Considering a Spectrum of Necropolitical Harms: Geographies of Asylum in Nottingham, Calais and Beyond

Freya Peters

Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of violence for refugees and asylum seekers in Nottingham and Calais and beyond. I situate these experiences of violence in relation to Mbembe's (2003) postcolonial theory of necropolitics. I argue that necropolitics is a suitable framework to view this violence because the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers involve harms which can be considered either outright killing or being kept "alive but in a state of injury" (Mbembe, 2003:21). These harms occur as an expression of necropower wielded by the sovereign in ways which reflect colonial power relations and hierarchical conceptions of race. I argue that there is value in considering necropolitics as a spectrum of harms which range in temporality and visibility (Mayblin, 2019a). The contribution that this thesis makes is that I argue there is a need to consider how necropolitical harms across this spectrum combine over the course of a lifetime rather than viewing them each in isolation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2023, 84,425 individuals made an application for asylum in the UK (Sturge, 2024). In November 2022 there were 231,597 refugees, 127,421 pending asylum cases and 5,483 stateless persons in the UK (UNHCR, 2023). This makes up just a fraction of the world's refugees with 117.3 million people worldwide being forcibly displaced at the end of 2023 (UNHCR, 2024). However, those individuals who have travelled to the UK, or are attempting to do so, in a search for safety are the focus of my research. Within the context of far right riots (Winterbotham et al., 2024), years of hostile UK immigration policies (De Martini Ugolotti and Webster, 2023; Tschalaer, 2022), and conflicts occurring across the globe (Ahmedin, 2023; Corera, 2024; Ochieng and Chibelushi, 2024), it is important to centre the lives of individuals affected by violence.

The 1951 Refugee Convention definition of a **refugee** is someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself [sic] of the protection of that country” (UNHCR, 2023). Everybody has the right to make an asylum claim, if that claim is accepted then a person gains refugee status (UNHCR, 2023). Those in process of making a claim are considered to be **asylum seekers** (Finney, 2003). If we stop here, we have what some would consider to be a perfectly acceptable legal definition of refugees and asylum seekers. However, if one attempts to apply these definitions to real-life people, the issues with this way of thinking become apparent. It is important not to take socially or legally constructed categories for granted (Brun, 2001; Rajaram, 2018). A simple legal definition of refugees and asylum seekers obscures the life or death consequences of these categorisations (Mayblin, 2019a). However, I join others in arguing that it is precisely because of the impact of ‘status’ for the individuals who are being categorised, that it is so important that we attempt to understand these categories and what they mean for people’s lives (Ehrkamp, 2017; Mayblin, 2019a). Not only are traditional categorisations of ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ state-centric (Gill, 2010), they “do not necessarily mesh with the messy realities of people’s lives” (Mayblin, 2019b:4). Those who come to be categorised as asylum seekers are incredibly diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, religious views, education levels, employment, gender, age, sexual orientation, access to resources and reasons for displacement (Bloch, 2007; De Genova, 2018;

Mayblin, 2019b; Sanyal, 2012). Not only that but constantly shifting movement patterns of people, and policy responses, add further complexity as these categorisations attempt to make comprehensible a constantly mutating phenomenon (Darling, 2016; Ehrkamp, 2017; Gill, 2010; Mayblin, 2019a; 2019b). Furthermore, people may occupy more than one category throughout their lifetime as they may shift from ‘asylum seeker’ to ‘refugee’ or ‘granted leave’ (which is often only for 5 years) if a decision is positive, or to ‘refused’ if a decision is negative (Ehrkamp, 2017; Mayblin, 2019a). In response to this complexity, many scholars including myself choose to focus on ‘geographically located individuals’ in ‘contexts of reception’ (Mayblin, 2019b:4, see also Bhagat, 2020; Darling, 2009; Frazer, 2020).

However, I argue that these categories are still worth understanding and referring to because of the real impacts they have on those who are being categorised (Ehrkamp, 2017; Mayblin, 2019a). As Mayblin puts it, “being put into one category rather than another can mean the difference between homelessness and a place to call home, between poverty and getting by” or “between life and death” (2019a:7). Definitions of refugees and asylum seekers can also be meaningful in highlighting nation-states’ responsibilities to meet their legal and humanitarian commitments (Ehrkamp, 2017). Brun (2001) argues that sociological definitions of refugees and asylum seekers can include a broader range of individuals while still keeping a focus on people forced to move for their own safety. Mayblin (2019a) highlights the importance of seeing those seeking asylum primarily as people. She argues that making an asylum claim is not the totality of who a person is, but instead something they do alongside all the other things which come with being a human being. In this research project I will refer to categories such as refugee and asylum seeker, because those categories matter. However, in doing so this does not mean that I believe these categories are an adequate way to divide human beings, nor do I accept the state-centric and often dehumanising worldview that those categories represent. I do so because these categories are meaningful for the individuals with whom I have performed this research.

This thesis centres the postcolonial theory of necropolitics as a way to understand the ongoing impact of colonialism and centre issues of race and colonial power relations (Wallace, 2018). The value of postcolonialist thinking is that it sees racialized violence against forced migrants “not as new, or as contra to liberal western values, but as the logical contemporary expression

of historically embedded colonial/modern, racially hierarchical worldviews which have their roots in colonial enterprise" (Mayblin et al., 2020:108). Necropolitics was coined by Achille Mbembe to account for the way in which sovereign power is expressed through "the subjugation of life to the power of death" (2003:39). This theoretical framework draws on race as the "principle marker of subjectification" (Davies and Isakjee, 2019:214) in forms of colonial governance. Necropolitics can include outright killing but also include keeping people "alive but in a state of injury" (Mbembe, 2003:21) and the "creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembe, 2003:40). As I argue elsewhere, necropolitics has then been used by geographers and allied scholars to explore neocolonial power configurations in modern bordering (Peters et al., forthcoming).

This research makes an empirical contribution by looking at the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in Nottingham, and by looking at the lives of asylum seekers living in Calais post the destruction of the so-called 'jungle'. Nottingham was chosen because it represents a site of everyday slow violence enacted against refugees and asylum seekers. I performed ethnographic research in the city over the course of two years. I performed a week-long ethnography in Calais using funding from the Graduate Research Support Fund. Funding constraints meant that I was unable to stay for longer - I discuss the differences in the amount of time spent in each place in my methodology (see Chapter 3). Calais was chosen because it represents a site of particular importance for geographies of asylum within the UK because many people are forced to undertake 'illegal' and dangerous journeys to the UK from this point. It also represents a major site of immobilisation, border policing, and violence for those attempting to reach the UK (Davies and Isakjee, 2019; Hagan, 2022). The research also makes a theoretical contribution by bringing together more traditional literature on necropolitics which focuses on outright death (Talbayev, 2023; Wallace, 2018; Wilson et al., 2023) and literature on necropolitical slow violence (Davies et al., 2017; Mayblin, 2019a; Mayblin et al., 2020). This takes up Mayblin's call to view necropolitics "in terms of a spectrum of temporality and visibility – from the fast, dramatic, and visible to the slow, incremental, and invisible or largely unseen" (2021:40). In doing this the research aims to make the contribution of demonstrating how necropolitical harms can accumulate over time. Viewing necropolitical harms as a spectrum makes visible the full extent to which necropower is wielded by the sovereign.

The thesis attempts to tackle the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of violence for refugees and asylum seekers in Nottingham and Calais?
- To what extent is necropolitics a useful framework for understanding these experiences?

In addition it aims to look at how viewing different types of necropolitics together may provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. Specifically, I look at how fast or immediate forms of violence, necropolitical slow violence, and the spaces in between, can work together to create a necropolitical border landscape in which harms can accumulate throughout an individual's lifetime as they are repeatedly exposed to the necropower of the state.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. I start by reviewing the existing literature on necropolitics and the way this has been utilised in relation to borders, I then go on to review geographies of forced migration. This is followed by an explanation and justification of the methods used: ethnography and interviews. I conducted a total of 84 days of ethnographic research over a two year period. I also draw on data from 22 interviews with refugees, asylum seekers, charity staff and volunteers. There are then three chapters analysing the findings of my empirical research. The first focuses on the sovereign right to kill ‘at any time or in any manner’ (Mbembe, 2003:25) by looking at instances of sudden death in boat and vehicle crossings of the English Channel. The second chapter focuses on the creation of ‘death-worlds’ (Mbembe, 2003:40) through sudden incidents of violence and explores how this exacerbates slow violence as harm travels across time and space. This chapter draws on examples of sexual violence during migrations, and police clearings, evictions and harassment in Calais. Both of these include moments of sudden violence that punctuate slower forms of violence, and then exacerbate the impacts of slow violence long after the original incident(s). The third chapter takes up Mayblin’s (2019a) call to look at slow violence as both a mechanism and effect of necropolitics. This chapter views necropolitical slow violence as a way of keeping people “alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe, 2003:21) and uses examples of: camp conditions, necropolitical housing, poverty, bureaucratic harms and psychological harms. The final section of the thesis draws together conclusions to argue that, despite its discontents (see Section

2.1.5), necropolitics *is* a useful framework for understanding the experiences of refugees and to advocate for considering harms across the breadth of a (temporal) spectrum of necropolitical harms. I argue that there is a need to look at how necropolitical harms accumulate as people are exposed to multiple and different types of necropolitical violence throughout their lifetimes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The structure of the literature review is as follows. The first section reviews necropolitics, as it is the theoretical foundation of the thesis. After laying out the origins of the theory, I review the way in which necropolitics has specifically been applied to bordering. The second section of the literature review looks at geographies of forced migration focusing on literature on governance, violence, precarity resistance and the coloniality of the border. This then leads into the empirical focus of this research project: exploring a spectrum of necropolitical harms against those forced to move in Nottingham, Calais and more widely.

2.1. Necropolitics

The first section of this literature review focuses on the theory of necropolitics. I start with a brief introduction of what necropolitics is and the work the theory attempts to do. I follow this by tracing how necropolitics emerged as a response to absence in earlier work on biopolitics. After that I focus specifically on how the theory of necropolitics has been conceptualised in relation to borders, paying specific attention to the way in which recent work has developed understandings of slow violence as a form of necropolitics. Finally, I look at some work which has attempted to move beyond necropolitical framings and its perceived failings before explaining why necropolitics remains highly relevant today.

2.1.1. Introducing necropolitics

Within geography, necropolitics increasingly serves as the theoretical framing for numerous empirically detailed studies. Achille Mbembe (2003:39) argued that ‘the subjugation of life to the power of death’—or necropolitics—is a cornerstone of sovereign power. His influential writing asks critical questions about ‘the work of death’ (2003:16) within worlds characterised by the ‘ever present shadow’ of racism (2003:17). Who may live, who may die, and whose lives may be exposed to conditions of ‘death-in-life’ (Mbembe, 2003:21) are questions that frequently animate contemporary political geography. From Israel's genocidal occupation of Palestine (Agha et al., 2024; Jones, 2023; Leshem, 2015) to the embodied impacts of refugee abandonment (Davies and Isakjee, 2019; Mayblin, 2019a; Mayblin et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2023), necropolitics has

enabled geographers to interrogate how death, race, and coloniality are producing radically unequal lifeworlds. In short, necropolitics is a call to investigate ‘under what practical conditions is the right to kill, to allow to live, or to expose to death exercised?’ (Mbembe 2003, 12).

Necropolitics dovetails with long-standing interests within political geography, including work on race and coloniality (Hawthorne, 2019; Sultana, 2022; Velednitsky et al., 2020), as well as geographies of violence and premature death (Gillespie, 2021; Kniffen, 1967; Tyner, 2015). Peters et al. (forthcoming) argue that while Mbembe (2003) introduced necropolitics in relation to war, terror, and weapons of mass destruction, geographers have used the concept to theorise varied topics, notably borders and the environment. Geographers have also pushed the concept in novel conceptual directions, often pairing it with other critical theories including Marxism (McIntyre and Nast, 2011), slow death (Lykke, 2019; Sandset, 2021); slow violence (Anderson et al., 2020; Davies, 2018; Mayblin, 2019a; Mayblin et al., 2020), queer theory (Binnie, 2016; Tschalaer, 2022), and biopolitics (Aradau and Tazzioli, 2020). Peters et al. (forthcoming) argue that necropolitics is an inherently spatial concept. Mbembe does this by evoking space directly in his work, describing how ‘zones’, ‘enclaves’, ‘boundaries’, and the ‘state of siege’ are integral to the violence of the colonial past and present (Mbembe 2003:30). His vivid description of ‘death-worlds’ (2003:45), for example, as a spatial fix for necropolitical violence, has resonated with many geographers and allied scholars alike (see Gillespie, 2021). So too has Mbembe’s assertion that contemporary colonialism is not only ‘a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area’, but is also a matter ‘of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations’ (Mbembe 2003:25). Peters et al. (forthcoming) also argue for the need to focus on the *political work* that necropolitics is doing by consigning vast numbers of people to conditions of ‘death-in-life’ (Mbembe 2003). This can be considered in terms of who (or which political, economic and social structures) benefit(s) from necropolitical geographies.

2.1.2. Prefacing Politics: From Bio- to Necro-

Given that necropolitics and necropower build on Foucault’s work on biopolitics and biopower (Mayblin, 2019a; Wallace, 2018) it is necessary to first examine these origins (Gržinić and Tatlić, 2014). Foucault argued that until the 18th century power was negatively defined by the sovereign right to kill or allow to live: a let live/make die model of power (Biddick, 2016;

Rutherford and Rutherford, 2013a). Around this time, however, a new form of power became influential: power over life, or biopower. This upheld, stimulated, and guided the expression of life, but also 'disallowed' some aspects of life to the point of death (Foucault, 2019:54). Functioning instead as a make live/let die model (Biddick, 2016; Mayblin, 2019a), this era of biopower represented 'a more direct control over and appropriation of life' where the nature of politics changes to become more concerned with 'the administration and government over life' (Raffnsøe et al., 2016:50). This is 'biopolitics', a form of power which includes, but cannot be reduced to disciplinary power, and consequently law and sovereignty are incorporated into biopolitical formations of governance that divide through surveillance (Biermann and Anderson, 2017). Rutherford and Rutherford (2013a) go on to distinguish between affirmative (see Tierney, 2016) and negative (see Prozorov, 2013; Rose, 2014) biopolitics, the former referring to the power of life, the latter power over life. Aradau and Tazzioli (2020), however, argue that such a strict binary distinction is not sustainable in practice, showing how a heterogeneous collection of biopolitical practices are mobilised through the idea of 'biopolitics multiple', an idea to which I return to later in the thesis.

Negative biopolitics is most famously linked to the work of Giorgio Agamben, another influential scholar (see Tyner, 2014; Minca, 2006, 2015) who, using the example of the Holocaust, considers the space of the camp as the paradigmatic site of 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998). Camp inhabitants were divested of their political status and exposed to the violence and power of the sovereign (Wallace, 2018), with 'bare life' becoming 'the existence suffered by the abject and the discarded, the living dead' (Rutherford and Rutherford, 2013a:417). Agamben (1998:122) introduced 'thanatopolitics' to describe the moment when 'the decision on life becomes a decision on death', and can be seen as a response to Foucault's inability to 'resolve the paradox of why a politics of life so regularly mutates into a work of death' (McMahon, 2018:750). Agamben's work (1995a, 1995b), being as much about death (partial or complete) as it is life, therefore, represents a key moment in not only the move towards necropolitics from biopolitics, but also the explicit spatialisation of biopolitics (Rutherford and Rutherford, 2013b).

As discussed above, Mbembe (2003) developed his idea of necropolitics in response to both Foucault and Agamben, and necropolitics thus functions simultaneously as a geographical, political, and theoretical intervention (Gržinić and Tatlić, 2014). Importantly, this re-spatialisation

of biopower—away from the of camps, prisons, and asylums of the European metropole towards the horrors of European colonies—foregrounds race as the primary marker of subjectification (Mayblin, 2019a; Davies and Isakjee, 2019; Wallace, 2018). As Mbembe described: ‘the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of juridical order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of “civilization”’ (Mbembe 2003:24). This stands in stark contrast to both Foucault and Agamben for whom race merely “functions as a vague European marker of difference” (McMahon, 2018:755), foregrounding the inescapable Eurocentrism of bio-politics and thanato-politics (Weheliye, 2014). As Puar (2017:137) articulates, ‘race only became important to Foucault when it entered the realms of European state management, not through the operations of colonialism’.

As Mayblin and Turner (2020:133) argue, ‘Mbembe’s conceptualization of necropolitics demands that we understand necropolitics as grounded in colonial histories’. In this way, Mbembe's idea of necropolitics is far more than a 'dismal offshoot of biopolitics' (Rutherford and Rutherford 2013a:418) but can be read instead as a necessary critique to the race-blind Eurocentrism of thinkers like Foucault and Agamben (see also Mbembe, 2017). Returning to McMahon (2018:756) this is “symptomatic of the Continental project of theorizing bio-politics [that] entrench[es]...racialism-without-racism”. Ultimately, Foucault’s biopolitics invokes normative theories of democracy and the concept of reason to suggest that sovereignty is expressed through norms created by a population of the putatively ‘free and equal subjects’ that underpin Western modernity. Necropolitical sovereignty, in contrast, rests on the power ‘to define who matters and who does not’ (Mbembe, 2003:27), and the necropolitical sovereign is thus concerned with the destruction of humans (Mayblin et al., 2020) and creating docile subjects through a ‘spectacle of pain’ (Mbembe 2003, 21).

While biopolitical governance is justified by claiming it protects the lives of the population on which it is imposed, the racial and colonial logics of necropolitics are 'enacted against “them” in the name of protecting life for “us”’ (DeBoom 2021:902). Mbembe (2003) argues that race is a key aspect in Western thought of imagining the inhumanity of racialized others. This concept of inhumanity is important because it suggests that necropolitical violence is legitimised by constructing a fiction of racialized groups as less-than-human. Aradau and Tazzioli (2020) argue

that processes of racialization allow subjects to be hierarchised and therefore governed differently. Mbembe argues that race is closely intertwined with the workings of ‘terror formations’ (2003:27) in the colony which are dependent on the state of exception and the state of siege. According to Mbembe (2003), in the colony, the sovereign is able to exercise power outside of the law. He relates this to the creation of a European juridical order which gives all states the equal right to wage war (to kill). However, the state is to civilise and rationalise the act of killing. In addition, it aims to territorialise the sovereign state because the state cannot make claims to rule outside its borders but can recognise no higher authority within its borders (Mbembe, 2003). In the colonies the European juridical order can be suspended, therefore colonies can “be ruled over in absolute lawlessness” (Mbembe, 2003:24). We can consider this as a spatialised state of exception. This exception is only legitimised by racism which presents colonial subjects as less-than-human (Mbembe, 2003). Therefore, in the colony, “the sovereign might kill at any time or in any manner” (Mbembe, 2003:25). Mbembe (2003; 2019) also considers the state of siege in the space of the colony, where the sovereign targets entire populations through infrastructural warfare in which daily life is militarised, local institutions destroyed and local populations are denied their means of income.

Under necropolitical conditions, the colonial ‘state of siege’ enables the sovereign to target entire populations through infrastructural warfare to create quotidian ‘death worlds’: “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (Mbembe, 2003:40). Crucially, therefore, necropolitics does not just include outright death but also encompasses those “kept alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe, 2003:21). In this move, Mbembe renders the concept of necropolitics useful to scholars who conduct research beyond outright-killing (poverty; pollution; borders; etc.), yet in doing so the concept potentially becomes vulnerable to being stretched 'too far'. After all, if every injustice and form of structural violence is rendered an example of "the living dead" then the elasticity and utility of necropolitics might 'snap'. That said, this understanding of both ‘living’ and ‘social’ death therefore creates a much more nuanced reading of agency than with bio- and thanato-politics (cf. Griffiths, 2022a), and so with this focus on race and the colony Mbembe (see also 2001, 2017, 2021) responds to some of the most powerful critiques of both Foucault and Agamben to actually show some ‘sensitivity to the politics of those subjected to necropolitics’ (Brennan, 2024:16). In addition, Mayblin (2019a) usefully takes up the call of examining those who are “kept alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe, 2003:21)

through her conception of slow violence in the UK asylum system as both a mechanism and effect of necropolitics. This enables us to look beyond immediate killing or ‘fast violence’ and consider how injury and gradually accrued harms can constitute a form of necropolitics without stretching the concept too far and thus falling into the trap of what Peters et al. (forthcoming) call the ‘necro-everything’.

2.1.3. Border Necropolitics

‘*Borders. Everything begins with them, and all paths lead back to them*’ (Mbembe, 2019:99).

Geographers have frequently examined borders as important sites of necropolitics. Borders are not only violent geographies that kill thousands of people every year (Isakjee et al., 2020; Jones, 2016; Squire, 2017), they do so in profoundly discriminatory ways. Borders are marked by racism and coloniality that lends itself to necropolitical analysis (Mayblin and Turner, 2020; Davies and Isakjee, 2019). Whether focusing on the quick and dramatic practices of ‘governing migration through death’ (Squire, 2017) in places like the Mediterranean Sea or the Sonoran Desert, or the slower and dispersed timescales of the ‘necropolitical abandonment of refugees in Europe’ (Davies et al., 2017), geographers have frequently employed necropolitics to make sense of violent borders and exclusionary asylum regimes (Wilson et al., 2023). Indeed, Mbembe grounds the concept of necropolitics itself in the ‘brutality of borders’ (2019:3) and his discussion of ‘racial classes’ rests on the idea of ‘border bodies’ (see Brennan, 2024). With his explicit focus on the colony, Mbembe also draws inspiration from Frantz Fanon (1991), for whom 'colonial occupation entails first and foremost a division of space into compartments' (Mbembe 2003:26), noting how the occupied territories in Palestine in particular demonstrate how necropolitics divides and rules through a ‘web of intricate internal borders’ (2003:28).

Reflecting Mbembe’s analysis, geographers and other critical scholars have argued that borders can be best understood as colonial technologies (Mayblin & Turner, 2020; Walia, 2013, 2021). As Mayblin (2019a) suggests, we might think of necropolitics as corresponding to what decolonial scholars refer to as the ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano, 2000; Wynter, 2003), with necropolitics helping to centre the ‘distinctly colonial and racial logics that (re)produce and

sustain the ongoing violence of borders' (Davies and Isakjee, 2019:2). As Brigstocke et al. (2023:589) noted: "[b]orders are sites of violence where state power is exerted, not only through a "biopolitical" management of life…but through a "necropolitical" mode of sovereignty that controls the reproduction of death". In this section, I distinguish between work that discusses necropolitics *at* the border and that which can be framed as necropolitics *of* the border. Although these of course co-constitute, the latter reminds us that 'borders are everywhere' (Balibar, 2012); that the necropolitical violence of borders and the border spectacle extends far beyond the frontier (De Genova, 2002; cf. Jones, 2016); and that by excluding, or differentially-including, racialized populations, borders drive value extraction and accumulation (Morris, 2023).

The idea of necropolitics *at* the border has most commonly been used by geographers to analyse the EU and US-Mexico borders, understanding these as 'border death regimes' (Cuttitta et al., 2020) that create 'necroharms' (Iliadou, 2023). For instance Squire (2017; also see De León, 2015; Estevez, 2014), uses these examples to argue that death is central to migration governance, while the idea of 'letting die' is key to the US–Mexico border in particular where the risk of injury or death, wall falls, river and ocean drownings, dehydration, heatstroke, poor detention facilities, and being shot at or run over by border guards creates a more-than-topological system of necropower (Wilson et al., 2023). Turning to 'fortress Europe', Kovras and Robins (2016) view the repeated deadly shipwrecks on the Greek island of Lesbos, in which asylum seekers attempting to reach the EU are killed, as a form of necropolitics, leading Stümer (2018) to emphasise how the 'necrogeography' of these borderscapes can conceal necropolitics through the constructed 'otherness' of those who are killed. The materiality of these necrogeographies are also important, with Talbayev (2023) exploring how seawater is both the border *space* where necropolitical violence occurs and also the *substance* through which the killing takes place. Other geographers have described how migrants are governed through 'necropolitical opportunism' (Hagan, 2023a) where the grim affordances of the border—as well as existential crises like COVID-19—are co-opted by the state to expose people on the move to conditions of death-in-life (Stierl and Dadusc, 2022). While necropolitics often unfolds due to the brutal *actions* of the state, geographers have also used necropolitics to theorise how racialised migrants are exposed to circumstances where 'brutality is concealed behind a veil of *inaction*, and the withholding of the means of life' (Davies et al., 2017:1281, emphasis not in original). Indeed, the harmful conditions produced by borders, which often avoid

the optics of public scrutiny, ensure that refugees and migrants are ‘kept alive but in a state of injury’ (Mbembe, 2003:21).

Ultimately necropolitics *at* the border drive the necropolitics *of* the border, not only turning migrants into ‘necro-figures’ (Last, 2020) but also relationally imbricating non-migrants through the forms of ‘necrocitizenship’ (Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey, 2020) that increasingly underpin migration governance (Danewid, 2017), especially through processes of detention and carcerality (Morris, 2023; Pfeifer, 2018). Yet as De Genova (2002) argues, more than just the acts of detention and deportation, it is a sense of ‘deportability’ that permeates everyday life. In this vein the systemically enforced poverty of asylum seekers has violent necropolitical effects (Mayblin et al., 2020), especially for those ‘illegalised’ through their lack of recourse to public funds (Farmer, 2021) and LGBTQ+ asylum seekers (Binnie, 2016; Broqua et al., 2021; Tschalaer, 2022). The *temporality* of necropolitics is also an important consideration. As such, ‘slow violence’ (Nixon, 2011) has frequently been used by geographers to theorise gradual harms of necropolitical border regimes (Davies et al., 2017; Mayblin et al., 2020; Sheringham et al., 2024). Mayblin's (2019a) research with asylum seekers in the UK found that racialised necropolitics is not produced through immediate and acute violence, but also through gradual processes of degradation, penury, and prolonged abandonment. In response to such issues, however, it is important to emphasise the heterogeneous forms of ‘slow resistance’ (Saunders and Al-Om, 2022) carried out by asylum seekers and the importance of social reproduction and leisure time as sites of necropolitical struggle and contestation (De Martini Ugolotti and Webster, 2023). Borders have also become sites of more extreme forms of ‘necropolitical resistance’ (Leshem, 2015) including hunger strikes, lip-sewing, and self-immolation (Pfeifer, 2018), which can be understood as the ‘weaponization of life’ (Bargu, 2014). This reflects how necropolitics can create conditions whereby 'resistance and self-destruction are synonymous’ (Mbembe, 2003:36).

Moving beyond those within formal asylum processes, once more the spectre of the camp looms large within geographic scholarship—especially the so-called Calais “jungle” in France (see Wallace, 2018; Davies and Isakjee, 2019; Hagan, 2023a)—where necropolitics works through violent abandonment (Davies et al. 2017), linked to waiting (Ozguc, 2021) and overcrowding (De Genova, 2022), and all the while underpinned by differential hierarchies of

humanity so redolent of colonialism. While the ‘jungle’ is now demolished, camp life continues in Calais and forms a substantial topic of discussion in the empirical chapters of this thesis. Yet as Sanyal (2012) argues through a biopolitical lens, the camp and the city have topologically folded into each other, and so the urban has increasingly been understood as a site of necropolitical bordering. This framing has been used to discuss those experiencing homelessness (Cerecer, 2020; López, 2020), as well as the informal ‘necrosettlements’ (Jha, 2023), 'necropolitical infrastructure' (Truscello, 2020:208), and ‘necroburbias’ (Ortega, 2020) that are so central to (Southern) cities despite—or perhaps because of—their stigmatisation, and housing itself has become a site of bordered necropolitics (Clare et al., 2022). These geographies and their inhabitants disproportionately experienced the necropolitical impact of COVID-19 (Basile, 2023; Hagan 2023; Stierl and Dadusc 2022), a pandemic that became a racialized and classed ‘state of acceptance’ (Sandset, 2021).

Borders also relate to an increasingly carceral (Bonds, 2019) and militarised (Graham, 2011) urbanism, where often-overlapping police and (para)militaries govern cities necropolitically (Alves, 2014; Flacks, 2020; Hanson and Zubillaga, 2021; Hutta, 2022), with LGBTQ+ city dwellers and migrants disproportionately targeted (Lamble, 2013; Bhagat, 2020). Once more this not only leads inevitably to forms of urban resistance against these very boundaries (Leshem, 2015), but also reminds us of the need to adopt queer, feminist analyses of necropolitics (Kinukawa, 2021). This is especially the case given that, despite the strengths articulated above, necropolitics also has clear blindspots. For example, drawing on Latin American perspectives, Gay-Antaki (2023) argues that while necropolitics is useful for addressing questions of race and coloniality, it is less adept at discussing questions of gender (Wright, 2011; Islekel, 2022). This research aims to be sensitive to gendered experiences (see Sections 2.2.1 and 5.1), especially during discussions of sexual violence against women on the move (Ozcurumez et al., 2021), however, the analysis will centre racism and ‘the colonial present’ whereby gendered violence forms part of a larger patchwork of harms, dispersed across time and space, which impact the daily lives of those forced to migrate in both acute and attritional ways (Mayblin, 2019a; Nixon, 2011).

2.1.4. Slow Violence as Necropolitics

'*If necropolitics is, in it's most visible form, governing through death, slow violence is both its mode of operation and its effect at the level of the everyday*' (Mayblin, 2019a:44)

Galtung (1969) coined the term structural violence to describe types of violence which are not committed by an individual but are the result of a system. Mayblin links this to necropolitics because "in necropolitics people are not killed (punished) as *individuals* who have defied the sovereign, they are targeted because their existence is seen as detrimental to the wider population" (2019a:42 emphasis in original). This violence is normalised by the way that it is institutionalised within wider structures, thus rendering it invisible (Davies et al., 2017). Galtung argues that violence is present "when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (1969:168). Structural violence is present "where there is capacity for people to live free from suffering, but no political will exists to implement change to alleviate such suffering" (Canning, 2017:48). This means structural violence is tolerated because the suffering of those who are subjected to necropolitical violence is "of little consequence to society as a whole" (Mayblin, 2019a:42).

Geographers and allied scholars have engaged with structural violence in relation to asylum seeking through work on: abandonment and violent inaction in Calais (Davies et al., 2017); gendered experiences of harm in the UK asylum system (Canning, 2017); and heavily securitised border practices (Fregonese et al., 2020). Structural violence has also been brought into conversation with slow violence in work on how state abandonment (violent inaction) and the fulfilling of legal obligations 'to an absolute minimum' forms part of asylum necropolitics (Davies et al., 2017; Mayblin, 2019a; Mayblin et al., 2020). Mayblin (2019a:43) argues that structural violence alone may be "insufficiently agential" to theorise the experiences of people seeking asylum in the UK. She argues that, because the impoverishment of asylum seekers is purposeful and deliberately designed into UK policies, necropower needs to be considered as the "*type* of power at work in producing the structural violence of the asylum system" (2019a:43 emphasis in original). Mayblin (2019a) also draws attention to the temporal aspect of structural violence, arguing that, given much violence within the asylum system is not acute or fast but

instead slow and attritional, there is a need to consider slow violence (see also Davies et al., 2017).

Nixon (2011) proposed the concept of slow violence to describe “a delayed destruction, occurring attritionally across space and time, and often out of sight” (Davies et al., 2017:1270). Nixon argues for the need to “engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2011:2). Slow violence then allows us to expand the definition of what counts as violence and consider harms accumulated over a longer duration of time. Mayblin (2019a) argues that we ought to view necropolitics as both a mechanism and effect of necropolitics. She argues that those seeking asylum are often being ‘kept alive but in a state of injury’ (Mbembe, 2003:21) where they are subjected to the ‘*slow* violence of impoverishment’ (2019a:41 emphasis in original). Significant work has been done to draw together slow violence and necropolitics specifically on the topic of bordering (Davies et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2024; De Martini Ugolotti and Webster, 2023; Mayblin et al., 2020; Saunders and Al-Om, 2022). This includes a focus on the necropolitical slow violence of: inaction and abandonment in the so-called Calais ‘jungle’ (Davies et al., 2017) and everyday life in the UK asylum system (De Martini Ugolotti and Webster, 2023; Mayblin, 2019a; Mayblin et al., 2020); enclosure and accumulation in Brisbane’s detention centres (Morris, 2023); and in acts of refugee and asylum seeker (slow) resistance (Saunders and Al-Om, 2022).

Mayblin (2019a:40) also invites us to view necropolitical violence as a spectrum of both temporality and invisibility where violence can range “from the fast, dramatic, and visible to the slow, incremental, and invisible or largely unseen”. She argues that the slow violence of asylum regimes can be punctuated by sudden moments of very acute violence such as deportations or drowning (2019a). This research utilises Mayblin’s ‘spectrum’ of necropolitical violence to draw together a range of harms across this spectrum of temporality and visibility which those seeking asylum in the UK are exposed to. It also aims to explore how during the course of their lifetimes and journeys people on the move may be exposed to harms from different ends of this spectrum, both acute and attritional.

2.1.5. Beyond Necropolitics

Running counter to the prolific uptake of necropolitics within geography are important calls to move away from ‘damage-centred’ research, and to focus instead on the *desire* of communities who have been rendered subaltern (Tuck, 2009). This provocation— that focusing on harm and death may itself *be* harmful—has given pause to some geographers (Brigstocke et al., 2023; Lindberg 2024), and raises further questions about the consequences of the ‘necro-everything’ (Peters et al., forthcoming). Afterall, framing particular places *as* necropolitical risks 'the neglect of all the living experienced and forged in these death dealing spaces' (Bruno, 2024:86). Relatedly, analytical pressure has been placed on the centrality of death within contemporary political governance, most notably with Jasbir Puar’s (2017) innovative work on the ‘right to maim’. In an effort to progress theories around violence and sovereign power beyond necropolitics (the political ‘right to kill’), Puar questions the role of killing within biopolitical and necropolitical frameworks, suggesting we pay greater attention to the ‘scripting of populations available for injury’ (Puar, 2017:64). Using the example of Palestine, Puar argues that the Israeli state operates a ‘right to maim’ against bodies, infrastructures, and environments, constituting a form of biopolitical control that is less reliant on death and more reliant on debilitation and wounding (see Solomon, 2022).

Supporting this, geographers such as Jones (2023) have examined the Israeli state’s ‘shoot-to-cripple’ or ‘not-to-kill’ policy in Gaza, where a ‘careful kind of wounding’ (Jones, 2023:10) is deployed. This not only causes harm, but also debilitates the capacity of protesters to participate in future resistance (Davies et al., 2024; Puar, 2017). Maiming therefore functions as a form of insidious settler colonial violence (Barakat, 2019) that, by claiming to be ‘less violent than killing’ (Puar, 2017:129) is used to create a humanitarian framing for a ‘logic of elimination’ (Obermaier, 2024). Crucially, because ‘the injured do not count in the “dry statistics of tragedy”’ (Puar 2017:131), it means that a focus on death alone (e.g necropolitics) may overlook other methods of control utilised by sovereign powers: an elision that “liberal" governments especially are all too happy to exploit, once more highlighting issues with the ‘necro-everything’ (Peters et al., forthcoming) and how the the role and importance of death can, at times, be overplayed (Davies et al., 2024).

Puar's approach therefore seeks to move beyond Mbembe (2003) by making visible forms of sovereign violence obscured by the life/death binary that necropolitics supposedly depends upon, enabling us to hold the sovereign accountable for a much wider range of violent (in)actions. By moving beyond the 'poles of living and dying' (Puar 2017:137), the right to maim has been used to analyse colonial occupation in Kashmir (Zia, 2019) and forced-feeding in Guantánamo Bay (Georges, 2023), as well addressing wider questions within childrens' geographies (MacFarlane, 2019; Blencowe, 2021), geopolitics (McCormack and Gilbert, 2022), mobilities (Alexander, 2023; Minca et al., 2022), critical disability studies (Dilodovico, 2023), and citizenship studies (Kannabiran, 2020). Further rejecting the centrality of death within necropolitics, geographers have also used the 'right to maim' to examine how systematic forms of *non-deadly* violence are routinely used against racialised migrants at EU borders in order to avoid humanitarian scrutiny, and thus permit harsh border regimes to persist unchecked (Davies et al., 2024). Alongside this, a precursor to the right to maim can be seen in the work of Debrix (2016) who also suggests moving beyond ideas of life or death, to instead consider the 'pulverisation of the human', where the objective of horror is to render bodies unrecognisable.

Related points have also been made by Aradau and Tazzioli (2020) who argue for the need to move beyond the life-death binary that dominates both biopolitical and necropolitical analyses in migration geographies in order to properly conceptualise migration regimes that are marked by cruelty (Aradau and Canzutti, 2022). The 'biopolitics multiple' framing (as mentioned in Section 2.1.2), they argue, enables us to comprehend better the liminal and grey spaces of migration governance which are driven more by injury than death (Minca et al., 2022; Tazzioli, 2021). Wells (2019) similarly seeks to move beyond Foucault and Agamben's conception of the life/death binary, suggesting that Agamben's (1995:104) *homo sacer* ("the man available to be killed") could be developed into *homo dolorosus* ("the man who is available to be made to suffer"). Together, these concepts reflect how *withholding* from outright killing —and thus falling short of necropolitical actions— 'allows state violence to persist beneath a threshold of liberal acceptability' (Davies et al., 2024:23). Indeed, if death is the only metric that 'counts' within political geography, then a necropolitical analysis that only focuses on state-sanctioned killing may overlook other, less spectacular, but no less egregious forms of injustice. In this way, 'wounding is offered as a supplement to political geographical work on necropolitics' (Jones, 2023:251).

Despite these important criticisms, sustained engagement with necropolitics remains politically and theoretically useful. At the time of writing, the horrific events in Gaza indicate how quickly the maiming of subaltern populations can escalate to outright killing, as the sovereign always retains the ability to subjugate life to 'the power of death' in the future (Mbembe, 2003:39), and therefore we witness potential issues with conceptual overcompensation and the relative underplaying of death. The idea of necropolitics reminds us, following Wynter and McKitrick (2015, 23, emphasis in original), that '*humanness* is no longer a *noun*. *Being human is a praxis*'. In other words, in a world beset by necropolitical exclusions and actually existing colonialities, being considered "fully human" is an experience not equally shared (Yusoff, 2018). The genocide in Gaza is the latest and most brutal manifestation of this necropolitical logic. Writing over two decades ago, Mbembe observed that 'the most accomplished form of necropower is the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine' (Mbembe 2003:27); a reality that has sadly not changed today. As Mbembe also observed in his book *Necropolitics*: 'Gaza might well prefigure what is yet to come' (Mbembe, 2019:97).

What is more, Mbembe (2003:21) himself leaves room for the grey areas between life and death with his discussion of 'death-in-life', the 'spectacle of pain', and being 'kept alive but in a state of injury' (Mbembe, 2003:21). Although arguably underdeveloped in the initial text, these ideas emphasise the role of the *less-than-necro* in necropolitics. If we consider the idea the idea of necropolitics as 'concatenation' (Mbembe 2003:29), and as a 'contrapuntal' theory (Gilroy, 2020), it is important to note that an unintentional strawman can be created by the emergence of a 'necro-everything' (Peters et al., forthcoming). Instead it is worth considering that the idea of necropolitics was always about 'death *and*' and never simply 'death *alone*' (ibid). For instance, writing about late-modern warfare in Palestine and beyond, Griffiths (2022b:290) reminds us of the need to think about the overlapping "bio-/thanato-/necro-political logics at the centre of military practices". Thus, while it may be possible to construct a similar framework through a focus on 'biopolitics multiple' (Aradau and Tazzioli, 2020) it is important to reiterate the inescapably Eurocentric nature of Foucault and Agamben's foundational work (Weheliye, 2014), and that their lack of meaningful engagement with race in general, and anti-blackness in particular, severely limits biopolitical analyses (McMahon, 2018) - this is reflective of an absence that sadly plagues much geographical work (Bledsoe, 2020; Noxolo, 2022). Mbembe (2003,

2019; see also 2017, 2024), on the other had, explicitly focuses on slave life in the colony when developing his idea of ‘death-in-life’, and thus, while of course imperfect (see Brennan, 2024), I argue that his reading of sovereign power is a better starting point for analysing racialized violence in the current conjuncture.

Mayblin argued that slow violence can be considered both the ‘mode of operation’ and the ‘effect at the level of the everyday’ of necropolitics (2019a:44). This contribution is valuable in understanding death and injury not as a binary, but as a spectrum in which the temporal effects of necropolitics have the potential to be immediate and acute, but also to be slow and more attritional. This work attempts to follow Mayblin in arguing that there is no need for a hard injury/death binary but, instead, injury and outright death can perform the same (necro)political, (if not material), ends. By considering a spectrum of harms and speeds of violence we can make visible what the sovereign intends to occlude; necropolitical violence against forced migrants.

2.2. Geographies of Forced Migration

Having laid out the theoretical foundations of the thesis, I now explore some key literatures that this thesis builds on. I start by looking at how forced migration is governed, and its relationship to territoriality. After this I look at borders as both a *cause* and *site* of violence. This is followed by reviewing literature which highlights the coloniality of the border, tracing racialised exclusions and policies built on false constructions of migrants. Finally, I review literature on activism and resistance both from within, and in solidarity with, refugees, and literature on the third sector and the role of charities such as those I conducted ethnographic research at.

2.2.1. Governance, Violence and Precarity

Nation states attempt to govern migration through the maintenance of their borders (Gill, 2010). This governance takes place through: the deployment of heterogeneous bio- and necro- political

techniques (Aradau and Tazzioli, 2020; Wallace, 2018); international collusion, shared security measures and international organisations (Ehrkamp, 2017; Gill, 2020); and the offshoring of border control through visas, buffer states and offshore interceptions (Darling, 2017; Dempsey, 2020; FitzGerald, 2020). The bounded nature of nation-states means that sovereignty is performed at the border as territoriality is negotiated (Dempsey, 2020; FitzGerald; 2020). However, the role of territory within bordering is shifting due to the offshoring of border control; Dempsey (2020) responds to through conceptualisation of 'borderscapes' rather than simply borders.

Linked to border governance, geographers and allied scholars have viewed the borders as a *cause* and *site* of violence. Violence on the (racialized) body has been considered as both a way of producing the border and a scale at which sovereignty is performed (Mountz, 2018; Smith et al., 2016). Forced migrants are subjected to dangerous journeys in which risk is increased by interception attempts as routes are blocked by rescue and capture operations (Ehrkamp, 2017; Garelli and Tazzioli, 2018). Limited options for safe routes mean that people are left with no choice but to turn to smugglers to reach safety, further increasing the risky nature of their journeys (Freedman, 2016; Gill, 2010; Hall, 2012; Kuschminder and Triandafyllidou, 2020). This results in repeated migrant deaths at sea (Kovras and Robins, 2016). Violence in transit also occurs through violent pushbacks of asylum seekers at the borders of the EU through police assault and destruction of property (Davies et al., 2024). A key site of violence for refugees and asylum seekers is the camp (Sanyal, 2012). Sanyal (2022:634) argues that camps are spaces of oppression and control, and that refugee "encampment continues to evoke a long history of xenophobia, criminalization and pathologization". Calais has been a key site of notable camp research exploring how harsh conditions, abandonment, segregation and racial profiling constitute forms of violence against those seeking safety (Davies et al., 2017; Tyerman, 2021); however research has been conducted on a variety of other camps in Europe including the Kara Tepe camp in Greece (Ozguc, 2021) and a variety of camps along the Balkan route (Davies et al., 2024).

Cities have also been considered sites of asylum seeker violence (Fregonese et al., 2020). Violence can take place through dispersal which increases asylum seeker marginalisation

(Darling, 2017); increases risk of racial violence (Boswell, 2003); and interrupts healthcare provision (Warfa et al., 2006). Housing can also be a site of violence for both asylum seekers in terms of temporality, containment and exclusion (Kreichauf, 2018), and for refugees because the Right to Rent Act forms part of the UK's 'hostile environment' by requiring landlords to check immigration status of potential tenants (McKee et al., 2021). Shobiye and Parker (2023) illustrate the way in which navigating everyday life as an asylum seeker in the UK impacts mothers and their children. Violence against refugees and asylum seekers has also been conceptualised in relation to COVID-19 (De Genova, 2022; Tschalaer, 2022), sexual and gender-based violence (Canning, 2020; Freedman, 2016; Ozcurumez et al., 2021), and discrimination towards LGBTQ+ migrants (Bhagat, 2020; Binnie, 2016; Broqua et al., 2021; Tschalaer, 2022). Psychological violence is enacted upon people forced to move through trauma related to torture, rape, destitution, asylum interviews and barriers to healthcare (Bajaj and Stanford, 2022; Freedman, 2016; Munt, 2012; Schock et al., 2015).

One specific type of violence which is the focus on Section 5.1 is sexual and gender based violence perpetrated against asylum seekers. Canning (2017) links gendered experiences of harm, and specifically of sexual violence with wider issues of structural violence (see Section 2.1.4 for structural violence). She considers how structural harms which asylum seekers are exposed to within the UK asylum system can compound the impact of previous experiences of sexual violence. Women's access to human rights, and their personal autonomy is limited by being in a state of limbo where they are exposed to uncertainty around their immigration status, the threat of deportation, insufficient support and other forms of slow violence such as poor housing and limited welfare support (Canning, 2017). Sexual violence towards asylum seekers can occur in the source country (Akinsulure-Smith, 2012; Belanteri et al., 2020), in transit (Belanteri et al., 2020; Gebreyesus et al., 2019), in camps (Belanteri et al., 2020) and in the host country (Khouani et al., 2023). Relative to men and boys, forced migrant women and girls are disproportionately the targets of sexual violence (Akinsulure-Smith, 2012). Irregular migration poses specific risks to women in transit due to "dangerous, difficult and often isolated terrain, dependence on human smugglers, and vulnerability to traffickers" (Gebreyesus et al., 2019:721). This has led to sexual violence becoming systematised and normalised on irregular migration routes (Gebreyesus et al., 2019). In camps, the need for mental health support for survivors of sexual violence can exceed the capacity of providers, this is the case on the Greek Island of Lesvos (Belanteri et al., 2020). In host countries, those who had already experienced

sexual violence before were more likely to experience sexual violence in the months following their arrival than those who had not (Khouani et al, 2023). In addition, Khouani et al. (2023) argue that lack of support for accommodation increases the likelihood of sexual assault for recently arrived asylum seeker women.

While forms of direct violence are vital to understand, we should not overlook the forms of structural violence that refugees face in relation to labour and precarity. Refugees' experiences of the labour market are significantly different to the experiences of citizens; they experience lower earning levels, employment rates and a higher likelihood of working jobs below their skill levels (Bloch, 2007; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018). This is the result of barriers to the labour market for them including language (Chamorro et al., 2021), trauma (Brell et al., 2020), discrimination (Bloch, 2007) and lack of recognition for foreign qualifications (Bloch, 2007). This precarity increases the risk of labour exploitation and is exacerbated by conditional access to the welfare state and neoliberal capitalism (Lewis et al., 2015). The majority of asylum seekers are not permitted to work in the UK and forced to live on what the poorest 10% of Brits spend only on essential living items (Mayblin and James, 2019; Mayblin et al., 2020). This only serves to heighten their precarity; Bales and Mayblin (2018) argue that labour within immigration detention centres in the UK constitute an example of coercive unfree labour for the hyper-precarious group that is detained asylum seekers. This precarity can be considered a form of structural violence whereby "human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (Galtung, 1969:168).

2.2.2. Coloniality of the Border

This section reviews work on how we can view the border as a (neo)colonial entity which forms part of 'the colonial present' (Mayblin 2019a:4). Contemporary borders which keep often-racialized people from freely moving between nation-states maintain many of the political relations of a colonial past (Bauder, 2015). It is the partial permeability of borders which facilitates the disproportionate constrainment of people from formerly colonised countries. As Bauder argued (2015), if borders were open to all, they would lose much of their power to control populations and labour. Tsianos and Karakayali (2010:373) views this as 'porocracy' whereby the porosity, or partial permeability, of borders is governed by what they call '*poro*cratic

institutions'. Not only is the wealth of Europe predicated on the accumulation of capital in the Global North through historical racialised domination and its resulting cultural legacies, but "European nationhood is determined by a history which saw European states colonize and subjugate, before retreating and restricting movement for citizens and subjects of those colonies" (Davies and Isakjee, 2019, 215). This is no accident, colonial powers intentionally attempted to exclude colonised and non-white people from human rights conventions, and while the right to asylum was gained for non-European refugees in 1967, the legacies of colonial conceptualizations of human hierarchy live on (Cole, 2021; Mayblin et al., 2020). The dehumanisation of migrants is a central tenet in maintaining the coloniality of the border and occurs gradually and subtly through the discursive differentiation of migrants' stories, feelings and embodiment from those of citizen populations (Collins, 2022). Linked to this is the idea that regions of the 'Third World' are produced as unmodern, and therefore those originating from such areas are imbibed with that status of unmodernity, thus increasing the ease with which their lives can be rendered expendable (Mayblin et al., 2020).

Collins (2022) argued that contemporary policy and understandings of migration continue to be underpinned by colonial power relations and the privileging of whiteness in both knowledge and governance. Davies and Isakjee (2019) call for the need for geographers to centre postcolonial approaches to address the coloniality of migration knowledge production. Importantly, Mayblin et al. (2020:110) remind us that this colonial logic of human hierarchisation "is internal to liberal Western values, not a denigration of them".

2.2.2.1. The Pull Factor Imaginary

The coloniality of borders is visible in the way that perceptions of why people move are inextricably bound to the way that they are categorised and subsequently treated. One particular idea is hugely significant within UK policy decision making and impacts the perceptions of host populations: the idea of the 'economic pull factor' (Matsui and Raymer, 2020; Mayblin, 2016; 2019a; 2019b). This is the idea that "economic rights afforded to asylum seekers can act as a migratory pull, and will have a bearing on the number of asylum applications received" (Mayblin, 2016:812), or even that economic rights will attract 'disingenuous asylum seekers' otherwise viewed as 'economic migrants in disguise' (Mayblin, 2019b; Neumayer, 2005). It is important to

note that this idea has been widely discredited by researchers and very little evidence supports the pull factor imaginary other than supposed ‘common sense’ (Mayblin, 2016; 2019a). For example, Garelli and Tazzioli (2021:390) argue that “the push–pull logic is deeply inadequate to explain migration dynamics and, in particular, to account for migrants’ desires and subjective drives that exceed structural economic factors or elements of deterrence”. Similarly, Shaffer et al. (2018) argue that personal subjectivities and networks are central to the routes and intended final destinations of forced migrants; this resists the idea that migration decisions are purely economic. Mayblin argues that this portrayal of the motivators for migration is “not natural or inevitable; it is the outcome of institutionally embedded, morally distancing, ways of viewing the world and Britain’s place within it” (2019b:2). Nonetheless, the pull factor imaginary affects how asylum seekers are treated both by the state, and by host populations. If one considers ‘disingenuous’ or ‘bogus’ asylum seekers to be a threat to the UK asylum system because they are in fact economic migrants in disguise, then the UK policies of both attempting to prevent would be asylum seekers from reaching the shores of the UK, and stripping them of their economic rights upon arrival, can be justified in policy, however unfounded the basis for assumptions is (Bhatia, 2014; Mayblin, 2019b; Zimmermann, 2014). This then creates a scenario where the majority of asylum seekers in the UK are legally prevented from working and forced into poverty and dependent on third sector organisations to meet their basic needs (Darling, 2011; Mayblin and James, 2019).

The pull factor imaginary also impacts the way in which asylum seekers are viewed in society. Racialized discourses alongside anti-immigration sentiment, fuelled by constructions such as the pull factor, produce displaced people as ‘other’ (Burrell and Hörschelmann, 2019). In addition the idea of the ‘bogus’ or ‘disingenuous’ asylum seeker, politicians and the media have utilised constructions of crisis to legitimise harsh border legislation, and to incite hostility (Burrell and Hörschelmann, 2019; De Genova et al., 2018). In addition, those seeking refuge are imagined as a threat to the nation (Wallace, 2018), as potential terrorists (De Genova, 2018), and are viewed with mistrust and fear (Sanyal, 2012). The key point from this literature is that how asylum seekers are constructed matters. It impacts the way that they are treated by both state and society. The pull factor imaginary is a powerful construction with significant influence for policy and the lives of those individuals that policies are designed to target (Mayblin, 2019b) .

2.2.2.2. Desirable Refugee or ‘Bogus Asylum Seeker’: A Racialized Shift

Related to the pull factor imaginary, it is worth being attentive to a wider shift in the perception of those forced to migrate. De Martini Ugolotti and Webster (2023) argue that the current asylum systems in place in Europe are aimed at containing those from the ‘Third World’ and prevent people from arriving into the ‘First World’. Mayblin (2019a) argues this is a result of a broader geopolitical shift. During the Cold War refugees were perceived as predominantly white and Soviet, as this era ended refugees began to become perceived instead as black or brown and from former colonies. Mayblin argues that this transition occurs at the same time in which those seeking refuge became constructed, not as persecuted people fleeing legitimate threat, but instead as ‘economic migrants in disguise’ (2019a). As Cole (2021) argues, the modern refugee regime which emerged after the Second World War was never meant for everyone. It was largely intended to be applied to those displaced within Europe and the legacy of this Eurocentric nature of both policy and scholarly thinking continues in the present (Cole, 2021). The racialized shift in attitudes is hard to ignore, particularly when recent events regarding war in Ukraine show that whiteness and Europeanness are still highly significant. Ukrainians have largely been received sympathetically by Europe, gaining automatic refugee status in the UK where many others must undergo the lengthy process of asylum (Ramji-Nogales, 2022) (as discussed in Sections 4.3 and 6.5). Perceptions of what constitutes a legitimate refugee rather than a ‘bogus’ asylum seeker is not just racialised but also factors religion. Farmer (2021) argues that during the United Kingdom Independence Party’s ‘Brexit’ campaign, fears of the ‘Muslim immigrant’ were stoked. De Genova (2018) argues that ‘Muslim’ has been racialized as a category of non-whiteness. The racialized shift from desirable refugee to ‘bogus’ asylum seeker also contains a moralistic element whereby transporting irregular migrants is seen as immoral regardless of the circumstances (Watkins, 2020). The racialised nature of these perceptions of (il)legality and (im)morality directly reflect the legacies of colonial power relations.

2.2.3. Activism, Resistance and the Third Sector

In response to the violence and coloniality of the border, refugees and those working in solidarity with them have used a wide range of forms of activism to challenge border injustices. This section encompasses a wide range of movements attempting to help refugees with potentially significant political differences; from more radical acts of resistance such as self-immolation (Pfeifer, 2018), to humanitarian organisations and charities (Frazer, 2020).

However, these movements are grouped here under the banner of attempting to resist border violence in various ways. Lobbying and identity politics both represent ways in which refugees themselves can challenge power (Gill, 2010; Sanyal, 2012). Identity politics in this instance can include activities such as deliberately distinguishing oneself from host populations as a way to gain specific rights (Sanyal, 2012). Power and resistance can be negotiated in the refugee camp (Darling, 2017) and in spaces of leisure (De Martini Ugolotti and Webster, 2023). Resistance can take the form of political acts such as hunger strikes which makes visible the way racialized violence is enacted on the bodies of refugees (Pellander and Horsti, 2018; Pfeifer, 2018). Ozguc (2021) centres the idea of 'affirmative hope' as a form of resistance which can be used by asylum seekers as they become politically active 'noisy-subjects'. The concept of 'slow resistance' aims to understand asylum seekers' resistance to their subjection to forms of slow violence (Saunders and Al-Om, 2022).

In addition to forced migrants themselves performing acts of resistance, third sector organisations have the potential to resist the state sanctioned destitution and marginalisation of those on the move (Mayblin and James, 2019). Through practices of care and generosity (Darling, 2011), and through friendships between volunteers and participants (Frazer, 2020), charitable spaces can create a sense of welcome. Place-making and community are important for the mental health, wellbeing and resilience of refugees (Munt, 2012; Sampson and Gifford, 2010). However, charitable spaces also have the potential to inadvertently create further marginalisation for the groups they intend to support by producing asylum seekers as passive recipients of care from volunteers (Darling, 2011). The third sector has the capacity to fill the gaps left by the state by providing unpopular public goods such as provision of basic support for asylum seekers such as housing management, legal advice, financial aid and support with general subsistence through food banks and clothes banks (Mayblin and James, 2019). The third sector can work in collaboration with the state, however, in recent years the UK government has withdrawn from much strategic collaboration with the third sector while at the same time creating extra demand for support through policies which leave asylum seekers destitute (Mayblin and James, 2019). This links to forms of necropolitical violent inaction discussed earlier in Section 2.1.4. In addition this literature is relevant to the context in which the ethnographic research took place. The research was conducted by volunteering within two of those third sector organisations struggling to meet the demand for support in the context of state hostility to asylum seekers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research project was undertaken using a mixed qualitative method including volunteer ethnography with two refugee charities and interviews. This data was collected through volunteering with two charities, one in Calais and one in Nottingham. As detailed below, the work was built on a total of 84 days of ethnographic research which I conducted over a two year period. In addition, I draw on 22 interviews with refugees, asylum seekers, charity staff and volunteers. Feminist geographers have advocated for the use of ethnographic research and in-depth interviews as a way to build relationships with participants that are both collaborative and non-exploitive (McDowell, 1997). Furthermore, Findlay and Li argued that studying migration using a mixed methods approach helps to ensure that research considers the "multiplicities of meaning associated with migration and place" (1999:50). Method triangulation involves using information from at least two different methods to corroborate constructs (Baxter and Eyres, 1997). Freeman (2020) proposed the idea of 'collage' as a way to refer to the use of multiple methods in geography; this accommodates for greater spontaneity in the research process. This research utilises militant approaches in an attempt to avoid complicity with state violence. Militant research is "a committed and intense process of internal reflection from within particular struggle(s) that seeks to map out and discuss underlying antagonisms while pushing the movement forward" (Halvorsen, 2015:466). De Genova argues that there is "no neutral vantage point" in migration research (2013:252) and so the researcher becomes a participant in the conflict and therefore 'militant'. The militant approach resists the disciplining effect resulting from the institutionalisation of migration knowledges and instead uses migration research to expose processes of subjectification relating to migration regulation (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2013).

Throughout the research project I draw on interview data from volunteer activists and charity staff. I attempt to situate this alongside data from refugees and asylum seekers themselves. However, there are certain points throughout the analysis where the voices of volunteers or staff come through more strongly, this was because their experience and expertise sometimes allowed them to see patterns rather than just individual experiences, I felt this was valuable data which had to be included. However, I acknowledge that, at these points, there is a risk that the opinions of staff and volunteers occlude those of refugees and asylum seekers themselves. For that reason I have included data from those with lived experience of forced migration as well,

and devoted significant attention to the oral histories which they shared with me (see sections 4.1, 5.1, 6.2.1, 6.3 and 6.5).

3.1. Volunteer Ethnography

Ethnography is “distinguished by the use of participant observation alongside other qualitative methods and allows for researchers to share experiences with their research participants to understand and empathise with their world views” (O’Connor and Baker, 2017:180). In ethnography researchers rely on their own observations and what they are told by others to collect experiential data (Chadwick et al., 2022; Ghoddousi and Page, 2020). A number of geographers have argued that ethnography is well suited for exploring the complexity of culture, and human life itself (Lees, 2003). Megoran (2006) argues that a key aspect of ethnography is that the researcher observes social interactions which they do not control. However, the fact that the researcher’s presence will impact the dynamic must be acknowledged. Lawson (2000) argued that critical ethnographies of migration specifically address complexity regarding identity and subjectivity. In addition, Megoran (2006) has argued that ethnography can be used to deepen understanding of how power is demonstrated and resisted at international borders. Ethnography also provides insight into processes and meanings which sustain and motivate the unfolding of social life and sustain social groups in particular places (Herbert, 2000; Hitchings and Latham, 2020b). It provides researchers with the opportunity to understand people’s interpretations and experiences of the world (Lees, 2003) and the relationships between structure, agency and geographic context (Herbert, 2000). It has been viewed as a way to represent human experience respectfully (Chadwick et al., 2022). However, Lees (2003) reminds us that the researcher only ever gets partial insight.

The particular type of ethnography used for this research was volunteer ethnography. Garthwaite (2016) used volunteer ethnography in her research on foodbanks. O’Connor and Baker (2017) argue that there were both benefits and challenges to playing the role of volunteer ethnographer in their research on social enterprises. They argued that the benefits of this method included the fact that informal day-to-day interactions, experiences and challenges could be observed (Garthwaite, 2016; O’Connor and Baker, 2017). Volunteering creates a dynamic which does not only focus on the needs of the researcher and increases the reciprocity

of the relationship by allowing the researcher to give back to a cause and local community (Garthwaite, 2016; O'Connor and Baker, 2017). Chadwick et al. (2022) argued that third sector ethnographic research requires scholars to be attentive to issues around power and voice.

I completed 48 full days of ethnographic research within the duration of the Masters year which built on an additional 37 days of research over the previous year. The research participants for this project were accessed through volunteer ethnography with two charitable organisations. The first organisation was a local Nottingham based charity called Refugee Roots; the researcher has a longstanding relationship with this organisation having completed undergraduate research with them and has therefore spent upwards of two years as a volunteer. The second organisation was a major charity in Calais who asked to remain unnamed. The researcher had no preexisting relationship with this charity but chose to perform a shorter ethnography in this location because of the importance of Calais to the geographies of forced migration in the UK. The fieldwork in Calais was made possible due to a successful funding application for the Graduate Research Support Fund within the School of Geography. Not only is Calais a site of particular importance for the migration discussion in British politics (Hicks and Mallet, 2019; Ibrahim and Howarth, 2018; Mayblin et al., 2024; Mould, 2017) but many of those who end up seeking asylum in UK cities such as Nottingham have to pass through Calais, or end up immobilised there for lengthy periods of time (Brito, 2023; Hagan, 2023b; Isakjee et al., 2020; Van Isacker, 2021). Therefore, Calais seemed to be a site worth investigating in order to better understand how people's journeys to the UK impact their experiences upon arrival.

Fitzgerald (2006) advocated for multi-sited fieldwork in both migrants' countries of origin and arrival as a way to explore sites that are linked. Similarly, transit locations, 'hotspots' (Tazzioli and Garelli 2020), and bottlenecks such as Calais are equally important places of study. Candea (2007) also advocates for the benefits of multi-sited ethnography as a way to respond to increasing globalisation but urges caution on the use of totally unbounded field-sites because of the risk of presenting knowledge as totality. Furthermore, Hage (2003) found that it was only possible to become intimately involved with a maximum of two sites. In order to address these issues, ethnography took place within the bounded locations of the two cities, Nottingham and Calais. Calais posed particular challenges to the research because the camps' repeated state

destruction made them ‘contingent’ spaces which are caught in a constant state of precarity and dynamism (Hagan, 2022). Using volunteer ethnography helped me to overcome some of the challenges related to this, including a lack of fixed boundaries, because the close relationship between the charity and the migrant communities it distributed to meant that I was kept updated on shifts in camp structures, locations and boundaries.

There was a significant difference between the length of ethnography in Nottingham and in Calais. Ethnography in Nottingham involved volunteering with charity multiple times a week over a period of two years. In contrast, the ethnography in Calais lasted just over a week and therefore did not include the same level of depth and repeated contact with participants over a long period of time. While at first glance the contrast between these two methods may look unusual, there were both epistemological and practical justifications for this choice. ‘Disjunctive comparison’ is the idea that comparative ethnography can be performed in two locations which appear to be very different to each other, and that this approach may produce knowledges or raise questions that would not otherwise emerge (Lazar, 2012). The charity in Nottingham relies on local volunteers who usually become involved in weekly activities for a period of months or years, building sustained relationships with service users. The charity in Calais relies on volunteers from the UK (and across Europe) who travel to Calais for short periods of time ranging from a few days to a few months to volunteer. The relationships that volunteers build with people on the move through this kind of volunteering are usually more temporary and involve fewer sustained or repeated interactions. My travel to Calais for a week of volunteer ethnography reflected this way of distributing aid and therefore I was able to perform a sort of autoethnography of the geographies of care in Calais. Autoethnography rests on the premise that being both researcher and participant allows for deeper understanding (Cloke, 2014; Liggins, 2013).

The duration of time spent in each location also means that the pace of the research reflects the type of violence in each location with shorter research duration in Calais where violence takes more immediate forms such as drownings in the Channel (Maggs, 2020) and longer research duration in Nottingham where the violence of the asylum system works in slower ways (Mayblin et al., 2020). However, it is important not to detract from slower forms of violence in Calais (Davies et al., 2017) and more immediate forms of violence in Nottingham. In addition, there

were practical constraints to my time in Calais. Funding for research became particularly limited during the time period of the thesis, meaning that even when performed as cheaply as possible, it was not possible to stay in Calais longer than 8 days. I argue that while there may be merits to methods which prioritise ‘slow scholarship’ in terms of time to think and reflect during data collection (Mountz et al., 2015), this is often a privilege of the tenured and well-funded academic.

At Refugee Roots in Nottingham, I conducted 40 days of ethnographic research during the masters year. However, I had already conducted over a year of volunteering with the charity and undergraduate research prior to this. Refugee Roots offers a wide variety of activities for local refugees and asylum seekers including: English lessons, art classes, performance art, women’s group, cooking group and gardening. It also has support workers who provide signposting and assistance regarding access to: housing, healthcare, college courses, foodbanks, warm clothing, blankets and SIM cards (Refugee Roots, 2024). I have volunteered at: English classes, art classes, women’s groups, cooking groups and warm space (a space set up over the winter where people could access hot drinks, blankets, foodbank, SIM cards and book appointments with support workers).

The relationships I had with participants often involved repeat encounters over an extended period, some participants I have known for two years now, others I met only once or a handful of times. Similarly, Darling (2011) engaged in repeat encounters with his participants while performing ethnographic research at a UK drop-in centre for asylum seekers. The participants with which I had longer standing relationships often asked me for advice about things such as their asylum applications (I was able to signpost them to the charities support workers) or confided in me about personal issues they were having such as risk of homelessness or medical issues. This meant I was drawn into more emotionally complex relationships with some participants, however, it also meant I was able to establish a high degree of trust. Munt (2012) argued that it is not ethical or feasible to insist on objective rationalism from the researcher when performing research which requires participants to make themselves vulnerable through emotional disclosure and the telling of their stories. During her research with refugee women, she became drawn into emotional relationships with her participants, showing them pictures of her cats and scuba diving trips (Munt, 2012). I became drawn into similar relationships with my

participants, telling them about my kayaking trips and showing them pictures of my dog. However, I was careful to maintain certain boundaries around what information I shared with my participants and thought carefully about the emotional impact and the power relations that I was inevitably drawn into throughout the research process. In addition, the longer duration of ethnography meant I was drawn into closer relationships with staff and other volunteers at the charity. Research notes were often taken during breaks between activities or immediately after leaving the days volunteering, this was sometimes followed up by additional entries upon reflection later on. Similarly to Darling (2011), these notes were recorded in an ethnographic research diary.

In Calais, eight days of ethnographic research took place with a major charitable organisation which has significant operations both in Calais and across the UK[1]. The charity focuses on distributing non-food items to asylum seekers living in informal camps in and around Calais and Dunkirk. Items distributed include: clothing, sleeping bags, tents and hygiene kits. The charity also offers a number of services at its distributions including: charging points, hot drinks, litter picking, hair cutting equipment, razors, games, English lessons and sewing for repairs to clothing. Volunteers are offered the opportunity to participate in all of these activities during their time with the charity so I participated in all of the services and also participated in distributions of non-food items. This ethnography involved more short-lived, one-off interactions at distributions rather than sustained relationships over longer periods of time. Garthwaite (2016) had similar one-off interactions with foodbank recipients during her volunteer ethnography and found that participants were more interested in how she could support them as a volunteer than in her role as researcher. I found that despite the short length of the ethnography, relationships with volunteers developed quite quickly, perhaps due to the shared experiences being outside our comfort zones and witnessing both the suffering and resilience of asylum seekers (Min et al., 2018). Data was collected by audio recording thoughts during the day in gaps between volunteering. This was supplemented by a longer audio recorded reflection in the evening. These audio recordings were then transcribed into the ethnographic research diary. The ethnographic research diary from both Nottingham and Calais was treated as a text and analysed through coding and identifying themes alongside the interviews (see 3.3).

[1] The charity asked to remain unnamed.

3.2. Interviews

Interviews took place with volunteers and staff in Calais, staff at Refugee Roots and refugees and asylum seekers at Refugee Roots. In total I conducted 22 interviews with refugees, asylum seekers, charity staff and volunteers. Interviews are one of the most widely used techniques in human geography (Hitchings and Latham, 2020a); they are effective for providing insights into participant personal and lived experiences (Kusek and Smiley, 2014), for their versatility, and for collecting a range of interviews on a topic (Hitchings and Latham, 2020a; Longhurst, 2009). Interviews are particularly useful for understanding people's relationships to place and the "spatialities of social life" (Dowling et al., 2016:680). Cook (2009) argues that interviewing rests on the premise that words are an adequate way to discuss and understand the world around us. I chose semi-structured interviews as they provided sufficient flexibility for me to address my research questions, explore varying perspectives, and for participants to raise themes which they felt were important (Fearnley, 2022; Longhurst, 2009). They are well-suited for addressing personal and sensitive topics and allowed me to show respect for participants by indicating that participants' opinions are valued (Longhurst, 2009). I argue that this was suitable for navigating the often emotionally charged and vulnerable nature of being an asylum seeker or witnessing harms towards asylum seekers. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis (Fearnley, 2022).

Within the research in Calais, I conducted ten interviews with volunteers of up to 45 minutes (see Figure 1). I conducted two interviews with staff at the charity lasting approximately 15 minutes (see Figure 2). These interviews were shorter than I would have liked, however, this was due to the staffs' work commitments and I did not wish to take excessive amounts of time away from their important work helping people on the move. Interview sites are imbued with spatial meanings or 'micro-geographies' which construct a set of power relations (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Half of these interviews took place in a quiet area of the warehouse where the charity operates. I chose this site because it positioned the participant and myself in a similar position where our shared roles as volunteers were emphasised. The other half of these interviews took place over video call in the weeks following the ethnography. This allowed participants more flexibility over the time of their interview and also allowed them to choose a place in which they felt comfortable to perform the interview (Archibald et al., 2019; Oliffe et al., 2021). Given the shorter nature of the ethnography it was decided that there was not sufficient

time to build up the trust and relationships needed to perform interviews with asylum seekers in an ethical manner.

Figure 1: Calais Volunteer Interviewees

Participant Number	**Pseudonym**	**Nationality**	**Gender**	**Occupation**
1	Marie	British	Female	Works for NGO which does social justice education for kids
2	Yoshiki	Japanese	Male	Masters student studying International Development
3	Julie	British	Female	Break in employment, previously dementia care specialist
4	Emma	British	Female	Masters student
5	Golnaz	Iran	Female	Legal access team for UK branch of Calais charity and also British Red Cross
6	Hayleigh	American	Female	Undergraduate student studying Politics and French
7	Caroline	British	Female	Break in employment, previously worked in NGO sector
8	Paloma	Spanish	Female	Masters student studying International Humanitarian Action
9	Martin	British	Male	Retired, previously builder, plumber, electrician
10	Alice	British	Female	Volunteer, looking for employment

Figure 2: Calais Staff Interviewees

Participant Number	Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender	Occupation
1	Isabelle	British	Female	Senior Operations Manager
2	Nicholas	British	Male	Field Operation Coordinator

I felt it was necessary to interview refugees directly in order to get a sense of how they describe their own experiences. Sigona (2014) highlights the importance of not presenting a singular refugee voice but rather acknowledging the 'plurality' or refugee experiences. Chatty argues that refugee voices are rarely heard outside of contexts which accentuate their role as "humanitarian aid recipients in an undefined space between nation-states" (2016:3). She argues that voices of the displaced can help us to understand people on the move in alternative terms to the nation-state. I interviewed seven participants at Refugee Roots with interviews lasting up to one hour (see Section 3.4) for discussion of power relations within interviews.

Figure 3: Refugee Roots Participant Interviewees

Participant Number	**Pseudonym**	**Nationality**	**Gender**	**Immigration Status**	**Length of time spent living in the UK**	**Work**
1	Ahmad	Iran	Male	Refugee	2 years 6 months	Part-time catering work
2	Salma	Iran	Female	Asylum Seeker	9 months	Volunteer interpreter work with refugee organisations
3	Abrihet	Eritrea	Female	Asylum Seeker	10 months	Not permitted to work
4	Teofila	Ukraine	Female	Refugee	1 year 5 months	Not currently employed
5	Chen	Hong Kong	Male	Asylum Seeker	2 years	Not permitted to work
6	Mustafa	Sudan	Male	Refugee	3 years	Searching for work
7	Ivanna	Ukraine	Female	Refugee	2 years 2 months	Compliance officer in healthcare

I also chose to interview staff at Refugee Roots because they are aware of a range of issues which refugees face because they assist with some of these issues. In addition, interviewing staff helps me to better understand the ethos behind spaces of care for refugees and asylum seekers. I performed 3 interviews with Refugee Roots staff of duration up to 1 hour 15 minutes. All the interviews were then transcribed to be analysed through a process of coding.

Figure 4: Refugee Roots Staff Interviewees

Participant Number	**Pseudonym**	**Gender**	**Role**
1	Jane	Female	Project Coordinator
2	Aiden	Male	Charity Director
3	Charlotte	Female	Assistant Support Worker

3.3. Data Analysis

I analysed both the ethnographic research diary and interview transcripts as pieces of text through a process of coding. Coding is a process which helps in producing a number of themes from a text (Jackson, 2001). It involves the deconstructing of texts, be that interview transcripts or diary excerpts, and then the reconstruction of words into meaningful research (Elliott, 2018). Words and phrases from the text in the participants' own words are highlighted to produce ‘in vivo’ codes; this process is also known as ‘indexing’. The researcher then uses these to create ‘constructed’ codes which are more analytical in nature (Elliott, 2018; Jackson, 2001). These codes are used to produce themes for the data. Elliott (2018) conceptualises coding as a decision-making process, I suggest that viewing it in this way is productive because it highlights the fact that the researcher impacts the knowledges which are produced from the data through their individual interpretation. I analysed each individual interview transcript in this way. Following this, I did a reading across the interview transcripts to identify commonalities and

differences in perspectives between different participants (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). This was used to highlight plurality in the participant's views.

3.4. Positionality and Reflexivity

One facet of the research which may present limitations is the fact that all interactions took place within the context of a space of care. This may have impacted what was witnessed because my interactions with participants were not just focused on what my research dictated but also my position as a volunteer. I noticed this meant that sometimes I was perceived as being in a position of authority or asked for assistance with certain issues that they had. While I was able to assist them or signpost them to the relevant member staff, I can't be certain whether or how this impacted the findings. I wonder if that may have made participants more reluctant to disclose concerns about the charities or the way that care is distributed. Darling (2011) discusses how a number of power relations are negotiated in asserting who has the right to distribute care. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) highlight the fact that, while researchers may attempt to increase the reciprocity of the research, certain power differentials are inevitable throughout the research process. Darling (2011) and Garthwaite (2016) discuss another issue which I encountered throughout the research; that is the issue of making my role as researcher known to service users of the charities. As they mention, although I tried to make my role as researcher clear, participants were much more concerned with my role as a volunteer. Arguably this could be a positive thing because it meant that relationships were dictated more by what I could offer participants from the charity rather than what they could offer me for my research needs. However, it could also have had negative implications for how freely participants felt they could speak about the charities and support they receive. O'Connor and Baker (2017) argued that being a volunteer ethnographer makes it harder to become a detached observer. I found this to be true in some regards, however, I argue this was also a strength as it allowed participants to feel more comfortable disclosing information to me.

Darling (2011) talks about how his status as a British citizen placed him in a privileged position to direct the narrative and which lines of inquiry were pursued in his research with asylum seekers. I found similar situations in my ethnography where my role as a volunteer, but also as a British citizen, meant that participants asked for my permission to do certain things, such as

get themselves a glass of water. A stark example of this was upon completion of my ethnography in Calais, I was able to freely pass through the border and board a ferry back to the UK. A right which was not extended to my research participants who remained immobilised in Calais or forced to risk their lives to make the same crossing I made without issue (Brito, 2023; Maggs, 2020). In addition, my perceived authority meant that people asked me for advice on wide ranging topics from questions around what is acceptable in British culture to specific questions about their asylum claims which I was not qualified to answer.

I think it would also be inappropriate to conduct this research without some discussion of whiteness. As a white researcher this research is performed without a lived experience of racism. The research utilises an actively anti-racist approach through engagement with racialized hierarchies and coloniality throughout, however, it is important to consider the fact that certain limitations may result from the fact that the stories and themes from this research were constructed by a white researcher working with people of colour. This research project acknowledges that 'Black spatial knowledge' and Black resistance are in a mutually constitutive relationship with colonialism and displacement (Hawthorne, 2009). While I attempt to foreground Black spatial knowledge through interviews and ethnography with people of colour on the move, this work is likely best performed by Black geographers. However, I attempted to utilise my privilege, both in terms of race and freedom of movement, to perform research and volunteering in both Calais and Nottingham, and provide disjunctive comparison with 'militant' research intentions (see Clare, 2017).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Schock et al. (2015) argue that asylum interviews as part of the asylum application process are associated with psychological stress for interviewees. In order to prevent further trauma for my participants I attempted to make my interviews feel informal and empathetic. In addition, I had a long pre-existing relationship with my refugee and asylum seeker interview participants which hopefully helped them to feel more comfortable. I did not interview asylum seekers in Calais because, for practical reasons, I was not able to volunteer in Calais for long enough to build up the sustained relationships needed for ethical interviewing of vulnerable asylum seekers. There are a number of vulnerabilities which can result from the experience of being a refugee or

asylum seeker including: precarious migration status, trauma, language barriers. Participants were informed that participation in the research was entirely optional and that they could withdraw at any time without explanation, data was kept password protected and interviews were pseudonymised (Longhurst, 2009; Winchester, 1996).

Chapter 4: The Right to Kill: 'at any time in any manner'

This chapter focuses on those forms of violence which are fast and highly visible. I make the argument that the asylum system in the UK is necropolitical long before those attempting to seek refuge have even set foot on British soil. The bodies of black and brown asylum seekers from former colonies which drown in the territorial waters of the metropole, a territory to which they are denied access, are a stark reminder of the coloniality and extent of the border. In this section I look at two ways in which asylum seekers are exposed to (risk of) outright death; by vehicle and at sea. I then go on to illustrate the ways in which exposure to this risk is racialized.

4.1. Death by Motor Vehicle

Many of the interviewees in Calais raised the issue of vehicle journeys being an exceptionally dangerous way to cross the Channel. While small boats crossing appeared to be more common and attract more political and media attention, for those who can't afford to pay the people smugglers, vehicles are their only option:

> *"They could not afford €700 to pay people smugglers to travel to the UK by small boat so, fully aware of the risk of death, they planned to try to cross on a lorry"* - Julie

However participants seemed acutely aware of the dangers of this method of crossing, as did those living in informal camps. Julie continued to describe a conversation with a man from Eritrea who had been in Calais for four years and did not have any money to pay people smugglers:

> *"I don't know whether he tried to cross over on a lorry or he just already thought that it was way too dangerous and he'd know people who had died trying that way"* - Julie

One of the most powerful examples of this kind of dangerous journey by a vehicle comes from a refugee participant who I interviewed in Nottingham, Mustafa. He described having made a dangerous journey underneath a vehicle to the UK and his retelling of this journey is described

here. He had to attempt this journey twice as the first time the lorry which he used went to the Netherlands rather than the UK. He explained to me that, on his first attempt, he found a lorry which was full of musical equipment. Him and friends climbed underneath the lorry and positioned themselves on top of the spare tyre which is slightly raised above the other tyres. The journey was not only dangerous, but also very uncomfortable:

> *"This is horrible day in my life because a lot of rain and cold, very cold and rain comes (gestures onto his body). When we are inside the tyre gives water"*

He said that once he arrived he realised he was in the Netherlands because he recognised the football stadium that the music lorry had arrived at. This is reminiscent of Tazzioli's (2020:10) idea of 'containment through (forced) mobility' whereby migrants are not wholly immobilised, but instead they are forced to "follow erratic geographies and to bounce across borders" as a way of controlling and curtailing their mobility. He said that once they left the lorry, the effects of the uncomfortable journey lingered in his body:

> *"When I go outside I walk like this" (demonstrates an uncomfortable looking walk with bent stiff legs)*

Once Mustafa left the vehicle the driver saw them and called the police. They were forced to run away because he had heard that many people who had smuggled themselves onto lorries went to prison in the Netherlands. They ran away and hid in the small town and surrounding area for two days in their wet clothes:

> *"My body and trousers and jacket, all of this, water. I called my friend and told him: we need to go back to Belgium*"

Mustafa managed to return to Belgium and after six months trying to get to the UK he went back to France. In France he had heard from a friend that he may have a better chance of crossing from Roscoff which is near to Brest, much further down the coast than Calais. He was arrested in Roscoff and detained in a cell for six or seven hours for attempting to cross. However, when he was released he continued to try. He described finding a caravan in the middle of the night and asking a friend to travel with him so that they could go together and alternate positions under the caravan:

> *"I find caravan, UK caravan, when I sleeping I wake up at like 2 o'clock and my friends, all of them sleeping. I go outside to search and when I find this I told my friend 'we can*

go with this, I know this is hard, very hard, but you can put your leg on my leg, one hour, half hours and I change'"

His friend told him that he couldn't ride the vehicle, he thought it would be too difficult:

"He says this: 'I can't. I can't ride this. No, no this is hard' he told me. Yeah we're like friends you know, I don't leave, when I try he say no. I told him 'okay, I can go, you don't need to come. We're somewhere in Belgium six months, in France, Calais, you know this. This one day you can suffer, instead many years you will suffer. This is one say in suffering. He said 'no, this is a small vehicle and inside no, under you can't'. I say 'ok, no problem, I need to go, I hope you come soon'"

He then explained to me how he stowed himself under the caravan by sitting on a sharp metal bar (he referred to as an iron) and tying a rope between two bars:

"I have a rope and this iron, when you sit on the iron you are suffering here (gestures to legs) because the bar is sharp [...], I put the rope like this between two iron, when I suffering a lot there I sit on the rope"

Mustafa described how, when the vehicle was moving fast and going over holes in the street he was scared that the rope was going to break so even when he was sitting on the rope he tried to hold his weight on the metal bars using his arms. The journey took five hours, he wanted to get out of the vehicle once it arrived in Bournemouth but the caravan did not stop until reaching a service station further down the motorway. At this point he was able to get out and tell his friends back in France that he had made it to the UK.

This example illustrates the risk of death that people attempting to cross using vehicles undergo, and also the discomfort which they are subjected to during these journeys. Migrants are subjected to these harms repeatedly as they are forced to make erratic journeys as part of 'containment through (forced) mobility (Tazzioli, 2020). I argue that this can be considered a form of necropolitics whereby migrants must repeatedly run the gauntlet on their journeys, risking death each time (see Section 4.2.3). The risk of death for migrants attempting to reach the UK, and the lack of alternative (safe) options for many, represents a way in which the sovereign has the capacity to decide "who matters and who does not" (Mbembe, 2003:27). Therefore, the necropolitics of this aspect of bordering occurs through the sovereign power to

render racialized lives ‘disposable’ and subject racialized populations to the risk of death attempting vehicle crossings (Mbembe, 2003:27). In addition to the risk of outright death, I argue that the bodily harms and discomfort accrued through these journeys, such as the lasting impact of travelling in the cold on Mustafa’s body, can be considered a form of ‘maiming’ (Puar, 2017) or keeping populations “alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe, 2003:21). I argue that these forms of non-deadly violence, not only allow the violence of the border to persist unscrutinised, but also work alongside Tazzioli’s (2020) idea of containment through erratic journeys or forced mobility as a way to debilitate the capacity of migrants to subvert or resist harsh border regimes and travel to their intended destinations (Davies et al., 2024).

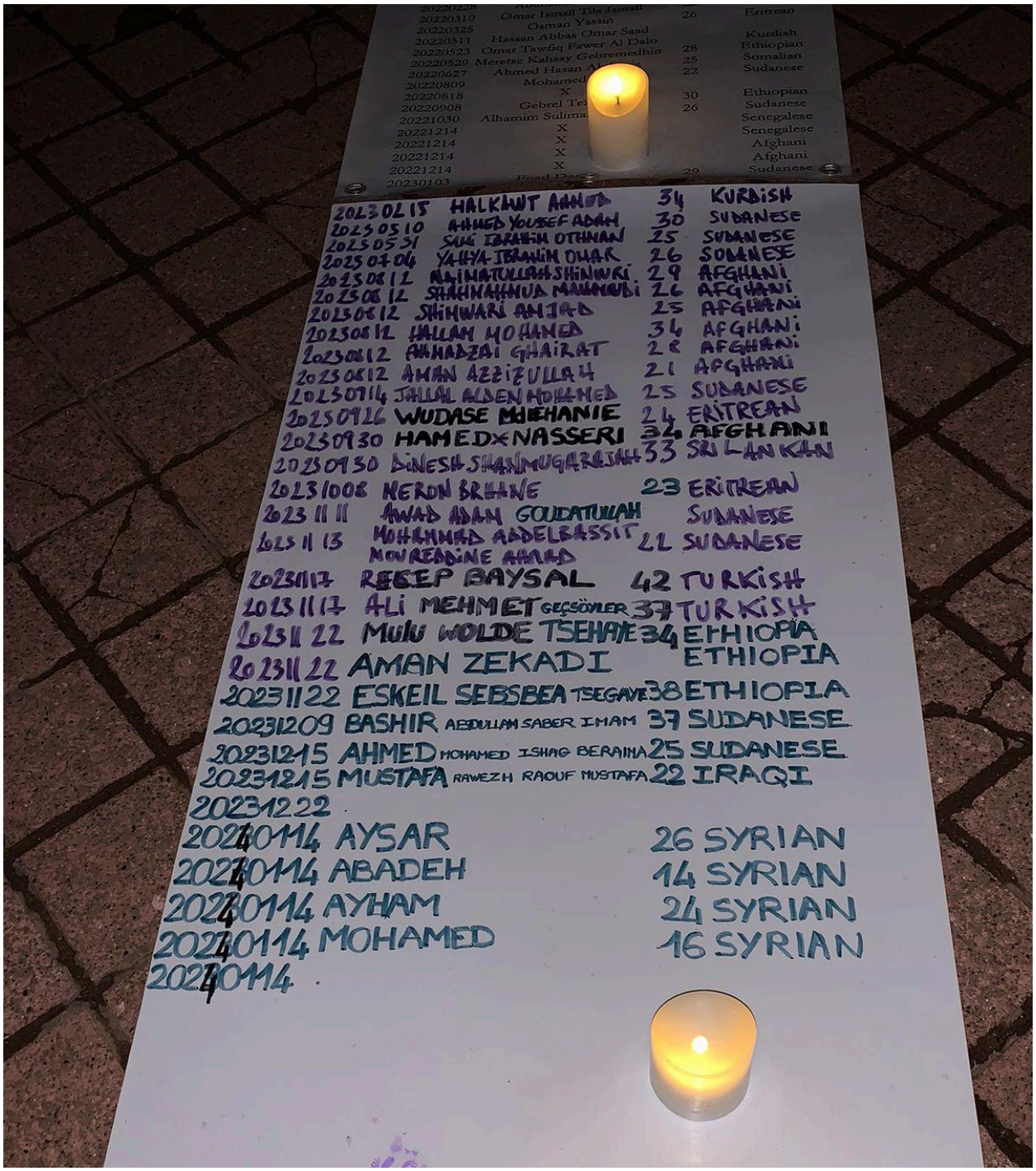
4.2. Death by Boat

4.2.1. Boats in the Channel

In 2022, 45,774 people were detected crossing the English Channel in small boats (The Migration Observatory, 2024). Of these, 8,692 were children (Refugee Council, 2024). From 2018 to August 2024, 184 people have been recorded as dead or missing in the English Channel on journeys to the UK (Missing Migrants Project, 2024). The first day of my ethnographic research in Calais opened with the news that the previous night, a boat had sunk in the Channel and five lives were lost, including two children. The boat was carrying over 70 people and had been leaving from much further down the coast where the journey is roughly twice the distance. This was due to pressure from the border force and police in Calais and other places where the crossing is shorter which forces boats to set off from further down the coast. That day we had a few of the survivors attend our distribution where we were giving out T-shirts, boxers, socks and providing hot drinks and other services. Two of the boys who attended were still in wet clothes from the unsuccessful crossing and their phones had become waterlogged and broken, these boys were minors (under 18). The following day we attended a vigil held in Calais for those who died on the boat, one of the boys who died was 14 and another one was 16, all the people who died were Syrian. At the vigil a scroll was placed on the floor which listed the names of all those who had died at the border between Britain and France (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). Around 100 people attended the vigil including some survivors from the boat.

Figure 5: Scroll of UK/France Border Deaths

Figure 6: Recorded Deaths from this Incident on Scroll of UK/France Border Deaths



This incident of drowning was raised my nearly all participants in their interviews who were both shocked at the deaths and disheartened by the fact that this was not an uncommon incident but rather part of a continuous pattern of boat deaths:

> *"I mean kind of a big thing that I guess surprised me, but I mean I wasn't really surprised, well that was when five people died and drowned. Yeah like they were Syrians which I just think is especially, everyone knows what's happening in Syria, why would they not be allowed in and that was very confronting, like people coming in wet clothes to our distributions" - Emma*

> *"Both time I volunteered for [organisation], vigils were held in Calais for refugees who had drowned - last summer for the several hundred people who died when the migrant ship, the Adriana, sank in the Mediterranean, and in January this year for the five refugees who drowned just off the Calais coast"* - Julie

Ethnographic research and the interviews with staff and volunteers made it clear that the asylum seekers themselves were acutely aware of the risk of death that they faced. However, people felt that they had no choice and would not be safe until they reached their intended destination:

> *"He said his life now, he was in this state of existential threat all the time because back in Afghanistan he was at risk of death, on the journey he was at risk of death, going across the channel he was at risk of death because there had been drownings that he was aware of. He just said that his life was, he was in a permanent state of being at risk of dying"* - Julie

I argue that this constant threat to life that migrants themselves are acutely aware of represents a form of "*instrumentalization of human existence*" whereby exposing racialized populations to (risk of) death is used as a method through which the sovereign participates in a brutal performance of bordering (Mbembe, 2003:14). This harsh performance of the border is facilitated by "*the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" (Mbembe, 2003:14) whereby racialized lives are rendered 'disposable' (2003:27).

A number of refugee and asylum seeker participants who I interviewed at Refugee Roots in Nottingham also described having made dangerous journeys. Abrihet described how she used a broker to get from Eritrea to Russia before travelling undocumented across Europe and

boarding a small boat to cross the chancel to the UK. She described the journey as “very dangerous”. This speaks to the need to undertake research methods that are sensitive not just to where those forced to move are right now, but also the risks and harms that accumulate on their passages across space and through time. For those who survive the risk of death on journeys to the UK, many are subjected to further necropolitical harms later on (see Chapter 6).

4.2.2. Death as Sovereign Violence

Multiple participants highlighted the fact that, not only is the sovereign the cause of violence due to the lack of safe passages for those from former colonies seeking refuge, but the behaviour of the French police (funded by the British government) directly exacerbates the risky nature of boat crossings.

First, I focus on the more indirect form of violence perpetrated by the sovereign: the lack of safe passages which results in dangerous clandestine journeys. For example, Julie drew attention to the fact that the lack of safe passages for those with a legitimate asylum case and intense policing of the border means that people are forced to turn to people smugglers so they can make it to UK and subsequently make their claim for asylum:

> *“This idea that we have to stop people smugglers, because it’s been made so difficult for people to get across it’s actually the situation itself is creating a need for people smugglers”* - Julie

The important factor here is that it is the lack of safe passages which is the source of the violence. Mayblin (2019b) argues that the idea that disingenuous asylum seekers are pulled to the UK is used to justify attempts to prevent would-be asylum seekers from reaching the shores of the UK. However, this discourse is not based on evidence and has been widely refuted. From 2018 to March 2024, 93% of small boat arrivals claimed asylum, of which 77% of those who had received an initial decision by the end of March 2024 were successful (The Migration Observatory, 2024). This shows that those forced to take these risky journeys are not disingenuous or ‘bogus’ asylum seekers, but in fact many have a legitimate claim to refugee status. This can be viewed as an example of state power appealing to, and labouring to produce, “a fictionalised notion of the enemy” (Mbembe, 2003:16). Therefore, we can see this as not merely a tragic phenomenon caused without intent, but a deliberate strategy which

prevents people who have the legal right to seek refuge from doing so, claiming many lives in the process. I argue then that this constitutes a form of sovereign violence reminiscent of colonial attempts to exclude those from colonies from accessing 'human' rights (Cole, 2021; Mayblin et al., 2020). This is where I suggest that necropolitics is a valuable framework through which to view this violence, as the deaths in the Channel constitute a form of necropower utilised by the sovereign to "define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembe, 2003:27) based on colonial power relations and race as the "principle marker of subjectification" (Davies and Isakjee, 2019:214). One interviewee raised the idea that that 'human' rights are not extended to everyone:

> *"So, for instance, the boys who died in the channel, like 14 and a 16 year old Syrian, it makes literally no sense if you are taking a policy of human rights that those children would die. So, clearly those human rights aren't being extended to everyone. Um, yeah I guess maybe they are being left there to die."* - Emma

I suggest that necropolitics is a useful framework to understand the killing of racialized children because people are "not killed (punished) as *individuals* who have defied the sovereign, they are targeted because their existence is seen as detrimental to the wider population"(Mayblin, 2019a:39). This killing of children suggests the sovereign right to kill indiscriminately in the colony using necropower to advance the material destruction, not just of human bodies, but of entire populations (Mbembe, 2003). The fact that these children are from former British and French colonial possessions (such as Syria) demonstrates the flagrant coloniality of allowing these deaths to occur, and therefore the value in using the theoretical framework of necropolitics which centres colonial power relations.

Second, I draw attention to ways in which the sovereign directly perpetuates violence by using border policing methods which exacerbate the already risky nature of Channel crossings. Staff and volunteers in Calais drew attention to the way in which strict surveillance and policing of the beaches in and around the city meant that, in order to avoid detection, people were forced to attempt the crossings at other locations on the coast, increasing the length and danger factor of the journey. Not only do policing methods result in people undertaking journeys from less-than-ideal starting points, it also impacts the way that boats are boarded. The risk of capture means that boats must be boarded quickly and may even be boarded while the police attempt to intercept. This leads to a number of risks:

“Because of this increased police presence people are having to inflate boats and jump into them in a kind of panicked way, maybe the boats are partially inflated, maybe people are just jumping and panicking to get on the boat. I think a situation like that was involved in these five people dying, they weren't even far from the French shores. It was people panicking and falling into the water and drowning, or dying or having to be hospitalised by hypothermia” - Julie

A number of participants pointed out the futility of the current government strategy. They felt that government policies were ineffective at preventing undocumented migration and merely forced those attempting to seek refuge to undertake increasingly risky methods of travel to the UK. Not only is this ineffective at achieving the government's purported aim of preventing ‘illegal’ migration (Home Office, 2023), but participants felt it also caused significant harm to the lives of asylum seekers.

“It made me feel more like my country is actively trying to kill people” - Emma

4.2.3. Repeatedly Running the Gauntlet

For many people the journey to the UK does not consist of only one treacherous boat trip where their lives are put at risk, but multiple. Many make a trip across the Mediterranean by boat, risking the dangerous waters off the coast of Libya, before attempting to cross the Channel. This does not even factor in the possibility of failed attempts which then force people to repeatedly put themselves at risk of death to seek refuge. Returning to the example from my time in Calais where a boat sank off the French Coast, causing the death of five onboard and meaning that many others were unsuccessful in their attempts to reach safety, I demonstrate how those who were unsuccessful were then placed in the position where they would have to risk their lives again. Some of the survivors of this ordeal attended our distribution the following day, still in their wet clothes in the bitter cold of January, and announced their intent to try to cross again.

“I was speaking to two of the guys who were on the boat that sank and you know, they just, the boat had sank and they were swimming to come back and they had gone through this horrible thing and one guy was like ‘but I’m still going to go to London’. He was like ‘I’m going to try again and again and again’.” - Marie

For many the Channel crossing is not the first boat journey they have undertaken, Julie describes the story of two young Sundanese men who she met in Calais:

> *"Their journey to France took four years via Libya, the central Mediterranean and Italy. They were imprisoned in Libya in very overcrowded spaces with no medical attention"*

In addition, during my ethnographic research in Calais I met a journalist who had spent three weeks in Libya working on boats which rescue those in danger who are attempting to cross the Mediterranean from Libya. She said that in three weeks they rescued around 400 people including lots of children (many unaccompanied), families and even a one year old. She said that the biggest danger for these people was the Libyan coastguard who she described as "just a bunch of guys with AK-47s who call themselves the coastguard". She said that the coastguard was in contact with people smugglers and sometimes worked in collaboration with them to exploit those attempting to cross. This provides further evidence of the lives of asylum seekers being placed at risk multiple times throughout their journeys to the UK.

As Mbembe argues, the sovereign retains a right to kill "at any time or in any manner" (2003:25) in the colonies. I suggest that asylum necropolitics requires an expansion of what we view as colonial space. I argue that the sovereign utilises the right to kill in any manner in order to subject people to death in the Channel as a form of colonial terror which takes place upon the very borders of the metropole. The idea that this violence is perpetrated against colonial subjects is made particularly clear because the same space (the territorial waters of former colonial powers) is safe for Ukrainians (see Section 4.3). Therefore, the violence is directed towards, not just the specific border space, but racialized groups within it. It is not just that asylum necropolitics is being applied to people who originate in Britain's postcolonial, but that this violence is underwritten by colonial *logics* that are redolent of imperial governance. Mbembe (2003) argues that in the colonies peace can take the form of endless war. I suggest a similar phenomenon is taking place on the borders of the UK today where a constant war against asylum seekers who are fictionalised as the enemy takes place in order to uphold the 'peace' and protect citizens of the UK from the imagined potential harms of 'bogus' asylum seekers. I argue that the sovereign utilises the right to kill "at any time or in any manner" to do this (Mbembe, 2003:25). Forcing migrants to undertake journeys which represent a significant threat

to life, not just once but multiple times, and then utilising police and border forces to exacerbate the risks of these journeys constitutes the ‘in any manner’ aspect of this contention. The repetition of journeys following ‘rescue’ and return constitutes the ‘at any time’ aspect in which the sovereign is able to utilise concepts of humanitarian rescue to disguise the violence behind forcing people to attempt the same deadly journey on repeat. This is why I use the idea of ‘repeatedly running the gauntlet’ as a way to describe the sovereign power not only to expose people to “the murderous functions of the state”, but to do it over and over again (Mbembe, 2003:17).

4.3. Race as the Principle Marker of Subjectification

In necropolitics “race is the principle marker of subjectification” (Davies and Isakjee, 2019:214). Many participants drew comparisons between the way groups who were predominantly white, such as Ukrainians, were treated differently to those from predominantly non-white backgrounds. This is not to say that being a Ukrainian refugee does not have its challenges, Ukrainian participants still highlighted issues with language and integration in their interviews (see Section 6.5). Nor is it to say that Ukrainian refugees do not deserve to be treated with welcome, they are fleeing a legitimate conflict and have the right to claim asylum in the UK. The trauma of being displaced, witnessing violence in the place you once called home, uncertainty around the future, and potential threat to your loved ones, is undeniable (Dowd, 2019). This thesis does not intend at any point to present the lives of Ukrainian refugees as easy, this is clearly not the case, however, throughout the analysis sections I will use the (predominantly white) Ukrainian population as an example of racialized differences in treatment. This section raises questions about why such privileges, or basic human rights, are not extended also to those from predominantly non-white backgrounds. Many participants felt that race was a key factor in why certain groups were able to access their right to asylum and refuge, while others were left with no option but to undertake risky journeys across the Channel, or remain immobilised in Calais and subject to a variety of other state sanctioned violence there.

A particular area where racial comparisons were drawn was in the provision of safe passage to all Ukrainians through the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (Refugee Council, 2024):

> *“Not a single Ukrainian got on a small boat to cross to the UK because there was another option of a safe passage provided for them. And actually, what we see here is, anyone who isn’t Ukrainian, or doesn’t have access to those safe routes, is from a different race, is from different countries, and they aren’t afforded those privileges”* - Isabelle

The journeys of Ukrainian interview participants in Nottingham also reflected their provision of safe passage; both participants were able to enter the UK by a combination of plane and train travel. Calais volunteer interviewees also felt that these protections and options for safe passage should be extended to other nations who currently have few options beside clandestine boat or lorry journeys:

> *“Not allowing safe passages for refugees, like we’ve done with Ukrainians, that really makes things more difficult for people and they’re going to come either way. Like they’re really fleeing extreme conditions in their countries, they’re not going to stay there, we cannot let them stay there. So there should really be safe passages for them to seek asylum which is like a right they have [...] It shouldn’t be this difficult to make things right as we’ve done with Ukrainians and now they have their international protections and they can start maybe building a life here or working”* - Paloma

When Ukrainian’s arrived in Calais they were accommodated in hotels, rather than forced to live in informal camps, and they were free to travel to the UK by plane or by Eurostar. Participants felt that race was central in this difference. Most of the participants from the Calais interviews, when asked if they thought race mattered, said that it did:

> *“The example of the British government being willing to support, pay for Eurotunnels for Ukrainians fleeing war in the same situation as say someone from Sudan or Eritrea. It’s the same situation but people are, governments are unwilling to offer the same sort of support and in fact, do more to try and stop that. It’s not even that they're not willing to accept them you know, the current government is totally trying to completely push these people out. Yeah, it is racist” - Alice*

Participants also felt that if the option for safe passages was extended to other asylum seekers in Calais, there would be no demand for small boat journeys organised by people smugglers:

> *"It doesn't make any sense, like the stuff the government says as well you know, in parliament, like 'we have to stop the boats', it's like, you can, you can do what you do for Ukraine, put everyone on the Eurostar"* - Marie

Some participants explicitly referred to the coloniality of this kind of bordering, arguing that colonial legacies are a driving factor in present day migration and therefore the UK should be willing to take responsibility for these forced migrants:

> *"The thing is, you know, my big question is always that it's like Western countries, they intervene in other countries affairs, start to attack and invade like Iraq and Syria. And then they make people flee their countries, and then they say they are not welcome and they don't accept them" - Golnaz*

> *"As I understand, quite a lot of countries which people are escaping from are former colonies of Britain, of France, European countries. And I think that the result of that colonialism, so exploiting those countries for resources, kind of insulating populations, when the colonial powers moved out it was quite destabilising for countries, and also they had a lot of resources stolen which created problems, just a struggle to survive really with no money. That's another reason why I think, I'm just talking about Britain, we really have a responsibility because of their sort of racist practices. So it's different layers of racism, in the past that kind of racist colonial behaviour which has left countries, maybe not the only reason, but they have had a big responsibility in creating problems in other countries, and then to refuse to take people who are escaping from that mess [...] It is appalling to me that Britain and other European colonial powers are washing their hands of those fleeing desperate conditions that they, the colonists, have partly or wholly created"* - Julie

The coloniality of the border is highlighted, not just by academics, but also from volunteer activists, including those from refugee backgrounds such as Golnaz. This shows that awareness of coloniality is not just the preserve of academics and people who theorise contemporary violence (such as Mbembe), it is also part of everyday or 'lay' understandings of the border violence people are witnessing. I argue this constitutes a form of 'theory from below' whereby necropolitics, and postcolonial theory more broadly, are useful concepts not just for academics, but also reflect a way of thinking for everyday people too. I suggest that the necropolitical

violence of the border is visible, not just to the highly trained academic, but to anyone who is willing to look closely enough, and especially to those refugees who have been subjected to such violence.

Mayblin (2019a) draws on necropolitics highlighting the way in which whether a migrant is ‘desirable’ or not through her contention that constructions of the ‘bogus’ asylum seeker emerged at the same time as refugees began to be perceived as predominantly black or brown and from former colonies rather than white and Soviet. I argue that this represents another way in which the sovereign exerts the power to define whose lives matter and whose can be rendered ‘disposable’ (Mbembe, 2003:27). I argue therefore that necropolitics is a useful framework for understanding these experiences because it centres the colonial and attempts to address the Eurocentrism of Foucault and Agamben (Weheliye, 2014). Necropolitics proves valuable in understanding the experiences of non-white refugees in a system which retains the legacies of colonial power relations (see Section 2.1.3), it also invites us to consider how those colonial power relations are still very real for those whose lives the sovereign has deemed ‘disposable’ (Mbembe, 2003:27). Building on this, in the next chapter I will argue that necropolitics occurs not just through outright killing, but where exposure to slow violence is punctuated by sudden and more visible acts of violence which then exacerbate the harmful impacts of slow violence. This leads to the creation of ‘death worlds’ where the result of these sudden acts of violence is that harm ripples out across space and time (Mbembe, 2003:40).

Chapter 5: Death Worlds: harm travels across time and space

This chapter aims to consider how sudden moments of violence can punctuate slower and less visible violence. Building on the previous section, in this section I argue that sudden moments of violence to do not exist in a vacuum as isolated events, rather they interrupt slower forms of violence and their effects are long lasting as well as immediate. It aims to consider how, throughout their journeys, and upon arrival to the UK, those seeking asylum are subject to a range of harms, the impact of which travels with them across space and through time. The argument here is that, although this research took place at two spatially bounded sites within a defined period of time, the experiences of the research participants had no such temporal and geographical delimitations. This section explores the way in which slow violence can give way to sudden and sometimes more visible forms of violence, and the way in which these sudden forms of violence then *exacerbate* the lethal consequences of slow violence. I argue that there is a need to consider a spectrum of harms in order to make visible both the impact and the extent of necropolitical violence at play in the asylum system. In this section I look at how sexual violence has both physical and mental impacts which follow participants throughout their journeys and have not just instant, but also long-lasting and attritional effects. I go on to look at how police evictions and clearings in Calais punctuate and exacerbate slower forms of necropolitical violence taking place at informal camps. Finally, I look at how exposure to sudden forms of violence through the way asylum seeker housing is managed leads to not just acute physical injury, but a much longer lasting state of fear. In this section the sovereign is both a direct agent of violence, through the actions of the police and border force, and also an indirect agent of violence, through the consignment of populations to spaces where they are placed at a heightened risk of sudden harms such as assault or rape.

5.1. Sexual Violence

One form of violence that involves sudden events with long lasting effects is sexual violence. The clearest example of this kind of violence was provided by one of the participants I interviewed in Nottingham, Abrihet. She described the way her journey had been punctuated by a sudden act of violence, a rape in a camp on the border between Poland and Belarus. This

singular moment led to a series of harms which followed her on her journey through Europe to the UK. These harms also had lingering temporal effects, both the trauma and physical health implications of this rape continue to affect this participant long after the original act had been perpetrated. This section details her disclosure and retelling of the event; this may be difficult or distressing to read[2]. When the Abrihet disclosed the incident to me she described it as a bad memory:

> *"Even I have a bad memory, also part of life, I don't know, that's my secrets. You know Belarus? Belarus and Poland, across the 'jungle'. Yeah more than one month I stayed in the 'jungle'. When I stayed at the 'jungle', rape"*

She was forced to irregularly using people smugglers and human traffickers which increases the risk of sexual violence in transit for asylum seeker women (Gebreyesus et al., 2019). This particular event occurred while she was staying in a camp, this is not uncommon and Belanteri et al. (2020) highlight the camp as a potential site of abuse. She discussed how the trauma of this rape haunts her when she tries to sleep and continues to cause her distress regularly:

> *"Every time I remember, when I sleep time, I remember that situation. Sometimes I cry a lot because I lost almost everything"*

The longer term impacts of the rape began to play out as she continued her migration. When she reached Germany she was able to visit a hospital and told that she was pregnant. This lead to the breakdown of her marriage:

> *"After that, when I was raped, I was pregnant, the second challenge, big challenge. In that time I was in Germany. I passed in Germany so checked the hospital for being pregnant. That's not good for me because I have husband in my country. He didn't understand I'm sure, still, already separated because of this"*

She also contracted a sexually transmitted infection as result of the rape.

> *"When I arrived in Germany the doctor, she said 'you're pregnant', at the same time happening infection, vaginal infection because that's not consensual you know"*

[2] Following this disclosure, after the interview I reminded her that she was able to withdraw her consent for this story to be included at any time with no negative consequences. She confirmed that she was happy for her quotes to be included within the research project and her name, like all participants, was replaced with a pseudonym. Procedures were followed according to the ethical approval for this research.

After being prescribed a medicine she didn't know the name of, and paracetamol, she continued on her journey to France. During this time she was in a lot of pain from the infection she had contracted, this led to an accidental painkiller overdose:

> *"So she gave me a medicine, I don't know the name of the medicine. At the same time I start going to France. In that time I have very pain. I took paracetamol, no stop pain. Again. Again, that's mistake, a lot of paracetamol I take. Finally, when I arrived in France, I don't know anything, I faint"*

She described how this overdose meant that she had to go to hospital in an ambulance while drifting in and out of consciousness, the blood loss and overdose meant that she had to have an abortion. Not only was significant damage done to her physical health, but the abortion also had a severe negative impact on her mental health:

> *"Yeah unconscious, some people come and help me, call ambulance, ambulance is coming, sometimes conscious, sometimes not, because a lot of blood loss. That means already abortion. Already abortion the result is because paracetamol and other things, that makes not good. So this is for me very difficult time, very difficult time [...] I lost my baby, I was raped, I lost my husband. Still I'm not good (gestures to head) because of this bad journey"*

Canning (2017) illustrates how structural harms within the UK asylum system can compound the impact of sexual violence for survivors. Abrihet told me that she had made a lot of sacrifices to come to the UK and that the threat of deportation to Rwanda scares her. I argue that this is a form of structural violence where being kept in temporal limbo through the threat of deportation exacerbates the traumatic impacts of the rape and limits Abrihet's capacity to access support (Canning, 2017). I suggest this event combines violence from across the breadth of Mayblin's (2019a) spectrum of necropolitics: it includes the immediate act, a sudden and (at least to the survivor) highly visible act of violence, but it also includes a number of slower and more attritional forms of violence which resulted from this act. In addition, the necropolitical harms of this particular incident, both long and short term, do not exist in a vacuum. They work in combination with other forms of necropolitics which the participant was subject to: the immediate risk of death on her boat journey across the channel; and exposure to slow violence in both camp life and everyday life in the UK (Davies et al., 2017; Mayblin et al., 2020). I have integrated literature around structural violence for this section rather than drawing specifically on Mbembe. I argue that while necropolitics is highly attuned to the politics of race and how this

impacts exposure to violence, it is less well suited to tackle issues of gender. Therefore, I argue there is a need to supplement necropolitics with theories around structural violence and gender in order to achieve a more intersectional approach which considers *both* race and gender.

5.2. Police Clearings and Evictions in Calais

In Mbembe's conception of necropolitics he describes the occupation of Palestine as a form of 'contemporary colonial occupation' (2003:27). He applies the idea of medieval siege warfare to the network of 'urban refugee camps' in Palestine. This particular form of necropolitics involves 'disabling the enemy' through a variety of techniques which constitute 'infrastructural warfare' (Mbembe, 2003:29). Puar's (2017) idea of 'maiming' as a way to debilitate future resistance follows a similar logic and reflects the way that harms from sudden moments of violence have long lasting consequences. I draw on the idea of using infrastructural warfare to disable the enemy for my analysis of the behaviour of the police in Calais. Acts of sudden violence including clearings, evictions and harassment are sudden, however they have long lasting consequences which exacerbate the slow violence enacted by the brutal conditions for those living outside in camps (Davies et al., 2017).

5.2.1. Police Violence Against Asylum Seekers

The police in Calais are sponsored by the British government to manage the border:

> *"So they are policed by the French police, the French state, and that is all paid for by the UK, those evictions, those clearances are all state sponsored, and the harassment and the violence that we've seen increasingly is all state sponsored"* - Isabelle

This is a good starting point: we can interpret the behaviour of the police as the actions of the sovereign. The British government commissions the French police to behave in certain ways towards asylum seekers, thus rendering police violence, British sovereign violence. States are seen to have the monopoly on 'legitimate' violence and it is the police that enforce this in everyday life (Weber, 1919 [1970]). However, this occasion includes collaboration between the British and French states to deploy that violence in a way that allows the British state to govern people on the move through violence whilst keeping them at arm's length in France. One

participant described the government's funding of French police as reflective of a “murderous” attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers:

> *“But when I saw the fact that they [the British government] are funding the French riot police and the attitude of British people towards refugees I was like okay, this British attitude goes along with a very like, I guess kind of like murderous attitude towards refugees”* - Emma

The role of the French riot police was perceived by the participants as an attempt to incite fear and create a hostile environment:

> *“It’s us [the UK government] funding the CRS which is the French riot police who bully, intimidate and harass the asylum seekers here in order to create the hostile environment”* - Nicholas

In Calais asylum seekers are policed in two main ways: clearings and evictions. Clearings involve the police going into informal camps and removing any unattended tents. They often come early in the morning, however, in January while I was there, they had shifted to coming in the afternoon so as to keep the clearings unpredictable. These clearings occur approximately every 48 hours and involve the police arriving with a convoy of up to 20 police vans and a clearing truck. They remove unattended tents, these tents are not abandoned but may have been left unattended because people are getting food, or away using services offered by charities such as showers, phone charging, sewing repairs, etc. If people have possessions inside their tents those will also be removed, that includes items like: sleeping bags, phones and documents. One of these clearings occurred while I was doing ethnographic research at a distribution site in Calais which serves a predominantly Sudanese community. The distribution site was a couple hundred metres away from the camp itself and so while we were providing essential services for the survival of those living in the camp, the police arrived and began removing tents. Many people were forced to leave the distribution and run back to their tents, some were not able to retrieve their tents and I could see the police confiscating them and taking them to a truck. The indirect violence of these clearings includes the exposure of people living outside to the full force of the elements without their tents to protect them. It also involves stripping people of other possessions which may be key to their survival, and of ID documents which may aid them in their asylum claims. Mbembe argues that in the state of siege “invisible

killing is added to outright executions" (2003:30). I argue that the sudden deprivations that result from these clearings can be considered a form of invisible killing. Most participants from the Calais interviews described how these clearances exacerbate already the challenging living conditions:

> *"Like they make things difficult for the refugees that really don't have anything. They're like sleeping in tents outside with the freezing cold that's here. And like the few things they have, they destroy their things, they take them or they get them destroyed"* - Paloma

> *"This time it was just a young teenager again [...], he came over, it was raining and he was very wet. He didn't have a coat [...], he came over and he just looked so sad and he said 'they've just taken my tent and I haven't got anywhere to go' and it was soaking"* - Julie

Participants also raised the fact that these repeated clearing take not just a physical toll, but an emotional one as well:

> *"It's not only that the things, like the material thing is going away, but also like the emotional pain of being persecuted all the time, or like being afraid that their things might be gone if they go somewhere for maybe a shelter, they cannot go for the shelter if they are afraid that things may be taken"* - Paloma

> *"The atmosphere among communities, I think, felt quite tense. I felt like there was quite a lot of worry because I think there was just so much desperation because people had so little and were having to survive on nothing with constant police raids [...] I didn't realise quite how frequent and hostile the police evictions and police clearances really were until we would see them. You know, when we were there in January we'd be on a site and then about 16 police vans would rock up or something [...] People come back, people are moved on, they come back, it's just this pointless circle that really just it must be such a demoralising thing"* - Alice

The fact that these clearings create a sense of fear and uncertainty was perceived as a deliberate part of the government strategy:

> *"It's a state of fear and it's a state of forced nomadic existence. People wake up before the sunrise to take their tents and move away from the locations where they know the*

> *police will find them, and they hide all of their belongings in the hopes to hold onto them for the next night basically. It's an incredibly hostile and inhumane environment"* - Nicholas

> *"This is an actual deliberate policy to make people feel scared and to make people have an awful time. It is very inhumane"* - Caroline

In addition to the violence of depriving populations of the basic necessities for survival, these clearings often involve more visible and overt forms of violence:

> *"In the last few months we've increasingly had stories from people of police harassment and violence within those clearances themselves [...] Tear gas is used quite frequently"* - Isabelle

We can consider these more overt forms of violence, including the repeated use of tear gas, as forms of 'maiming' which debilitate asylum seekers' capacity to resist camp clearances (Puar, 2017). Both the direct and indirect violence keeps people living in camps "alive but in a state of injury" (Mbembe, 2003:21).

In contrast to clearings evictions occur less regularly but involve the arrest and displacement of people as well as objects:

> *"About every six to eight weeks, we see mass evictions. So evictions are a police operation that starts very early in the morning. People are caught unaware, they're taken off on buses and taken to different French asylum processing centres. That last happened about two months ago now. Those people were taken as far a way as places like Marseille and Nice in the south of France. So they were all taken really, really far away from Calais, dropped off without a way to get back at that point. All of the tents and people's belongings are confiscated so if you leave without your belongings they're lost. So that could be your money, your ID, your only clothing items, and of course your shelter as well, like your tent."* - Isabelle

The displacement of people to other distant locations across France represents another form of "containment through (forced) mobility" (Tazzioli, 2020:10) whereby people are displaced as a way of restricting their capacity to reach their intended destinations. One of these evictions at a predominantly Eritrean site named 'BMX' led to 40 people who had managed to avoid being

caught by the police being left sleeping outside until the aid workers were able to provide more tents. Both Van Isacker (2021) and Mould (2018) describe this kind of bordering in Calais as ‘domicide’, killing the home. This domicide results in a form of material precarity whereby people are forced to “continually (re)make their notions of home” (Mould, 2018:393). In this context, I argue that domicide constitutes one mechanism of ‘infrastructural warfare’ being waged against asylum seekers in Calais (Mbembe, 2003:29).

5.2.2. Police Violence Against Aid Workers

Not only do the police subject asylum seekers to sudden acts of violence on a 48 hour schedule, they have also been known to harass and intimidate aid workers.

> *“We also use the town centre on the weekend to distribute. We see a lot of police harassment here for mostly other organisations but sometimes ourselves [...], this is the one site where they will come and control us, will ask to see our IDs, ask to see our paperwork, and generally just harass us and tell us to move and stop doing things”* - Nicholas

> *“As an aid organisation, we’ve seen an increase in harassment by the police towards us and our work. So the last few weeks we’ve really had to tighten up on, for example, the ID that we carry when we’re out and about in France. Two aid workers, not with our organisation, with another organisation were detained for 23 and a half hours for not having their passports on them because they were British nationals.”* - Isabelle

Participants described being surprised by how intimidated they felt by the police:

> *“One big thing that surprised me was just how intense the Calais riot police were. Yeah, like I did not realise I was going to have to have my passport on me every day and they’re going to come out of their vans holding pepper spray. I mean, I wasn’t there that day, but there was this one day where they came and basically forced people to stop giving out biscuits which is like quite a crazy thing to do”* - Emma

This harassment towards aid workers attempting to support asylum seekers is not limited to Calais, one participant provided an account of police violence towards her for trying to help an unaccompanied minor in Paris:

> *“I’ve had pretty negative experiences [with the police] while I was there. I was thrown against the wall once in Paris by the police for trying to set up a tent for this like 15 year old guy, and I experienced quite intense contact by the police so yeah, not great feelings”* - Hayleigh

I argue this could be considered a way of attempting to force asylum seekers into “a demeaning life of being socially ‘cast away’, economically and culturally excluded, and being dehumanised by the process” (Mayblin et al., 2020:119). Necropolitics includes “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (Mbembe, 2003:40). I suggest that, by harassing aid workers, the French police aim to increase the isolation of asylum seekers and disincentivize solidarity with them. Therefore, we can see this as a way that the sovereign attempts to create ‘forms of social existence’ which facilitate necropolitics. I build on this in the next chapter which focuses on necropolitics as a form of slow violence. I discuss how camp conditions in Calais, housing, poverty, bureaucracy and psychological harms position those subjected to necropolitical violence as “alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe, 2003:21).

Chapter 6: Alive but in a State of Injury: necropolitical slow violence

This chapter takes up the call to consider slow violence as both a mechanism and effect of necropolitics (Mayblin, 2019a). I argue that while less visible and slower, the attritional nature of everyday violence accumulates to serve the same (necro)political ends as more overt forms of violence, largely with less backlash and accountability. I argue that outright death and Mbembe's death in life in which populations are kept 'alive but in a state of injury' (Mbembe, 2003:21) both form part of a necropolitical spectrum whereby the sovereign creatively exposes those deemed unworthy of life to a variety of harms which limit their capacity for life. In this chapter I look at necropolitical slow violence in the context of: Calais camp conditions, housing and homelessness, poverty, bureaucratic harms and psychological harms.

6.1. Calais Camp Conditions

The camp conditions in Calais have a number of necropolitical impacts, largely inflicted through 'violent inaction' (Davies et al., 2017) whereby the state does not meet its obligations to provide refuge for people attempting to reach safety and instead, deliberately facilitates their destitution through clearings and evictions. This abandonment was summarised in a conversation between a volunteer and a man living in one of the camps:

> *"One of the like quotes from a refugee that I talked to, he said he has nothing, [...] saying that like 'we don't know what we have to do' because like they don't allow him, he was saying 'they don't allow me to go to France, but they don't want me to go to the UK, but they don't allow me to stay here so we have nothing'"* - Yoshiki

The period of ethnographic research I undertook in Calais took place in January 2024. The first point to make was that air temperatures were fluctuating around 0℃ for the duration of this period and I noted in my research diary every single day how cold I felt despite spending large proportions of time in a warehouse or indoors and returning to sleep in a hostel each night. For those sleeping outside in informal camps the cold was dangerously severe. The camps were made up of tents and tarpaulins nestled in the trees in an attempt to avoid persecution by the police. The smell of burning plastic cut through the cold air as small fires were fed with rubbish

as the only respite from the cold. At one of the sites in Dunkirk, the ground is covered with a thick layer of grey mud. While this usually creates boggy conditions making access difficult, at the time when I was there, the ground was frozen solid. Toilets in camps are limited, many have no toilet provision at all, one site called ‘Hospital’ in Calais had Portaloos and the site in Dunkirk had a very small tent labelled toilet. None have showers and only one site, ‘BMX’, had a source of water, a plastic tank which is provided by a charity which must be shared for drinking, washing and cooking; this requires careful rationing.

The fact that people are forced to occupy wasteland and wooded areas was mentioned by interviewees:

> *“I guess something very interesting about Calais is that it’s kind of this parallel world where it’s also like this vacation beach town and you can kind of exist in it without seeing the massive refugee population because they are forced to occupy like wooded areas and abandoned warehouses and under bridges. This idea of like, through these like governmental mechanisms they’re kind of forced to occupy hidden spaces and to exist in these liminal unseeable spaces to the general public”* - Hayleigh

In Dunkirk there is no state provided food for asylum seekers living in informal camps, people are reliant on distributions by a number of aid organisations. In Calais, the French state is obligated to provide some food. They do this through a provider, La Vie Active. I was told that the quality of this food is often poor, other organisations attempt to supplement this provision. In addition, La Vie Active brings a police escort when they distribute food. I witnessed one of these distributions and (unsurprisingly given the police harassment of camp dwellers) many people fled when they saw the police. I documented in my research diary that most of the (predominantly) men living in camps were very thin. This seems indicative of the lack of adequate food provision despite the attempts by aid organisations to fill the gaps.

A key area of slow violence is the lack of appropriate equipment for people who are forced to live outside. Tents were often in a state of disrepair and some only had tarpaulins rather than tents. In addition, sleeping bags are a very high demand item for charity distributions as they are often confiscated alongside tents and offer valuable protection from the cold.

> *“So the people that we’re supporting in Calais and Dunkirk are living outside and so there’s no kind of state provided consistent accommodation. And so, for a lot of people here in Calais, their only shelter is a tent. If they’re lucky they’ve also got a sleeping bag and they sleep outside in kind of areas of wasteland and scrubland. And they’re here for a number of days, weeks or months depending on their situation and they will be surviving with the support of organisations like ourselves. So they rely on everyone solely for food, for showers, for water access, and then for clothing access from people like ourselves”* - Isabelle

Clothing items such as tracksuit bottoms, hoodies and socks were given out to help protect against the harsh cold. People also tied scarves or other fabric around their heads and faces to help conserve heat. A lot of clothing was in a state of disrepair and the charity bought sewing equipment and glue for shoes to each distribution. In one singular distribution the following items were repaired: a pair of trousers, a rucksack, a jacket, two pairs of gloves, a belt, and more shoes than I could count. Many of the shoes were in such a state of disrepair that the soles were falling away from the rest of the shoe. Participants highlighted the poor living conditions and lack of provision for asylum seekers

> *When asked what surprised him: “The appalling conditions they live in. What little they have to live with. What little they get”* - Martin

Participants also highlighted the extreme cold and harsh weather conditions as something which significantly impacts health:

> *“In the winter months where we are now, we see you know the conditions that people are living in having a direct impact on their mental and physical health”* - Nicholas

> *“The conditions at the moment are the worst I’ve ever seen. So the weather has been really, really terrible over the last few months; there has been a lot of storms that have rolled through the UK and then consequently through northern France as well. So the conditions themselves are very, very wet and muddy. They’re very unhygienic and unsanitary so for a lot of people we’re seeing a lot of serious medical conditions brought about by those living conditions” - Isabelle*

Living conditions which are a direct result of police activity have necropolitical effects. The fact that people are forced to occupy such marginal spaces severely impact foot health:

> *"People are having to hide in tree lines, live in bogs and swamps etc. which affects things like foot health [...]. The conditions underfoot generally in and around Calais in the areas where people are forced into are horrendous and cause trench foot; we've seen instances of frostbite and things like that"* - Nicholas

The forcing asylum seekers to live outdoors and confiscating items that keep them warm like tents and sleeping bags impacts respiratory health and resilience to infections:

> *"People are living in tents which are not built for the kind of conditions they live in with insufficient materials to keep themselves warm at night which causes a lot of illness and respiratory problems"* - Nicholas

> *"When I was volunteering people [living in camps] would be like coughing and hacking up time and it just made me think that the conditions they were living in were actually making them unwell and like quite deeply unwell. Sometimes like some people wouldn't be able to come to drop offs because they were so unwell. And I guess that's like another way that they're being harmed that isn't quite as you know, they don't put any funding into that other than I guess the riot police taking away things that keep them warm"* - Emma

The fact that the living conditions directly caused so many health issues can be usefully understood through Mbembe's (2003:21) idea of keeping people "alive but in a state of injury". This idea of producing injury through necropolitical slow violence (Mayblin, 2019a) and inaction (Davies et al., 2017) has particular relevance to the camps of Calais. I argue therefore that necropolitics is a useful framework to understand the experiences of asylum seekers living in these camps. In particular, this research showed that the state of injury is produced through: cold temperatures, damp conditions, lack of hygiene facilities, poor nutrition, dehydration and toxic fumes from plastic burnt to keep warm.

I argue that necropolitics is also a useful framework for understanding the slow violence of camp conditions because there was a clear politics of race at play in the camps. Necropolitics is not just about death or being "alive but in a state of injury" (Mbembe, 2003:21), but one of the ways that it differentiates itself from biopolitics is through its deep engagement with race (see Section 2.1.2). Nearly everyone I saw at distribution sites near camps in Calais was black or brown. I was told by staff during my research that Eritrean and Sudanese people often end up

immobilised in Calais for particularly long periods of time, and therefore exposed to necropolitical slow violence, these are countries with predominantly non-white populations. One volunteer who was from a refugee background felt that the concept of human rights was empty:

> *"Asylum is a human right. It's unbelievable because you know, the UK and America they were like first countries that they wrote the human rights and international laws and now they are breaching their own laws, the human rights. The concept of human rights doesn't exist really, it's like empty"* - Golnaz

Participants felt there was a politics of race and of religion at play in terms of who was exposed to the necropolitical slow violence of informal camps in Calais:

> *"So I was in Calais in 2022 when Ukrainians started arriving here. So on the whole Ukrainians are white middle class people and they were treated very, very differently to the other people on the move that we saw here. Other people on the move tend to be people of colour, they're from much further away countries. And actually what we see is that those people who aren't white are othered, they are not given the state support. Ukrainians were given a humanitarian visa system and they were given accommodation in Calais in a hotel to stay whilst they were here"* - Isabelle

> *"There's racial issues at play from the policies that our government bring in. [...] I think it's not only a racial issue, I think there's also a religious connotation to what goes on as well because one of the arguments that the right has in the UK is about assimilation. And I think for some reason they set up their policies in a way in which it favours white, Christian people. I think another example of this is that the people who we see in Calais, the communities that we meet, are mostly non-white people and mostly either some derivation of Islam or some other religion"* - Nicholas

I argue this is reflective of the sovereign right to define "who matters and who does not" (Mbembe, 2003:27). Those asylum seekers whose lives are deemed by the sovereign not to matter are kept "alive but in a state of injury" (Mbembe, 2003:21), forced to battle the elements, the police, hunger, illness, and ailments in a daily struggle for survival:

> *"Um, the living conditions, it's difficult, I'd say it's difficult to describe them as living conditions, I'd call them more survival conditions"* - Nicholas

This demonstrates that the coloniality of harms does not apply only to faster and more visible forms of violence, but also to forms of violence which are slower and more attritional.

6.2. Necropolitical Housing

6.2.1. Asylum seeker housing

Participants noted the poor quality of accommodation provided for asylum seekers with items in accommodations being broken or in a state of disrepair:

> *"In that time I live on my own but the house is very bad, everything is broken. Yeah, I reported it many times but they just said tomorrow we will fix it, and then tomorrow they tell me tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow; this is so annoying"* - Chen

Asylum seeker accommodation can also be overcrowded or poorly located. For example, a family I met in December 2023 through Refugee Roots was all living in one hotel room; a mother and her two daughters who were 9 and 6 years old. They had been unable to sleep properly because the Hotel Britannia where they were staying (a large asylum seeker hotel in Nottingham) is directly next to a police station so they were repeatedly woken up by police sirens.

Participants raised the issue of sharing accommodation with strangers within the state provided asylum seeker housing:

> *"So I think with housing as well, it's in a hotel, you are often placed regardless of, not much consideration of who you are, So for example, many of the single males that I know are placed with another male from another region, not the same language, in the same room. So yeah, that is a massive invasion of your privacy, um, it's a big risk, you may get on and even then it's a massive invasion of your privacy. You just, when you're treated like that it's going to impact your mental health, not just external factors that impact, but the mental kind of triggers that it can bring around like: 'this is what I deserve' or 'this is my fault', many of those things"* - Jane

This shows that there is a significant toll on mental health due to: overcrowding, living in accommodation which is in disrepair, lack of sleep and lack of privacy. I argue that the negative impact on mental health, caused by indirect sovereign violence, constitutes a form of injury. The attritional nature of these factors over time which gradually wears on the psyche of those subjected to them constitutes a form of slow violence (Nixon, 2011). The fact that this harm is perpetuated by the sovereign towards racialized asylum seekers, often from former colonies, means that we can see it, not just as slow violence, but necropolitical slow violence (Mayblin, 2019a). In addition, I argue that these forms of necropolitical slow violence do not exist in a vacuum, but rather work alongside more sudden and visible forms of necropolitics. Therefore, the starting point for the impacts of these harms is shifted. I found during my ethnography that those who are subject to slow violence in asylum seeker housing have often been subject to more sudden acts of necropolitical violence previously in their lives, such as police harassment or sexual violence. Therefore, I argue there is a need to consider how violence from across the necropolitical 'spectrum' (Mayblin, 2019a) works together and accumulates throughout an individual's lifetime.

The poor quality of food provided in asylum seeker hotels was also raised by a number of participants:

> *"People who are waiting for their status are often in a hotel which means they've got their accommodation provided and food but this is often only like nutritionally imbalanced"* - Jane

This poor provision of food led impacts both physical and mental health:

> *"Physical health is pretty massively impacted, I know with a lot of the children that I've interacted with there have been troubles with kind of nutrition and health. This kind of comes down to the fact that there's no culturally appropriate foods in the hotels which means a lot of the kids struggle, and adults might also struggle with this. So this can impact both mental and physical health if you're not getting the right nutrition"* - Jane

One participant described the fact that despite repeated complaints, the food provided in his hotel was unsuitable because he had a stomach problem meaning he had to avoid certain foods including spicy food which he told me was cooked regularly:

> *"I couldn't eat so well because I had a problem with my stomach. So many times I complained but is not changed, nobody's not care"* - Ahmed

This is a clear example of asylum seeker accommodation enacting necropolitical slow violence on asylum seekers. This constitutes what Galtung (1969:174) terms 'physiological violence' which is the denial of basic necessities for life such as food, air or water. I argue that this can also be considered an example of necropolitical 'inaction' (Davies et al., 2017) whereby the sovereign does not have to actively *do* anything to express its necropower, rather necropower is expressed through the sovereign power not to do anything. Therefore, physiological violence through necropolitical inaction is another way in which the sovereign power "to define who matters and who does not" is exerted (Mbembe, 2003:27).

One of the key areas of the asylum system which participants raised as being challenging and harmful was the lack of certainty, especially regarding accommodation. One interviewee, Salma informed me that when she and her husband arrived at an asylum seeker hotel in Wolverhampton they were told they would be there for 6 months. She said this experience was particularly bad because the supervisor in the hotel knew where they were going to be moved to but had a bad reaction when Salma asked to be told where she was moving and refused to tell her or her husband.

> *"She called me and she told me she had a letter. She told me on 22nd of November you are going to be translocated, and I just became shocked and I asked her: 'So where are we going to? Which city, which place, which hotel even it is?'. And she just had a bad reaction"* - Salma

Salma said that after the supervisor refused to tell her where they would be moved, she and another member of staff were laughing and Salma and her husband. A number of days later a different member of staff told them where they would be moved.

> *"Even in hotels, the staff mistreat asylum seekers. So there's no like monitoring or supervision on the hotels and councils"* - Golnaz

This experience was particularly stressful for them and a number of other participants throughout the ethnographic research also highlighted how disruptive the repeated displacement and lack of choice or control within the NASS dispersal scheme was. This

repeated dispersal causes stress for participants. I also suggest that it may reinforce the trauma of their original displacement which forced them to flee their country of origin. The asylum system requires that they, yet again, at a moment's notice pack their things and move to an unknown location where they must start from scratch. Additionally, I suggest that this repeated displacement isolates people from their networks of support (Watt, 2021) by making it difficult to maintain local connections when the notion of what their 'local' is continuously shifting.

One participant I interviewed in Nottingham had spent time in Folkestone in an asylum seeker detention centre. This was Mustafa, the same participant who had risked his life under a caravan to get to the perceived safety of the UK. His experiences at Folkestone were rife with suffering.

Mustafa described the poor and overcrowded living conditions as similar to a prison:

> *"This is not good, you know, like prison. Yeah because we were like 10, 12 people staying in one room, like room big like this (points out a space that couldn't be more than 2 by 4 metres), a small room"*

The horrific conditions led many of the people he was accommodate with to attempt to take their own lives:

> *"We are all of this, suffering you know. Some people cut here (points to wrists), some people put a sheet around their necks to die (demonstrates people hanging themselves with bedsheets)"*

He explained that the reason why he did not attempt to take his life was that it went against his religious beliefs:

> *"I am Muslim. I can't die, it's haram"*

The period of time he spent at Folkestone was during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and Mustafa questioned the safety of putting so many people in such close proximity during this time. This suggests that asylum seekers in Folkestone were not only exposed to the physical and psychological harms of overcrowded and poor living conditions, they were also placed at an increased risk of contracting a dangerous and potentially deadly virus.

I argue then, that these conditions constitute the creation of ‘death-worlds’, and that the populations of asylum seekers in Folkestone are subjected to “conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (Mbembe, 2003:40). The physical and psychological harms inflicted upon asylum seekers in Folkestone places them well into the category of being “alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe, 2003:21). Mbembe’s description of slave life as “a phantomlike world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity” (2003:21) seems to fit Mustafa’s description of Folkestone well. However, given the vast numbers of people attempting to kill themselves, I think we have to consider the provocation that sometimes being kept “alive but in a state of injury” may feel like a fate worse than death. Regardless, I argue that necropolitics is a suitable framework to understand the experiences of those living in detention in Folkestone. I also advance the argument that there is a need to consider the cumulative effect of necropolitical harms across the spectrum of temporality and visibility, given that this participant had already risked his life on multiple dangerous vehicle journeys and been subjected to the slow violence of living outside in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. This participant also later became homeless in the UK (further discussion in Section 6.2.2). I argue that we must consider the full range of necropolitical harms that those seeking refuge are exposed to throughout their journeys across space and through time.

There is an additional point to be made about this participant's experiences in Folkestone which relates to both the visibility of violence and the isolation of asylum seekers from potential networks of support. While Mustafa was in Folkestone he remembered a journalist visiting to document the conditions, he was not allowed in living areas and was not allowed to take pictures. He tried to ask if people were suffering but was not allowed to speak with inhabitants. I suggest this represents another attempt, as discussed earlier, to create the ‘forms of social existence’ which facilitate the necropolitical conditions of life as an asylum seeker (Mbembe, 2003:40) whereby the extent of suffering is kept from the general public as a way to maintain the social conditions needed for support of the sovereign’s necropolitical violence.

6.2.2. Homelessness

Many interviewees highlighted the risk of homelessness for refugees. The most vulnerable period of time is once people have received a positive decision on their asylum claim and

gained refugee status. This is because once they have gained their status they have a very limited period of time to vacate asylum seeker accommodation. This means there may be insufficient time for them to find alternative housing, find work to fund private renting or access Universal credit.

> *"For asylum claimants who then get that positive decision, um a huge need is around, well the immediate need for housing and financial support because the home office support that they will have been on whether that's been a hotel or in dispersal accommodation [...], then they have 28 days basically to move on out of that accommodation and somewhere else. And to get benefits or employment, it takes about 5 weeks for Universal Credit to start for that first payment, so there's a gap there for many, many people where they have no financial support and there's virtually no housing, or local authority housing, in Nottingham and housing providers are really at capacity. So securing accommodation, affordable accommodation especially, when people are certainly now being presented with the only options really are private rent, then become very very difficult. And for most people, if they are going to be on some form of benefits, their housing benefit isn't going to be enough to cover most private rented accommodations"* - Aiden

> *"Often they're finding that the most vulnerable point to become homeless is once they receive a decision for the right to remain because, up until that point, the Home Office has probably provided their accommodation, and then it's just such a quick turnaround that it's almost impossible to secure housing with, kind of, no income in the 28 days we've got"* - Charlotte

Multiple times during my ethnographic research a participant disclosed that they had become homeless:

> Excerpt from ethnographic research diary, 21/11/2023: *At the end of the women's group today [name omitted] from Turkey told me that she had a housing problem. She explained that she had been evicted from her current accommodation and now had nowhere to live. She said she had called a few organisations but nobody had been able to help her. She stayed last night in emergency accommodation at the university in a room of around 25 people, men and women together. She showed me a video of where*

she had slept, it was a blanket on the floor with a pillow and another blanket. No bed, mattress or sleeping mat. She said she can stay there tonight but has nowhere to stay tomorrow.

Excerpt from ethnographic research diary, 8/2/2024: *At the end of the employment session today a participant approached me to get an appointment with a support worker. He was from Afghanistan and he said he's been living in the UK for a year but had become homeless. He said he'd been everywhere: YMCA, Refugee Forum. But he had nowhere to stay tonight and he's worried because it's very cold. It snowed this morning.*

One interview participant, Mustafa, described how, after gaining his refugee status he moved from Stockton-on-Tees to Nottingham because there is a large Sudanese community but he has now been homeless in Nottingham for six months:

"When I find paper [gained refugee status], I come here [...] but I suffering without place, I don't have place, I don't have house" - Mustafa

He had not been able to get a job without having a home address first so he was forced to turn to charities. However, he appeared to have exhausted all his options within the charity sector which is struggling to meet demand for homelessness assistance in Nottingham.

The idea of housing being underprovisioned for by local authorities, and demand for charities exceeding supply was also raised by Refugee Roots charity director, Aiden. He felt that this disproportionately impacted single people:

"So more often single people end up not prioritised and there isn't the provision really for them to get local authorities and council housing, and, you know, organisations like the YMCA or Framework who have accommodation, they're just full" - Aiden

The result of housing support organisations being largely over capacity is that people are constantly moved around in emergency accommodation:

"What typically happens is people end up being accommodated in emergency accommodations which are often hotels and bed and breakfasts. They can be moved around every night or every couple of nights which creates all sorts of problems for

children that are in school [...] We're here in Nottingham, people could be in Leicester, could be in Derby, in Birmingham, and then back in Nottingham after a week and a half of moving around" - Aiden

This repeated displacement can impact mental health and hinder people's ability to build local connections and access support which they are entitled to:

"That's quite distressing for families but it also means all the other things that people are trying to do to kind of move on, you know, like sort out benefits, start to look for housing, are held up" - Aiden

In addition, the idea that not, just the reality, but also the *fear* of homelessness impacts mental health was highlighted:

"Just the idea of impending homelessness, this is what your friends have been through, this is what people are talking about, this is what charities are telling you about. You know that, one day, you're going to get a letter which is great, you're going to get your status. Or you might not, you might get rejected altogether, that's a massive impact. But you could, once you've been accepted for refugee status you're in the hands of someone else and it's an impending thing, which, it impacts everyone's mental health having something that's just waiting for you, this massive unknown" - Jane

Repeated displacement in emergency accommodation as a result of homelessness impacts physical health by creating a barrier to healthcare access:

"If people have any health conditions or health appointments, then they're no longer, um, within reasonable distance of getting to those appointments" - Aiden

Temporary accommodation such as homeless shelters also exposes people to risks from the general population:

"Certainly some of the shelters pose real issues because it's general population so you can have anyone in there with any sort of mental health issues, addition [...], we've had individuals complain about the smell of accommodation and the smell of drugs that are being smoked, and people concerned for their safety in places because people are under the influence or because there's aggressive residents" - Aiden

I argue that the disproportionate exposure to homelessness immediately upon gaining refugee status forms a kind of slow violence. In this situation the sovereign is not killing quickly, but instead, I argue the attritional harms of homelessness are necropolitical. These harms include: risk of hypothermia; health complications as a result of repeated displacement and inability to access medical appointments; and negative impacts on mental health. In addition, Clare et al. (2023) argue that homelessness, and more than that, the lack of ‘a sense of home’ can increase vulnerability to modern slavery and related exploitation. The reason why I propose necropolitics as a suitable framework to understand the experience of lacking ‘a sense of home’ (Clare et al., 2023) is twofold. Firstly, I argue that the sovereign is the cause of the violence and therefore, these slow harms can be considered as an expression of necropower. I argue this because the British government chose to make the time limit for vacating asylum seeker accommodation 28 days. The British government will also understand that this is less time than it takes for the first Universal Credit payments to be made. The British government also is responsible for policies which mean the vast majority of asylum seekers are not allowed to work, thus they cannot afford to privately rent without those universal credit payments as 28 days is insufficient time to find a job and subsequently privately rented accommodation. Secondly, exposure to this risk of homelessness is racially uneven within the category of forced migrant. Given that (predominantly white) Ukrainians arrive with a pre-agreed sponsor, they are less likely to be at risk of homelessness than other (non-white) refugees who have had to spend time getting their asylum claims processed while being forbidden from working until such a point. Therefore, necropolitics, with its focus on race, and on the sovereign as the perpetrator of necropolitical violence, provides an appropriate framework to view these experiences.

6.2.3. Refugee Housing

Many refugees, upon getting their status, have to enter the private rental market because council housing is limited and families are usually prioritised. Refugees are often placed at a particular disadvantage within the housing market due to the combination of racialization, ‘us’ vs ‘them’ rhetoric, and class structures (Brown et al., 2024). Conversations with refugees during ethnographic research, both indicated that the quality of housing people can afford is poor, and landlords seem reluctant to make accommodation liveable. This was also raised by staff interview participants:

> *“When people do get slightly more permanent housing or, you know, maybe get moved into something like a flat or something like that, we’ve had people moved into property that’s got no carpet at all, or the gas and electricity doesn’t work. Or there’s, even in my time of being here we’ve had at least four incidents where people’s roofs have fallen in because of damp. And on one occasion that’s fallen on somebody we support and caused injury. In all those situations there's been families with young children as well”* - Aiden

The poor quality of housing therefore, directly positions refugees as at a higher risk of being “alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe, 2003:21). In the private rental market this form of necropolitical slow violence is directly related to capital accumulation as the exploitation of racialized individuals results in profits for landlords. Therefore, there is value in looking at how necropolitical slow violence intersects with racial capitalism to produce the “‘premature death’ of minoritised groups” (Clare et al., 2022:2). This can occur through necropolitical slow violence of being exposed to mould, damp and cold, or it can occur through more sudden harms such as being struck by a falling ceiling. Exposure to cold was an issue for participants who could not afford to adequately heat their homes. Many participants approached me during ethnographic research which took place over the winter to talk about issues heating their homes. This idea of exposure to the elements, and particularly the cold, reflects experiences of camp dwellers in Calais (see Section 6.1). Therefore, for many of those who spent time in Calais, and then subsequently made it to the UK and gained refugee status, this is not the first time they have been subject to this harm. I argue this provides further evidence for the need to consider how necropolitical harms accumulate across a lifetime and are not geographically or temporally bounded.

Racism factors into the way that refugees are treated in terms of housing. In the interviews it was clear that predominantly white Ukrainains accommodated through the Homes for Ukraine had different experiences than those who are non-white. This is not to say that Ukrainians universally experienced welcome (see Section 6.5 for experiences around culture shock), however, non-white refugees appeared to have been subject to racism within the housing market.

> *“There are very clear examples we have where people, where certain things have been said that are hurtful and incite hate. There are also, you know, landlords too that have*

> *described tenants in such a way that it's demeaning [...] We've had other people as well who've kind of ended up in accommodation that, while everything else might look fine and there aren't those risks from the property itself, the areas where they're located, sometimes they've been in places that are perhaps less accepting of cultural diversity. And we've have people report to us incidences of hate where people have been attacked or where there's been unpleasant things done in and around their property"* - Aiden

The Ukrainian participants I interviewed were both accommodated under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This meant that they had moved to the UK to live with a pre-arranged sponsor in their home with them. One participant described how she gets on well with her host and is able to improve her English skills through social connection with her:

> *"Very nice people, I every day have English practice with her English language, she teach me. She very interesting lady"* - Teofila

This contrasts with the experiences of other refugees because, not only does the housing appear to be adequate, and the risk of homelessness reduced, but Ukrainians are also placed into a support network through their hosts. The ability to practise English daily provides opportunities for them to socialise, further broaden their support network, and build lives in the UK. However, some Ukrainians have had significantly negative experiences within the Homes for Ukraine scheme. There have been concerns around safeguarding, the risk to Ukrainian women from potentially abusive men, cramped living conditions and lack of sufficient background checks for hosts (Crawford and Smith, 2022). It is important not to present Ukrainian experiences as universally positive because this is not the case. However, throughout this thesis I do highlight differences in treatment between (predominantly white) Ukrainians and other (non-white) refugees and asylum seekers.

6.3. Poverty as Necropolitical Slow Violence

In the UK, at the time of writing asylum seekers receive £49.18 per person per week if accommodation does not provide meals and £8.86 if it does (GOV.UK, 2024). This is based on what the poorest 10% of people in the UK spend only on essential living items and amounts to

less than a third of their weekly spend (Mayblin and James, 2019; Mayblin et al., 2020). Many participants reported struggling as a result of this state sanctioned poverty. During the ethnographic research, and in the interviews, key areas of life affected by this included: food, clothing, travel, internet connection and risk of exploitation.

Participants raised these money issues during interviews and ethnographic research:

> *"I have money difficulties"* - Salma

One of the most basic aspects of survival affected by poverty for those living on asylum seeker cash support was food and clothing:

> *"My most frequent support [work] is a lot of food bank and clothing referrals"* - Charlotte

Throughout the winter Refugee Roots ran a 'Warm Space' project where participants were able to access blankets, SIM cards and a food bank. This proved to be very popular and therefore we can assume these basic needs were not being met elsewhere. Certain items in the food bank ran out very quickly, especially oil, sugar and tinned tomatoes. When the cooking oil ran out, one participant informed me that she needed oil to cook for her children and had none. People used the Refugee Roots food bank while they waited for their referrals for larger more permanent food banks to come through, many people were in quite desperate need during this time. One participant told me that she has to get her food from food banks or she runs out of money for other necessities.

The fact that participants must budget strenuously and rely on food banks echoes the findings of Mayblin et al. (2020), who also detail how the use of food banks raised feelings of shame which took an emotional toll on asylum seekers, alongside the physical toll of inadequate nutrition which is a kind of 'physiological violence' (Galtung, 1969). This kind of slow violence allows the state to harm asylum seekers while outwardly appearing to meet its human rights commitments. Mayblin et al. use the term 'small harms' to account for the gradual wounding that is done by this impoverishment and argue that these harms accumulate into a much more significant kind of slow violence (2020:115).

A key area affected by money issues was travel. Some people mentioned that £8 a week is not sufficient to cover the costs of travel:

> *“Any challenge, it’s about money because in the UK everything is expensive, even travel”* - Chen
>
> *“Lots of people don’t attend English classes because they can’t afford the bus”* - Salma
>
> *“So it [asylum seeker cash support] doesn’t go very far for people and so, you know, getting around and affording things like public transport and getting to appointments become difficult”* - Aiden

Missing healthcare appointments has a direct impact on the health of asylum seekers, this impact may be immediate but is more likely to be a slow deterioration of health. Mayblin et al. (2020) discuss how the physical strain of having to walk, due to being unable to afford buses, constituted a form of corporeal harm, I add to this by suggesting those who most need to travel (say for healthcare appointments) may be the ones who are least able to do so by walking. This lack of access to public transportation constitutes a form of immobility (Mayblin et al., 2020) which I argue reflects the control over movement in Mbembe’s (2003) description of necropower in Palestine.

Another area where people were affected by poverty was in terms of accessing the internet through SIM cards. Use of the internet is essential to access nearly all forms of support for refugees and asylum seekers, however, money was a significant barrier in people being able to afford internet connection:

> *“For a period we had data SIM cards and people needed access to the internet, it was a resource that would otherwise have been hard for them to fund themselves or obtain”* - Aiden

The levels of poverty that those seeking refuge are subjected to make them vulnerable to exploitation in the labour market:

> *“I think, um, there’s a massive vulnerability with refugees and asylum seekers. I think the lack of income can make them really vulnerable to people trying to exploit them. [...] I know there’s a lot of situations where there are people working when it’s illegal to work, but they’re kind of desperate for money. And it’s people kind of running these situations*

that are preying on people, knowing they're desperate and knowing they can actually give them so little money because they're already used to so little, so I think that's a massive thing" - Jane

Salma said that she knew other asylum seekers who are forced to work illegally because the money the government gives to people is not enough to support their children. She said that people are doing hard jobs for very little money, working as much as 3 hours for £5. This exposes them not only to necropolitical harms, but also to the brutality of capitalism, in ways which are racially uneven (Clare et al., 2022).

6.4. Bureaucratic Harms - Denied their Right to Minority: Misclassification of Unaccompanied Minors in the Asylum System

Participants from the Calais research who had volunteered in other locations or with other organisations raised an issue relating to unaccompanied minors. This was that in many cases, government officials refused to accept that these children were in fact minors and instead insisted that they were adults and should be treated as such. This occurs in both the UK and in France. There are evaluation methods which are used in an attempt to estimate the age of a child, including medical or dental findings, or a 'holistic approach' (Thevissen et al., 2012). However, there is "no method that can determine the age of a child" precisely and the "nearest one can get is an age estimate" (Thevissen et al., 2012:89). Mostad and Tamsen (2019) found that, in asylum age estimates in Sweden, children had a 33% risk of being classified as adults.

One participant had done work with children in France who were trying to negotiate this system and claim their right to state protection as unaccompanied minors. In many cases the state was able to avoid this obligation to protect those people and instead, successfully excluded them from their right of minority. I argue that this suggests another way in which states manage to perpetuate necropolitical harms by deciding who is included and who is excluded.

"While I was in France I did an internship with an association called Utopia 56 that is present throughout France but specifically in Calais and Paris. And while I was there I was specifically working with the unaccompanied minor population which are essentially

> *refugees and immigrants who arrive in French territory as children without a guardian, who present themselves to child services and are subsequently denied their right of minority and considered as adults by the French immigration system instead of children [...] And there's kind of this crisis of this population who is in this legal limbo who's like not really seen as children but not really seen as adults [...] Especially in Calais and in Paris, there are a ton of unaccompanied minors, a ton of people who were kind of exiled from their country but also exiled from their right to a childhood and to adolescence"* - Hayleigh

There is evidence for this within the literature as well. Gautier et al. (2022:304) argue that there are around 40,000 unaccompanied minors in France who "theoretically have access to the child protection scheme (in French, Aide Sociale à l'Enfance, ASE)" however, unaccompanied minors "are frequently refused access to ASE because assessment systems consider that they are not minors". Those who are rejected and those who are awaiting a court decision on their status are left without any public care provision (Gautier et al., 2022). I argue that this phenomenon of rejecting those who present as children is an extension of state abandonment and violent inaction (Davies et al., 2017) whereby the (French) state refuses to meet its obligations for populations whose lives it has deemed as 'disposable' (Mbembe, 2003). In France, unaccompanied minors are routinely subject to age assessments even when they provide identity documents such as passports or birth certificates (Binford et al., 2023).

This phenomenon is not just happening in France, but also in the UK. Participants from the Calais research who also work and volunteer in the UK charity sector described how their casework involved supporting unaccompanied minors who had been unsuccessful in their attempts to access their right to protection:

> *"So I've been doing some voluntary work as a caseworker supporting young asylum seekers who are currently going through asylum, claiming for asylum in the UK. Many of them are young people who the Home Office have assessed them to be adults on arrival and this could be a very, very brief assessment based on I think, based on demeanour and based on physical appearance. So they're judging someone and saying, 'oh they're 23' even though they're saying 'I'm 17'"* - Alice

Not only do the Home Office and local councils attempt to avoid their responsibilities, asylum seekers reported that the if they attempt to claim as minors, officials delayed their cases or allocated them an age that is almost double the age they present as, seemingly in a punitive manner or as some form of deterrent:

> *"So I met some asylum seekers who are underage but they applied as adults because it makes their life complicated and hard so they've lied and they are saying that they are 19, 20 to avoid you know, this. Because when I was talking with them I said 'why is your case over aged, you're 16, 17?' they said 'because they will delay our cases because age dispute, it's a hassle, they wouldn't accept our age so what's the point, and then they would double our age'"* - Golnaz

This situation enacts bureaucratic harms through the negative impact it has on mental health:

> *"I just can't imagine how scary it must be for those young people when they're 16, 17, being put in hotel rooms with adults probably is terrifying"* - Alice

> *"I was talking with one of the like, minor asylum seekers. He was, you know, I referred him to age dispute team but when one of the colleagues contacted him he said 'no I just give up, you know I don't want to declare my age' because they've given him like, he is 17 but when he arrived he was 15 but the Home Office determined his age as 31 and then he said 'I've given up, I can't you know, it's too much pressure and stress'. Yeah and it negatively impacts mental health because they need a lawyer and the lawyer would fight for them but the Home Office still would refuse, and then the lawyers would give up on them as well so at the end nothing positive really happens"* - Golnaz

I argue that the threat of delaying cases or increasing people's ages represents a deliberate strategy by the (British) state to avoid its commitments. Unaccompanied minors are excluded from protections which they are entitled to with necropolitical effects in terms of fear, detrimental impacts on mental health and lack of relevant support.

6.5. Psychological Harms

One Ukrainian participant described how she felt that people in the UK are welcoming and friendly:

> *"People in the UK, very friendly. For me I have friends, English friends. Yes, sometimes I speak little because my English is not well, sometimes I little speak with my neighbour. Very friendly, very polite people"* - Teofila

This contrasts with the experience of Iranian participant Ahmed who described struggling to integrate into British culture and feeling judged rather than welcomed. This had a significant negative impact on his mental health:

> *"About the people, that was so difficult to make the friendship with them. There's some things in your culture is fine but in our culture is so rude and vice versa, there's some things for us is ok and for yours is rude. And anyways the people knew I'm not British but always they judge me how they judge the British people but they know I don't have any bad meaning when I say something rude [...]. But yeah, that's reason that make me in 2 years, for 3 times I was depression and I wasn't happy to do anything"* - Ahmed

However, it is worth noting that the experience of welcome and integration highlighted by Teofila is not universal amongst Ukrainians either. Another Ukrainian interview participant had difficulties with culture shock in terms of being able to understand subtext and people's genuine attitudes and intentions. This created problems for her social integration:

> *"The main difficulty is with British people because it's not like somebody is rude to you or something. No, just different. It's just different and you're like ok, I'm ok, but when you're digging a bit lower it's not so amazing. Like because of this habit of British people smile all the time, and in these situations where something went wrong but the British person still smiles. Only after a while, I understood like, 'oh something's wrong' because in Ukraine, in all the post Soviet Union, like if something went wrong person will tell you like 'hey, come on, stop here'. Yeah, here no. British people like (mimes smiling) but they already hate you. So it's a real problem"* - Ivanna

Despite these issues Ivanna did also highlight the benefits of having a sponsor in terms of supporting integration into life in the UK:

> *"I understood that actually it [the sponsorship element of the Homes for Ukraine scheme] makes sense because when you live with a sponsor, sponsor gives you lots of information which is essential for you at the beginning. Because a lot of my friends who moved to other countries in Europe, they faced a lot of problems when nobody said to*

them like 'oh, go there and like ask, or go there and buy something', they should investigate everything themselves" - Ivanna

British interview participants also felt that the public and policy attitude towards Ukrainians was different to other refugees:

"The language that was used about Ukrainians was different to the language used for other refugees. So the scheme was set up referring to Ukrainians as guests [...]. So I think that the language that was used has formed, um, like an opinion or a set of assumptions that, I think they're sort of looked upon as different" - Aiden

This different language was also linked to the fact that Ukrainians had come through a scheme whereas some other forced migrants have not:

"And I think anyone who's not come through a scheme as well, and because language around people making small boat crossings of being illegal immigrants [...] used by the current government has really fuelled a public opinion that those are people that are undeserving and they are handiwork of criminal gangs and other things [...] you've almost got this propped up system that says 'everybody that has a right to be here, will come through a scheme, and everybody else doesn't', which is so far from true you know" - Aiden

This relates to Watkins' (2020) argument that morality and righteousness are used to produce narratives within migration that all irregular migration is immoral. I argue that given that safe passage is a privilege afforded to very few, and afforded in racially and nationally uneven ways, it is important to demonstrate how ideas around morality can lead to racialized differences in how migrants are perceived.

Both staff and participants at Refugee Roots in Nottingham described trauma as something which continues to impact the lives of people seeking refugee, even after time has passed or they have moved on from the location where the traumatic events occurred. Trauma is an issue that was raised repeatedly by participants. Trauma may occur due to the impact of having lived in an oppressive regime:

> *"I think it's quite common to see, kind of particularly if someone's lived in an oppressive regime, fear of being watched, and that doesn't just go away when they come to the UK. So then sort of, I've noticed fears, I think 'is that paranoid thoughts?'. But, there could be a very real reason for having that fear because it could be real still in the UK"* - Charlotte

Trauma may also occur during migrations. One of the volunteers in Calais described a conversation she had with a man from a camp about his journey:

> *"He just, he look haunted, and he said, he just said 'I have seen things I should never have seen', and he had come through Libya"* - Julie

Abrihet described how the trauma of her journey to the UK continued to impact her upon arrival:

> *"My route is not good. I was coming from France by boat, because of that I was stressed. Yeah, scary, I'm not stable in mind really. I was not happy after that"* - Abrihet

She also mentioned that after her traumatic journey, her uncertain immigration status causes her significant anxiety, especially due to the proposed Rwanda scheme:

> *"Sometimes I scared because, you know, the Rwanda case. So when I came here, I pay a lot of sacrifices, so after these sacrifices I want something: safety. But this time we're hearing bad news, yeah, so that's why every time I will be, I will stress really"* - Abrihet

The way that trauma and mental health issues not only travel across space and time, but are also added to at each stage of the asylum process was noted by a participant:

> *"Certainly participants will be coming like already having gone through trauma at the point of arriving in the UK, and then I think it would be fair to say their experiences in the UK just kind of add to that because life is so stressful: in getting anything sorted; they're away from their support network usually; they've got no-one. So all of those kind of risk factors for mental health and just daily life is very stressful. So I think all those factors like daily life, but on top of often having gone through a traumatic experience"* - Charlotte

We can see this as a form of necropolitical slow violence in which harms are enacted attritionally rather than in one immediate act of violence (Davies et al., 2017; Nixon, 2011). However, these harms are accretive and the 'calamitous repercussions' occur along a range of temporal scales (Nixon, 2011:2).

One participant described how the issues of trauma and isolation can become intertwined:

> *“Often people can be quite socially isolated. This could be because of their language, also because of what they’ve been through, trauma. A lot of places are set up in the fact that they don’t know about social opportunities and there’s a lot of fear around those social opportunities. So they might, for example, live in a hotel and not leave that hotel because of fear of what’s out there [...] so it already takes quite a brave resilient person who has maybe overcome or downtrodden their trauma to go out and do it”* - Jane

Salma reinforced this idea when she told me that some asylum seekers are too scared to leave their hotels. She described this as an empty existence:

> *“Maybe they are breathing, but they are not living”* - Salma

This demonstrates that not only does trauma exacerbate isolation, but also the set up of hotels themselves do in that people are not connected to the wider community in the same way that, for example, Ukrainians living with a British sponsor may be. The idea that people may be breathing but not living speaks to Mbembe’s idea that people are “subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (Mbembe, 2003:40). Mayblin et al. highlight the value of social support for asylum seekers as an ‘economic buffer’ whereby costs and information can be shared (2020:118). This suggests that not only does isolation expose migrants to risk of Mbembe’s social death, but it also exacerbates their exposure to the necropolitical slow violence of impoverishment (Mayblin et al., 2020). Therefore, I argue that necropolitics is a useful framework to understand not just physical violence but also psychological violence against racialized populations. In the context of asylum in the UK this psychological violence takes place through: isolation, social exclusion, and through forcing people to undertake traumatic journeys to reach the UK. This psychological violence works alongside forms of physical violence and, I suggest, can be considered as part of the slower end of the spectrum of necropolitical violence. I argue that there is significant value in considering how these harms accumulate throughout an individual's lifetime.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Throughout this research project I have aimed to understand the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Calais, Nottingham, and what can be drawn more widely from these. I have also aimed to explore to what extent necropolitics is a useful framework for understanding these experiences. I have argued that necropolitics does continue to be a useful framework for understanding the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers for the following three reasons. Firstly, the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers involve subjection to harms which can be considered either outright killing or being kept “alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe, 2003:21). Secondly, I have argued that these harms occur as an expression of necropower wielded by the sovereign. Thirdly, I have laid out the ways in which the expression of this necropower reflects colonial power relations and conceptions of race. In addition, I found it particularly compelling that participants themselves mentioned the coloniality of the border in interviews. I argue that necropolitics is therefore appropriate, not just because of its value to academics, but also because of the value it has in expressing the way everyday people see border violence as predicated on colonial power relations.

The empirical findings of this research involve a range of necropolitical violence from fast outright killing to slow and attritional forms violence which result in injury. Therefore, I suggest that there is value in considering necropolitics as a spectrum of harms which range in temporality and visibility (Mayblin, 2019a). The structure of this thesis follows that spectrum of necropolitics, having started with the sudden outright killing before moving on to how sudden moments of violence punctuate and exacerbate slow violence, finally looking at slow violence proper and the more attritional, but no less necropolitical, impacts of this. I have explored sudden violence as the sovereign right to kill ‘at any time or in any manner’ (Mbembe, 2003:25) through looking at the way in which the behaviour of nation states forces people into risking their lives through boat or vehicle crossings of the English Channel. I then looked at how sudden violence leads to the creation of ‘death-worlds’ (Mbembe, 2003:40) and exacerbates slow violence as harm travels across time and space. I did this using examples of sexual violence during migrations, and police clearings, evictions and harassment in Calais. Both of these included moments of sudden violence that punctuated slower forms of violence, and then exacerbated the impacts of slow violence long after the original incident. Finally, I looked at necropolitical slow violence as a way of keeping people “alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe,

2003:21) using examples of: camp conditions, necropolitical housing, poverty, bureaucratic harms and psychological harms.

One of the key limitations to this research was that it does place significant emphasis on the perspectives of activists and on my own experiences. Whilst I have tried to include the perspectives of my research participants with lived experiences of the asylum system as much as possible, there were some practical constraints which prevented me from doing this more. These constraints were largely financial. I would have liked to spend more time in Calais, this would have enabled me to build up more trust with asylum seekers living in camps, making it possible for me to interview them in a way that was ethical. However, the grant I received meant that it was only possible for me to stay for one week and therefore unethical to perform interviews directly with those living in camps (see Section 3.2 for more detail). If I had the opportunity to interview asylum seekers in Calais then I would have been able to include their own perspectives on their experiences rather than just those of staff and volunteers. However, some participants I interviewed in Nottingham had spent time in Northern France before crossing informally to the UK so I was able to include some data on these experiences. The other financial constraint which limited my capacity to include the perspectives of refugees and asylum seekers in my interview was the cost of translation. I did not have the resources to pay a translator so, for both ethical and practical reasons, I could only conduct interviews with those who had a relatively high level of English. This means that the perspectives of non-English speaking refugees and asylum seekers were not centred in this thesis. I suggest that future work which addresses these limitations is needed to further develop our understandings of refugee and asylum seeker experiences of necropolitical violence.

Overall, I argue that there is a need to consider how necropolitical harms across the necropolitical spectrum (of temporality and visibility) combine over the course of a lifetime rather than viewing them each in isolation. This approach helps make visible the full extent of necropolitics enacted against refugees and asylum seekers by looking at how exposure to necropolitical violence can accumulate as individuals are subjected to harms across the spectrum. By following individual stories of real people, and putting together moments of necropolitical violence, I hope to show that the sovereign has determined that the lives of these people are considered disposable (Mbembe, 2003). By making visible the extent of this

violence, and the racism and neocoloniality that it both relies upon and perpetuates, I hope to empower people to challenge these power formations and move towards a less violent society.

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