experienced extreme violence and political persecution in Egypt.

To work on their sense of self was described by RASW as a response to the asylum system systematically working to diminish it. Similarly, Nadia and Sachini[159] spoke about taking rest as an everyday act of resistance after they were granted their leave to remain. Having fought so hard, they asserted that rest was necessary to their survival: 'We need to recover. It's not an easy battle' (Sachini). To persist by surviving is resistance to the sexist and racist violence of the asylum system, and more so when building resilience in the face of being so thoroughly dehumanised. To take rest was a political act for some research participants, as it disrupted the state's near-absolute control of their bodies and allowed them space for being more fully human.

Another form of individual action expressed by research participants took place in immigration detention. The very nature of immigration detention, like prison, is to severely limit the autonomy and agency of detainees and control the movement of unwanted, racialised, 'crimmigrant' bodies. Nadia spoke about performing her political agency in the context of the state inscribing violence on her body as a non-citizen, on the numerous occasions she was held at Yarlswood Detention Centre. She enacted her agency through a refusal of the life that the state was imposing on her, in the form of purposeful hunger strikes:

> They say, 'we are returning you back, we reserve the ticket, we booked for you a ticket.' When they told me that they are going to return me, the first thing I did is I stopped eating food, I refused it. I started to be in the room, not coming out.

Within the dehumanising, punitive location of the immigration detention centre, this form of agency disrupts the 'administrative' processes of detention, and simultaneously poses a risk to the physical and mental health of ASW. To refuse food is a 'political micro-challenge to the certitude of their asylum lives as wholly regulated by those in authority' (De Angelis, 2020, p.220). Nadia made choices about her body within a system that assumes control of non-citizens who exist at the intersection of asylum and race.

> There is a man, and he came, saying, with one interpreter, advising me, just pray, come down to pray. He gave me hope, he was Christian, he was very nice. Come down and pray, and he said. He could see I was alone, very quiet (Nadia).

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[159] RASW research participant Sachini worked for many years as a solicitor and human rights defender in Sri Lanka.

Nadia and Sachini also described enacting micro-transgressions around faith (De Angelis, 2020) in challenging their 'otherness.' Muslim and Christian respectively, Nadia and Sachini were invited to join the faith community in Yarlswood within their first few weeks, as they struggled with 'immcarceration.' They found that spaces for prayer allowed them to connect with other women and find some sense of community where their humanity was acknowledged through kindness and support.

Within the punitive space of 'immcarceration,' Nadia and Sachini also discovered that prayer rooms were subjected to less surveillance than other areas. Both women engaged with faith-related activities on a daily basis. The sense of 'belonging' they described challenged their assigned status as deviant criminals, particularly as their relationships to the faith community extended beyond detention. When the 'crimmigration' regime is designed to isolate and exclude the racialised other, to find community and solidarity is an act of resilience. I will now turn to acts of self-(re)definition that research participants described as a response to being criminalised for seeking asylum.

Self-(re)redefinition

> I learned that if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive (Lorde, 1984).

Chapter 4 explored the redefinition and the accompanying sexist violence that RASW endure, criminalised and excluded as the racialised 'other,' who is undeserving of protection. A form of agency which emerged in this project was in research participants disrupting these dominant narratives about their being either passive victims or suspect villains (Bowling and Westenra, 2018; Malkki, 1996; Vecchio and Gerard, 2017), finding avenues of expression for their agency, as individuals with complex identities that did not revolve around their immigration status. RASW spoke about challenging their redefinition as suspect individuals and engaging in self-definition, repeatedly asserting their right to apply for asylum, and by finding some sense of normality in everyday life. This redefinition could be understood within Katz's framework as a kind of reworking, imagining and enacting alternative self-identification.

Apart from those who were trafficked, RASW spoke about the active decisions they made to flee persecution and seek asylum. Blessing 'bought a plane ticket,' while Hiyab[160] paid a broker and spent two days on foot through the desert. Zala[161] crossed 'Mediterranean water, no plane, in a boat,' and Mahum[162] made 6 attempts to leave Calais by lorry. Their arrival at the UK border challenges narratives that they possess no agency and warns against essentialising RASW as only victims. Conversely, research participants also challenged the rhetoric that they 'targeted' the UK as 'economic migrants.'

> Life back home was excellent and growing up with my mom dad was a normal family growing up. Yeah, I went to school, normal stages of school, I was a journalist back home. I miss my home country. I do, definitely. I am proud of who I am, I'm proud of my profession, but unfortunately with what I faced back home I cannot go back and practice it (Blessing).[163]

Blessing was one of many RASW who spoke of missing their home country very much. Hiyab described her home life as 'perfect' before she experienced state violence and fled, and Iftin[164] remembered being 'happy, I was studying, I didn't have any stress, with my family. I was living normal.' Research participants spoke about their rich and unique life history which is either dismissed by the Home Office or weaponised to criminalise them. These histories were neither defined entirely by persecution nor by uninterrupted happiness, but complex intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, and language that informed their identities and experiences. RASW were vocal about claiming these aspects of their identities in the face of having their humanity denied, redefining themselves as whole individuals. Another method of changing their definition as 'crimmigrants' that was reinforced by refusals, was to persist in applying for refuge.

Despite the innumerable challenges to living with a sense of normalcy while engaging with the asylum system, RASW described the ways in which they made their lives more liveable and even found enjoyment. All participants actively engaged with learning English language skills, a valuable adaptive strategy, and many took great pride in cooking and sharing food from their

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[160] RASW research participant Hiyab was an Eritrean woman in her early thirties who fled political persecution while pregnant.
[161] RASW research participant Zala fled persecution based on her ethnic group in Ethiopia.
[162] RASW research participant Mahum was from Eritrea and had 3 young children.
[163] RASW research participant and journalist Blessing fled political persecution in Nigeria.
[164] RASW research participant Iftin was trafficked into the UK from Pakistan in 2014 in her late twenties.

countries of origin. Ruta[165] spoke about the 'joy' that it brought her to share her cultural practices, also a resilient resistance to the dehumanisation enacted by the asylum system. This everyday act of 'being' Eritrean helped Ruta to maintain her daily world. Numerous RASW described how often they would cook and share food from 'home,' sourcing hard to find ingredients from each other and sharing recipes. This acted as a kind of non-violent cultural resistance, a refusal to abandon the markers of their identities that are used by the asylum system to reproduce their 'otherness.' Food-making becomes a challenge to the removal of cultural identity enacted by the hostile environment.

> They refuse the appeal. Afterwards I waited for a whole year, until last October, and I submitted further submissions. For that year I was preparing, I had been writing articles about the opposition and partaking in demonstrations and these things (Hiyab).

Submitting appeals or repeated claims for asylum to the Home Office was one way in which ASW resisted their criminalisation, reasserting their identity as asylum seekers who the state should protect. Between 2016 and 2018, 70% of initial decisions were appealed, largely against refusals (Walsh, 2020). Of those with a known outcome, 43% of appeals were successful (ibid.). This is an indictment of Home Office processes and the poor quality of decision-making. Research participants spoke about the risks involved in challenging Home Office decisions and submitting a fresh claim as it would attract attention and potentially lead to their deportation. This speaks to the risks of working to redefine themselves, as even these acts are used to criminalise ASW. Persistently seeking legal protection as refugees is an explicit challenge to the 'crimmigrant' label imposed on ASW, as well as an assertion of their agency, as ASW insist that they are recognised as refugees and granted protection. They are insisting upon recognition for the definition they are claiming for themselves and the guarantee of their human rights that should accompany it.

> I really want to be an advocate, speak for people, see what I can do to make things easier, things I didn't have help for, I want to see if I can do it for people. Language - wise, they don't really know where to go, how to start, I really want to be for those people and advocate and I know it's not going to be easy but to start from somewhere. I really want to do is see how I can help people because people have actually helped me in the past and what I plan to do (Blessing).

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[165] RASW research participant Ruta was a solo parent to one son, who had fled political persecution in Eritrea.

Of all the responses that research participants spoke about, the possibility of self-definition and living life were the most potent, which ties into the feminist project of acknowledging women as the experts in their own lives. All research participants spoke about defining themselves in ways other than their immigration status. Many described situations in which they refused to disclose their status as a micro-resistance to the 'crimmigrant' identity imposed on them. The last topic of each one-to-one conversation with participants was about their ambitions for the future. Their unanimous surprise at being asked about this indicated that their autonomy over their life course is often dismissed as they are dehumanised and repeatedly reminded that their future is unlikely to be in the UK. RASW spoke about wishing to 'study healthcare,' to 'be a chef,' 'a judge for family court,' or a 'translator.' Invariably they wished to enter these professions in order to provide support to migrant communities in the future.

Dellina[166] dreamt of a life consisting of 'normal things, basic needs' and to 'feel like normal people' until she could get to a point of 'helping other people.' Hannah[167] and Iftin were focused on being 'independent educated' women, while Ruta hoped to 'build a family.' Essentially RASW were speaking about having access to their basic human rights such as the right to education, protection of the law, a home and family life, employment, and freedom of movement. This self-definition rejects dominant racist narratives of RASW as suspect, benefit frauds, unqualified, or unskilled, and exposes the oft unheard complexities of identities formed at multiple intersections, and the gendered experiences of seeking protection.

RASW participants detailed numerous forms of resistance to intersectional state violence enacted daily through the hostile environment, ranging from the subtle challenges of resilience, the indirect challenges of self-definition, and more direct challenges. Their acts of everyday resistance rejected the reproduction of RASW as depoliticised victims, passive recipients of state power, dangerous threats to the nation, burdens on the state, and as less-than human. The multiple forms of resistance are mediated of course by the state's intentional restriction of RASW's ability to challenge oppression, with the constant threat of being pushed further into precarity and acts of resistance being weaponised to further criminalise and 'immcarcerate.'

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[166] RASW research participant Dellina was an Eritrean woman in her mid-twenties who had sought asylum from political persecution.
[167] RASW research participant Hannah fled sexual violence in Albania with her children.

Evasion and hiding

Chapter 6 explored the ways in which the criminalisation of RASW by the hostile environment extends beyond dehumanisation to diminishing their right to be human. Unlike British nationals who are convicted of crimes and imprisoned, ASW's access to their basic human rights is restricted to the point that they are not offered safe housing, freedom from exploitation, or healthcare. These gross violations undertaken by the state elicited more direct forms of action among research participants, such as advocacy, campaigning, and community building. This section will look at the active challenges that RASW and their allies made to state violence perpetrated by the 'crimmigration' regime. Almost all research participants spoke about the risks of taking action, particularly direct challenges which they feared would expose them to even greater precarity, criminalisation, and punitive measures. This section will explore research participants' challenges to surveillance and spatial restriction, and their social exclusion.

As discussed in Chapter 5, spatial confinement is a mechanism of the hostile environment used to regulate the 'crimmigrant' body which has become a site of enforcement (Weber and Bowling, 2004) regulated at various sites (Bowling and Westenra, 2018). One response among RASW was to subvert this mode of 'crimmigration' control and exercise agency over the spaces that they occupied by evading the Home Office. This was a tactic of resistance for some new arrivals to the UK, and more so for those who had received a refusal and were at risk of detention and deportation. Numerous RASW spoke about the active decision to avoid detection by the Home Office as an exercise in resilience in order to remain in the UK, to survive, and to challenge persistent attempts to remove them.

> I prefer to take my documents and go… I go Manchester, nobody can keep you a long time, they keep you for some days and after that… From Manchester I end up in Southampton where they catch me… They catch me and they brought me detention (Thabisa).[168]

With such extreme restrictions placed on ASW's autonomy and agency, to flee underground is a type of challenge using the tools available to them within the narrow parameters set by the asylum system's 'immcarceration' regime. Rather than accepting impending removal or detention, without being afforded the time or resources to make a fresh claim, research participants rejected further punishment from an institutionally racist system that does not

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[168] RASW research participant Thabisa was trafficked out of Eswatini in 2010.

recognise their humanity. When research participant Hayat[169] suddenly stopped attending the Meena Centre it was distressing for all of us who were concerned about her safety. A message was shared with us weeks later that she was in hiding in Manchester, although we remained uncertain as to her accommodation status, wellbeing, or if she would ever return to Birmingham. The price of fleeing the violence of removal and return to persecution was sharply felt by the Meena community who accepted that they may never speak with Hayat again.

The hostile environment works hard to restrict and control the geographical movement of ASW, from where they live to attendance at reporting centres, and confinement to detention centres. To hide underground becomes a refusal to be subjected to this and the accompanying violence, as does the willingness of other RASW and allies to house them. Almost all research participants spoke about the practice of 'going underground' after their claim had been denied, for periods of time ranging from a few months to several years. This involved suddenly leaving their city and community to avoid detection by the Home Office, detention, and deportation. Of course, this means exposure to the significant gendered harms of destitution, homelessness, and the risk of exploitation, all created by the hostile environment and still judged by ASW as lesser than the violence of detention or forced removal to a place they had fled.

The unrelenting hostility faced by RASW aims to restrict their agency and going into 'hiding' was described as 'really hard' and 'stressful.' Constantly fearing detection, focused on daily survival, and attempting to submit a fresh claim while pushed even further into the very margins of society, ASW spoke about 'fighting' for the right to access sanctuary. This form of resistance exemplifies ASW refusing to have their unwanted bodies removed from the nation, utilising the spaces to which they are banished by the asylum system to shield them temporarily; in effect using the master's tools against him (Lorde, 1984). Aaminata[170] was one of many RASW who spoke about being taken in by friends across the country while underground, and on occasion by overstretched charities or community allies. They were very aware that they could not be offered refuge for very long as that would potentially place their asylum seeking friends at risk of punitive measures, although RASW spoke about their own willingness to offer shelter to others who were in hiding, as an act of solidarity.

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[169] RASW research participant was a young woman who had been informed that her forced removal was pending.
[170] RASW research participant Aaminata was a Nigerian woman in her early thirties with a ten-month-old baby.

Collective Action

Another form of collective action in response to surveillance was developed by RASW in collaboration with community allies, End Deportations Birmingham (EDB).[171] The organisation's focus was on preventing deportations by challenging the government, campaigning, holding open forums, and taking practical measures. One such measure was to implement a 'buddy system' for those reporting in Solihull. As in Manchester and London, volunteers travelled with the asylum seeker to Solihull, waited with them while they queued outside, and stayed there until they left the building to ensure they were not unlawfully detained. If the asylum seeker did not leave the building, the volunteer would call the solicitor, support worker, or next of kin to alert them. Similarly, there was a discussion about setting up a group calendar for reporting days, whereby the asylum seeker would text the volunteer to confirm their arrival at the reporting centre, and again to confirm they had left the building safely.

The Baobab Women's Group service users expressed enthusiastic support for the initiative in the hope that it would make the psychologically violent process a 'little bit more manageable.' This kind of solidarity from allies like EDB is a more organised form of resistance to everyday 'immcarceration' practices that are used not only to control the spatial movement of ASW, and to exercise psychological control by maintaining a climate of fear, but also to remind ASW that they are less-than human and vulnerable to violence at any time. The buddy system disrupts the state's all-encompassing power by threatening visibility and accountability for any unlawful attempts to remove someone from the country, operating on the principles of human dignity.

RASW partook in wider community building and organising activities in and around Birmingham. Criminalised and monitored, their mobility controlled, research participants had very limited access to spaces they could safely occupy. The Meena Centre in Birmingham was one of these rare spaces, where RASW were able to engage in everyday association with others who also want autonomy and agency over their lives and take pleasure in being together. The act of physically being together in a safe space and forming relationships, challenges the denial of social inclusion, and policies like dispersal and destitution, which severely limit RASW's geographical movement to their sub-standard asylum accommodation in hostile communities, or the threatening reporting centre. The meagre asylum allowance and

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[171] Newly set up in 2019 by activist immigration lawyers, aimed to offer practical solidarity to asylum seekers, migrants, and trafficked persons.

transport costs are another limiting factor, and numerous projects who were housed at the Meena Centre offered RASW refunds for their daily bus pass to facilitate their access to the community. Intending to 'create a family unit,' the Meena Centre enabled the development of community cohesion which resists the isolating criminalisation of ASW who are redefined as suspect. It also disrupted the state's everyday 'immcarcerality' regime which restricts ASW's spatial movement, and all participants spoke about the Centre as the only space they could occupy without feeling under threat.

In addition to being a women-centred space for rest and socialising, the Meena Centre offered a daily schedule of activities run by local groups, with a focus on the local population directly affected by 'crimmigration' policies. Sessions included training with experts on topics like campaigning skills and domestic violence, fundraising events, English language classes, film viewings, yoga, coffee mornings, art therapy, and many others in accordance with service user demands. Engaging in these activities is also an active challenge to the exclusion and dehumanisation ASW are subjected to, as they are offered social belonging and opportunities for autonomous self-development should they desire it.

The Baobab Women's project offered advocacy and advice sessions to RASW in order to support them to make decisions about their lives armed with the knowledge to do so. The approach of advocating 'alongside' service users, starts from the point of believing them to be active agents of change in their lives, while recognising the limitations placed on them by the hostile environment. The core group of advocates and interpreters were all women with lived experience of the asylum system and were at various stages of their claims.

> I didn't have any hope but just wanted to do something in return. That's how I came. Now I feel I can do more things, help with legal issues with the women, I can understand the cases, I can understand what kind of evidence they need. As a lawyer we know how to understand the case, what kind of things we need for (Sachini).[172]

Funding from Lush enabled RASW to train as community advocates for Baobab and have their expenses covered. RASW were able to experience their own agency in a space that was also political, where they engaged with and affected their lives and situations, as well as supporting others to do so. This direct challenge to the hostile environment used community expertise to enable ASW to gain more understanding of the complex immigration system and

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[172] RASW research participant Sachini worked for many years as a solicitor and human rights defender in Sri Lanka.

how to engage with it in order to try and secure access to their basic rights. RASW are actively renegotiating their categorisation as 'crimmigrants' and finding different modes of belonging and agency that are not dependent on citizenship status (Franko, 2020, p. 30).

As well as advocating with and interpreting for other women in the migrant community, RASW engaged in campaigning activities within the Meena community, unsettling the UK's own narrative of being a defender of human rights. RASW took action by forming a group to work on the Lift the Ban Campaign. The group met weekly to organise writing to MPs about the impact of the ban on employment and the contribution their tax payments could make. Participants voiced their desire to feel valued as productive members of society, to avoid becoming deskilled, and to improve their quality of life. In short, that they be treated as humans with a wealth of knowledge and skills to offer. This form of direct resistance questioned the state's removal of the right to employment.

> The long and the short is we have to speak up. There are many more people who cannot speak so if the few that have got the opportunity to speak out, at least it will go a long way to change so many things. We are humans, no matter your race, your colour. I have made up my mind, I will speak. Even in front of the Home Office, I will tell them and damn the consequences. I will demonstrate. I prefer to be locked in prison here because prison in the UK is a five-star hotel compared to my country, I have my three meals. So let me speak and change and go to prison for a better future (Elean).[173]

A public campaign is another way in which to challenge systems of oppression but is accompanied by serious risk. Elean spent over a decade in cycles of refusals and destitution, dispersal and hiding underground. Facing deportation after her last refusal, she made the decision to partner with a charity and make her case known to the media. This disrupts the political invisibility of ASW, a visibility that makes her identifiable to the Home Office who are seeking to remove her. Elean's campaign focused on the UK's obligation to respect the duty of non-refoulement, and as public pressure mounted, she was granted leave to remain.

The Meena Centre was a space where RASW organised around the intersections of their identities, namely gender, race, and nationality, in order to effect change in their lives. However, the closure of the Centre exposes the precarity of community organising as a form

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[173] RASW research participant Elean fled Cameroon in her forties due to persecution based on her sexuality.

of resistance to the hostile environment. That the Centre was a rarity and caused so much distress when it announced it would close speaks to the lack of funding and other resources available to enable grassroots collective action.

This spectrum of responses from research participants reveals how RASW challenged their redefinition, control, and dehumanisation by the sexist and racist 'crimmigration' regime which works hard to restrict their voices and agency. They challenged the historic construction of RASW as passive, apolitical victims, but also their more recent categorisation as criminals to demonstrate that they are women with unique life experiences who live at many different intersections that inform their identities.

In the final section of this thesis, I will discuss the contributions to knowledge that this study has made.

Conclusion

The primary contribution of this thesis is to create space in the literature for the experiences of RASW seeking asylum within the contemporary hostile environment, centring their stories using a feminist framework in response to the marginalisation of their voices in discussions about their lives. Another significant contribution made by this study is to the understanding of 'crimmigrant' as it is applied to ASW who live at the intersections of race, gender, nationality, language. I have demonstrated that rather than simply being constructed as criminal and being punished accordingly, ASW are redefined by racist and sexist institutions as being beyond criminal. Their identity has been designated as more deserving of harsh punishment than those who have been convicted of criminal offences. Making the search for asylum synonymous with severe criminal conduct has enabled relentlessly harsh measures to be taken, effectively imprisoning RASW in their daily lives which is disproportionately harmful for women of colour.

This project also expands the understanding of 'immcarcerality' beyond detention and forced removals to include 'everyday immcarceralities.' I have presented RASW's stories as evidencing the insidious forms of control of the bodies of RASW that have created an alternative carceral site. This is done though accommodation dispersal policies, enforced destitution, and reporting requirements. RASW are imprisoned within the very few spaces that they are permitted to occupy, like their accommodation or a reporting centre, excluding them

from most white public spaces. While not physically in the space of a prison or a detention centre, ASW are effectively living as pseudo-prisoners as they are subjected to extremely restricted spatial movement at the margins of society. Before the 'crimmigration' regime is able to expel these bodies of colour beyond the nation's borders, it pushes them to the very edges.

As a project utilising a feminist framework, the aim was to provide a lens into the lived experiences of RASW, and to apply their knowledge to facilitating change. One way in which I worked towards this was through the processes of carrying out the research itself, consulting with participants and following their lead as the experiential experts in formulating the research questions, the method of data collection, and the recruitment of participants. My 12 month fieldwork also provided me with the opportunity to contribute to promoting change in the lives of RASW. Through my involvement with the Baobab group and wider Meena community, I was able to contribute my knowledge, skills, and experience to support 40 RASW Baobab service users. Issues included securing accessing healthcare, having essential repairs made to unsafe accommodation, readmission to English Language classes from which they were unlawfully removed from, securing a bed in a shelter, and having their case taken on by a pro bono solicitor. I provided informal support to Baobab community advocates and interpreters, from drafting their supporting statements for their asylum claim to liaising with the University of Birmingham in respect of an application for a student who has sought refuge in the UK to the Article 26 Scholarship Award Programme. Many research participants expressed the hope that contributing to this study would 'make things better for all asylum seeker women' (Ria).

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Participant information sheet

Study Title: **Exploring refugee & asylum-seeking women's experiences of seeking asylum in the UK**

Investigator(s):   **Rakinder Reehal (PhD candidate)**

Introduction

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish.

(Part 1 tells you the purpose of the study and what will happen to you if you take part. Part 2 gives you more detailed information about the conduct of the study). Please ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

PART 1

What is the study about?

This project explores the experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking women with the UK immigration system, so that their perspectives can be better understood. I am interested in your stories about applying for asylum and engaging with different parts of the system, and how these experiences affected you. The project will place your stories and experiences at the centre in order to develop an understanding of what it is like to seek asylum in the UK that is specific to your situation as a woman living in a different country, where the social, political, and cultural practices are different to your country of origin.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you to decide. I will describe the study and go through this information sheet, which I will give you to keep. If you choose to participate, I will ask you to sign a consent form to

confirm that you have agreed to take part. You will be free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and this will not affect you or your circumstances in any way.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you would like to take part, please email r.reehal@warwick.ac.uk and I will arrange a convenient time and date for a one-to-one conversation with you. It will take place in person with me, in English. The conversation will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio recorded. It will be about your experiences as a refugee/ asylum-seeking woman and your views on them. You will be asked questions about your lived experiences as a refugee/ asylum-seeking woman in the UK. The focus will be on your experiences with the asylum system in the UK.

What are the possible disadvantages, side effects, risks, and/or discomforts of taking part in this study?

There is a risk that the one-to-one conversation may cause uncomfortable feelings as you speak about your experiences and sensitive topics. You can pause for a break at any point if you wish, and you can decide whether or not to continue, or to end the meeting. You may also wish to speak with your GP who can refer you for counselling, contact the charity Samaritans on **116 123**, or the charity Mind on **0300 123 3393.** I can also pass on to you the details of charities who work particularly with refugee and asylum-seeking women who have experienced trauma.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

The motivation for this project is to give greater visibility to the lived experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking women in the UK, and to have your stories heard, in your own words. In particular, it seeks to develop a greater understanding of the impact of the UK immigration system on women. I hope that this may inform government and third sector agencies in their responses to women seeking asylum having fled from conflict and danger and living in exile away from their families and community.

Expenses and payments

Unfortunately, I cannot pay your expenses, but I can travel to your home if that is more convenient. Alternatively we can agree to meet at a convenient central location.

What will happen when the study ends?

The findings of the project will be used for writing up my PhD thesis and potential publications. Any extracts from one-to-one conversations which are included will be anonymised and you will not be identified.

Will my taking part be kept confidential?

Yes. We will follow strict ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence. Further details are included in Part 2.

What if there is a problem?

Any complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm that you might suffer will be addressed. Detailed information is given in Part 2.

This concludes Part 1.

If the information in Part 1 has interested you and you are considering participation, please read the additional information in Part 2 before making any decision.

_____

PART 2

Who is organising and funding the study?

This is a study which I am undertaking as a PhD student at the University of Warwick's Centre for the Study of Women and Gender. The project is funded by the ESRC (the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK).

What will happen if I don't want to carry on being part of the study?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will not affect you in any way. If you decide to take part in the study, you will need to sign a consent form, which states that you have given your consent to participate.

If you agree to participate, you may nevertheless withdraw from the study at any time without affecting you in any way. You have the right to withdraw from the study completely and decline any further contact by study staff after you withdraw.

What if there is a problem?

This study is covered by the University of Warwick's insurance and indemnity cover. If you have an issue, please contact the Chief Investigator of the study:

Name	Position	Telephone	Email
Ms Rakinder Reehal	PhD student	+44 7596101932	R.Reehal@warwick.ac.uk

Who should I contact if I wish to make a complaint?

Any complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm you might have suffered will be addressed. Please address your complaint to the person below, who is a senior University of Warwick official entirely independent of this study:

Director of Delivery Assurance
Registrar's Office
University House
University of Warwick
Coventry, CV4 8UW
Complaints@Warwick.ac.uk
(024 7657 4774)

Will my taking part be kept confidential?

Your identity and any information collected about you will remain strictly confidential. All files will be password protected on an encrypted laptop. The use of any data collected will anonymous.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will be written up as part of my PhD thesis and possibly in academic journals. All participants will receive a copy of the thesis and any published articles, and their comments/ feedback will be welcome.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by the University of Warwick's Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC).

What if I want more information about the study?

If you have any questions about any aspect of the study, or your participation in it, not answered by this participant information leaflet, please contact:

Name	Position	Telephone	Email
Ms Rakinder Reehal	PhD student	+44 7596101932	R.Reehal@warwick.ac.uk
Dr Khursheed Wadia	Principal Research Fellow and PhD Supervisor	+44 (0)24 7652 3970	Khursheed.Wadia@warwick.ac.uk
Prof Virinder Kalra	Head of Sociology and PhD Supervisor	+44 (0) 7341072418	Sociology-HOD@warwick.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this participant information leaflet.

Are you a refugee or asylum-seeking woman?

What has your experience been of the UK asylum system?

I am a PhD student at the University of Warwick and I'm interested in hearing about your experiences. The focus of my project is on your experiences of seeking asylum in the UK and engaging with the system. The aim is to create a better understanding of women's experiences.

All conversations are confidential and anonymous. I would like to invite you to participate if:

- You are over the age of 18 years
- You identify as a woman
- You are a refugee or asylum-seeker
- You are available for a 60-minute one-to-one conversation

I can travel to your home or meet you at a convenient central location.

Please get in touch with me, Rakinder, for more information on r.reehal@warwick.ac.uk or 07596101932.

Thank you!

Appendix 3: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: **Exploring refugee & asylum-seeking women's experiences of seeking asylum in the UK**

Name of Researcher(s): Rakinder Reehal (PhD candidate)

Please initial all boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated **[   ]** for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my medical, social care, education, or legal rights* (*delete as appropriate*) being affected.

3. I consent to audio recording of the interview.

4. I agree that suitably anonymised data may be used for this project and shared for research purposes.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of Person taking   Date   Signature
consent

Appendix 4: Demographic Information Form

The following information is collected to help us understand your experience. You do not need to provide any information you are not comfortable with.

1. Gender

Female	
Male	
Other	
Prefer not to say	

2. Age

18 – 28 years	
29 – 38 years	
39 – 48 years	
49 years and over	
Prefer not to say	

3. Country of birth

_____

4. Nationality

_____

5. Year of arrival in UK

_____

6. Legal status

_____

7. Relationship status

Single	
Married	
Divorced	
Widowed	
Other	

8. Education

No formal education	
Primary school	
Secondary school	
College	
Vocational training	
University	
Masters	
Doctorate/ PhD	
Other	
Prefer not to say	

9. Accommodation status

Initial accommodation	
Hostel/ B&B/ Hotel	
Section 95 accommodation	
Section 4 accommodation	
Council housing	
Housing association	
Private landlord	
Homeless	
Other	
Prefer not to say	

10. Financial status

None	

Asylum support
    -Section 95
    -Section 4	

Charity support	
Benefits	
Loan	
Employment	
Other	
Prefer not to say	

11. Number of children

_____

12. Religion

_____

Thank you.

Appendix 5: RASW One-to-One Conversation Guide

Introduce myself and thank participants for meeting me/ allowing me in to their home. A quick recap of what the project is about, and a reminder that the session will be audio recorded and I may take notes. Ask participant if they have read through the Information Sheet and have any questions. Have consent form signed and collect demographic information.

1. Is there anything you would like to share about your home country?

2. Is there anything you would like to share about your journey to the UK?

3. Did you know you were coming to the UK?
   - Did you know much about the UK?
   - Did you have any expectations about the UK?

4. When did you first apply for asylum in the UK?
   - Did you understand the system?
   - Did you have support navigating the system?

5. Would you like to share anything about your experiences with the Home Office?
   - How was your substantive interview?
   - Did you have help from a solicitor?
   - Did you need an interpreter?

6. While you were an asylum seeking/ waiting to submit a claim/ appeal did you experience:
   - Destitution/ homelessness?
   - Dispersal?
   - Immigration detention?
   - Attempted removal?
   - Attendance at a reporting centre?

7. Do you think these experiences have affected you?

8. What has been the most challenging aspect of life in the UK?

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9. How do you feel about your life in the UK now?

- Your self/ identity
- Your home/ the area you live in
- The community around you
- Do you feel safe?
- Do you feel a sense of belonging/ acceptance?

10. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experiences in the UK?

11. What are your hopes and plans for the future?

Appendix 6: Community Ally One-to-One Conversation Guide

Introduce myself and thank participants for meeting me. A quick recap of what the project is about, and a reminder that the session will be audio recorded and I may take notes. Ask participant if they have read through the Information Sheet and have any questions. Have consent form signed.

1. Can you tell me about the work you do with RAS women?

2. From your experience, how do RASW describe experiencing the UK asylum system?

3. How do RASW speak about these experiences affecting them and their lives in the UK?

4. Is there anything else about seeking asylum in the UK that you've learned from your work with RAS women that you'd like to share?

Appendix 7: Participant Demographics (RASW)

Name	Immigration status	Age	Education	Religion	Country of Origin	Grounds for asylum	Route	Additional information
Aaminata	Asylum seeker (failed)	29-38	Masters	Muslim	Nigeria	Political	Flight	Trained as an accountant, before 9 years in UK. Solo parent to 10-month-old baby in Coventry.
Abi	Leave to remain (5y)	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Muslim	Afghanistan	Undisclosed	Calais	A volunteer at Meena.
Aster	Asylum seeker	18-28	None	Christian	Eritrea	Religious	Calais	Solo parent to a toddler. Enjoyed socialising at Meena.
Ayana	Asylum seeker	18-28	Primary	Muslim	Eritrea	Religious	Calais	Solo parent to a toddler. Very at home at Meena.
Blessing	Leave to remain (5y)	39-48	University	Christian	Nigeria	Political	Flight	A volunteer at Meena. Career as a journalist before arriving in UK 2010. Solo parent to 8-year-old daughter. Writes poetry about asylum.
Dellina	Asylum seeker (failed)	18-28	Primary	Christian	Eritrea	Political	Calais	Arrived in UK 2016 via Mediterranean. Would like to learn how to swim and overcome fear of water.
Elean	Asylum seeker (failed)	39-48	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Cameroon	LGBT	Flight	An activist for LGBT+ rights. A volunteer at Meena, and currently homeless.

Esi	Asylum seeker (failed)	39-48	College	Christian	Ghana	LGBT	Flight	Solo parent to a toddler in Coventry. A regular attendee of Coventry Peace House.
Hannah	Asylum seeker	29-38	College	Muslim	Albanian	Sexual violence	Flight	Arrived in the UK 2013 with 2 small children and heavily pregnant. Plans to train in family law.
Hayat	Asylum seeker (failed)	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Muslim	Iran	Undisclosed	Calais	Fearful due to impending forced removal from UK, fled from Birmingham to go into hiding.
Hiyab	Asylum seeker	29-38	University	Muslim	Eritrea	Political	Calais	Community interpreter at Baobab, with a young daughter.
Iftin	Leave to remain (5y)	29-38	College	Muslim	Pakistan	Domestic violence	Trafficked	Dreams of being able to see her mum again in Pakistan. Hopes to enter higher education.
Ina	Leave to remain (5y)	29-38	Undisclosed	Muslim	Albanian	Sexual violence	Flight	A campaigner for refugee women's rights, self-described as disabled.
Kesandu	Asylum seeker	39-48	College	Muslim	Nigeria	Trafficked	Trafficked	Misses her daughter in Nigeria. Fearful of being re-trafficked.
Lizi	Asylum seeker (failed)	39-48	Masters	Christian	Malawian	LGBT	Flight	A campaigner and regular attendee at Coventry Peace House. Currently homeless. Misses her son in Malawi.
Mahum	Leave to remain (5y)	18-28	College	Muslim	Eritrea	Slavery	Calais	A solo parent to 3 young children.

Nadia	Leave to remain (5y)	29-38	Secondary	Muslim	Egypt	Political	Flight	A volunteer at Meena who loves cooking. Hopes to recover from the trauma of seeking asylum.
Nadjet	Leave to remain (5y)	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Muslim	Egypt	Undisclosed	Calais	Dedicated to 3 young children with special needs.
Ria	Undisclosed	39-48	University	Sikh	Undisclosed	Family life	Flight	A Baobab community advocate who speaks poetically about her experiences.
Ro	Leave to remain (5y)	29-38	Masters	Christian	Uganda	Political	Calais	An activist who hopes to work in politics.
Ruta	Leave to remain (5y)	18-28	Primary	Christian	Eritrea	Religious	Calais	Solo parent to a small toddler, enjoys cooking Eritrean food. Hopes to build her family.
Sachini	Leave to remain (5y)	49+	Masters	Christian	Sri Lankan	Human rights defender	Flight	A Baobab community advocate. A human rights defender, trained as a solicitor. Paints in her free time as a way to recover from trauma.
Selat	Leave to remain (5y)	29-38	Undisclosed	Christian	Eritrea	Religious	Calais	Fearful about being forcibly removed after 5 years leave to remain ends.
Thabisa	Asylum seeker (failed)	49+	Primary	Christian	Swazi	Trafficked	Trafficked	An optimistic and religious woman who dreams of having her own home.
Zala	Asylum seeker (failed)	18-28	Secondary	Muslim	Ethiopia	Ethnic group	Calais	Fears being separated from her children by forced removal. Currently homeless.

Appendix 8: Participant Demographics (Community Allies)

Name	Role	Organisation	Additional information
Aleah	Modern Slavery Support Worker	Birmingham Women's Aid	Has a high caseload of AS women who have experienced slavery. Very involved in End Deportations Birmingham.
Dr I	Doctor & Campaigner	Docs Not Cops	Very vocal about the impact of the hostile environment on AS women's health, especially maternal health.
Ellie	Campaigner	Lift the Ban	An active campaigner in the West Midlands.
Eva	Community Interpreter	Baobab Women's Project	Long term volunteer at the Meena Centre and Baobab Women's project.
James	Immigration lawyer	Confidential	Over a decade of experience with asylum law. Founder of End Deportations Birmingham chapter.
Jess	Immigration lawyer	Confidential	A year's experience with asylum law.
Laura	Centre Manager	Meena Centre	Founder of the Meena Centre, and foster parent to unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
Shay	Project Co-ordinator	Baobab Women's Project	A decade of experience working on asylum seeking women's projects in local communities.

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