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The Colonised Self: The Politics of UK Asylum Practices, and the Embodiment of Colonial Power in Lived Experience

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Abstract: This paper draws on empirical data generated in the ‘Everyday Bordering in the UK’ project, with a focus on the experiences of people seeking asylum and hoping to establish a safe life in the UK. Specifically, we show that during the process of claiming asylum, people’s experiences of *waiting* and displacement—practices inherent in UK immigration policies—work as time- and space-based dimensions of power that are imbued with colonial logic. Existing studies apply the lens of Foucault’s governmentality approach to politics regulating people seeking asylum. In particular, the international literature describes the policy of dispersal, and associated periods of *waiting*, as a dynamic of power used by governments to control and regulate behaviours. However, these time- and space-related experiences are often considered separately, focusing on the rationalities underpinning these politics. This paper, by contrast, develops Foucault’s theories by examining how these two characteristics interconnect in the lived realities of people *waiting* for an asylum decision in the UK to create racialised politics of power and privilege that reproduce the colonial origins of European migration governance. In doing so, we contribute by illustrating how practices within the UK asylum system can be embodied by people seeking asylum to create a subject that modifies behaviours in response to being positioned as ‘less deserving’ than UK citizens—the ‘colonised self’.

Keywords: claiming asylum; migration governance; technology of the self; colonial logic



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1. Introduction

While asylum is a universal human right,¹ globally, national policies governing this right are increasingly restrictive, dehumanising and designed to deter applications for asylum (Mayblin et al. 2020; Fitzpatrick 1996; Bloomfield 2016; Bhatia 2020). A developing body of literature attributes this to the colonial origin of the 1951 Geneva Convention, which includes international laws outlining the rights of people seeking refuge. According to this line of thought, the growing ‘violent’ nature of global and national refugee and asylum policies is viewed as a coherent evolution of international refugee law rather than a departure from the Convention’s core values (Mayblin 2016; Krause 2021; Abuya et al. 2021). We apply this perspective to contemporary UK politics and qualitative data generated during the ESRC-funded ‘Everyday Bordering in the UK’ project—specifically, the in-depth accounts of people ($n = 7$) with lived experience of claiming asylum in the UK. In doing so, we demonstrate how the practices and procedures inherent in the management of asylum requests in the UK are consistent with British colonial history and reproduce racialised colonial logic, notably, the ‘rule of difference’ (Chatterjee 1993). Scholars argue that this ‘rule’, or ‘myth’ (Chimni 1998)—that the coloniser is superior, and the colonised are inferior—historically normalised the now-discredited existence of racial hierarchical differences and justified the imposition of British imperial rule (Chatterjee 1993). However, because the goal of colonial enterprise was to establish and preserve the coloniser’s power, rather than being in the past, the ‘rule’ has left a ‘permanent mark’ on colonised peoples and administrations and institutions established during the colonial period. As such, it underpins what Quijano and Ennis (2000) refer to as the ‘coloniality of power’—the

structures of power, control and hegemony that have emerged from the colonial era and remain in the present. Here, we contribute by arguing that immigration control in the UK is one such area where the ‘coloniality of power’ manifests. Previous studies have examined the impacts of geographically ‘dispersing’ people that are seeking asylum (Robinson et al. 2003; Bloch and Schuster 2005; Darling 2011) and, in the UK, the extended time that people *wait* for a decision on their asylum claim (Griffiths 2017; Hewett 2021). We add to this knowledge and draw on Foucault’s concepts of ‘governmentality’ to show how, in UK immigration ‘management’, the combined experience of these two features of the asylum process can result in people seeking asylum: becoming aware of being positioned as ‘other’, internalising the colonial ‘rule of difference’ and ‘acquiring certain attitudes’ (Foucault 1988, p. 18). Borrowing from Du Bois ([1903] 1996) and Fanon ([1952] 2008), we uniquely argue that the resulting ‘subject’—or what we refer to in the context of contemporary asylum politics as the ‘colonised self’—is of utility to the UK government and their ‘management’ of people seeking asylum and refugees.

2. Coloniality, the 1951 Geneva Convention and Wider Immigration Control

The arguments presented here are grounded in scholarly recognition of the racialised and colonial origins of the United Nations (UN), the 1951 Geneva Convention (Mayblin 2016; Mayblin 2017; Simpson 2004; Odhiambo-Abuya 2005; Hamlin 2021) and international bordering practices that control the movement of populations from beyond Europe (Achiume 2019; Landau 2019). In 1945, in the wake of World War II, some 50 governments formed the UN with the stated aim of preventing future world wars and, amongst other things, protecting human rights and upholding international law (Moravcsik 2000). In 1948, the UN General Assembly went on to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, detailing an individual’s basic rights and fundamental freedoms, including stating that everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution (article 14). In the UN’s subsequent ratification of the 1951 Geneva Convention, the term ‘refugee’ came into being, and was formally defined as:

‘someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion’ (UNHCR 2010).

However, international laws within the 1951 Convention only applied to Europeans displaced as a result of World War II and did not extend to the vast populations—which were primarily people of colour—displaced by the concurrent dismantling of colonialism (Mayblin 2017). The Eurocentric geographical restriction was not removed until the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees was ratified by the UN and extended the status of refugees to wider international contexts (Malkki 1995). Today, the Convention remains the basis of global refugee governance (Krause 2021), and, for Mayblin (2017), its racialised colonial origins—namely the politics of ‘difference’—continue to influence understandings of who bears rights.

During recent decades, the control and criminalisation of refugees, people seeking asylum and economic migrants—from states external to Europe—are increasing features of immigration governance in individual nation states (Fitzpatrick 1996; Bloomfield 2016; Landau 2019; Achiume 2019; Bhatia 2020). For some, this represents a rupture in the relationship between national policies and the human rights protections of the original Geneva Convention, and they propose changes to renew this aim within international law (Hathaway 1991; Warner and Hathaway 1992; Fitzpatrick 1996; Moravcsik 2000). However, an emergent literature presents an alternative view that stresses the exclusionary and divisive logic that underpins international immigration politics (Landau 2019; Achiume 2019; Hamlin 2021). More specifically, Mayblin (2016) focuses on the significance of the context in which the 1951 Geneva Convention was ratified and the power and influence of colonial member states when formulating the final agreement; colonised countries were not active participants in the formulation of the agreement, which, instead, included a clause that enabled colonisers to decide whether to extend the convention to the countries

they colonised. As such, scholars position the Convention as a predominantly European agreement that deliberately excluded asylum requests made from countries beyond European borders (Krause 2021; Simpson 2004). For Odhiambo-Abuya (2005), the regulation of asylum seekers and refugees is, therefore, predominantly Eurocentric and infused with dynamics that racialise, exclude, restrict and disempower certain groups—dynamics typical of colonial logic. As such, rather than being at odds with the original aims of the Convention, modern-day immigration controls are, instead, consistent with its colonial roots (Krause 2021; Odhiambo-Abuya 2005; Abuya et al. 2021). It is to this body of knowledge that we add weight.

3. The UK Context, Racialised Immigration Controls, and Politicisation of Asylum

In the UK, hostility towards populations from beyond European borders is also reflected in wider immigration controls. Scholars argue that the British Nationality Act of 1948 extended British citizenship to all Commonwealth citizens to address labour shortages in the post-war period. However, the 1962 and 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act, and their consolidation in the 1971 Immigration Act, systematically restricted immigration from the New Commonwealth (primarily people of colour), whilst privileging immigration from the primarily White populations of the Old Commonwealth (Solomos 2003; Bloch 2020; Bloch and Schuster 2005). As such, these immigration laws ‘implicitly defined Britain as white’, created obstacles to entry for brown and Black people from former British colonies and further imposed differential human rights based on a person’s ‘race’ (Kundnani 2007, p. 22). Since the 1990s, UK governments have also increasingly restricted the terms under which a person is granted state asylum and the ways in which a person is controlled as they move through applying for this protection. In the 1980s, in response to increased numbers of people fleeing famine and extended periods of conflict in the Global South—again, primarily people of colour—asylum was further politicised, and measures intended to deter people seeking asylum from beyond Europe’s borders intensified (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Hathaway 2015). The 1999 Asylum Act was a landmark turning point, introducing a voucher scheme to replace welfare state benefits; the removal of a person’s right to work; and compulsory dispersal with accommodation provided on a no-choice basis. For Bloch et al. (2013, p. 16) the punitive and hostile practices and procedures introduced during this period represent an ‘arsenal of control’.

Since this time, there has also been an amplification of policy narratives that present all immigration as a problem that needs to be controlled. In 2012, Teresa May, the UK’s then Home Secretary announced that the government aimed to intentionally create a ‘hostile environment’ towards immigration (Gov.UK 2013). Whilst this ostensibly targeted those she described as ‘illegal’ immigrants (undocumented or irregular migrants), the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts led to an intensification of what scholars describe as ‘everyday borders’—internal border checks that permeate everyday life, bureaucratically and symbolically, impacting all migrants’ sense of ‘belonging’ and security (Brambilla et al. 2015; Yuval-Davis et al. 2017; Lewis et al. 2017; Walsh et al. 2022a). These Acts have broad impacts, but further criminalise those seeking asylum, by giving immigration officers the power to electronically tag and detain people appealing a decision (Wilcock 2019). More recently, The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 has further criminalised people seeking asylum by categorising them into two groups: those that arrive in the UK through so-called ‘illegal routes’ may not be able to apply for asylum in the UK and/or receive limited protection (Gower and Sturge 2022). Concurrent with the introduction of this Act, Ukrainians (European and predominantly White) fleeing war in their homeland were able to benefit from the UK’s Ukrainian Resettlement Scheme. Whilst the implementation of the scheme has been met with varied responses (Besana 2022; Da Lomba 2022; Miller et al. 2022; Venturi and Vallianatou 2022), it remains that the UK government facilitated the Ukrainian peoples’ right to asylum by streamlining the claim process and minimising features of the ‘arsenal of control’ described (Bloch et al. 2013). The simultaneous tightening of restrictions on people from beyond Europe provides further support to arguments that a racialised

colonial logic—the politics of ‘difference’—continues to influence understandings of who bears rights within Europe (Mayblin 2017; Landau 2019; Achiume 2019).

We build on these theorisations of UK asylum politics by considering the narratives of people seeking asylum in the UK that are from countries outside of Europe’s borders. We focus on their experiences of two specific features of the UK’s ‘hostile environment’ to examine the ways in which a racialised and colonial logic continues to shape their treatment and everyday lives: the policy of geographical dispersal, and people’s experiences of *waiting* for a decision on an asylum claim.

‘Waiting’ and the Practice of ‘Dispersal’ in the UK

As the UK is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention, a person has the right to apply for asylum in line with the grounds stated therein (Lewis et al. 2015). Ordinarily, the applicant must make a case for this and the UK Home Office, as the government department responsible for processing asylum claims decides whether the application is justified. Lengthy *waits* for a decision on an asylum claim, and practices of dispersing, detaining and/or deporting people during the claim process, have become increasingly experimental and normalised (Bloch and Schuster 2005; Darling 2011). People seeking asylum face, for example, recurrent periods of *waiting* to hear if their request for state protection is judged as legitimate or if they will be returned to their home or another country. Initially, a person has to register as an ‘asylum seeker’ at a ‘screening meeting’ with the Home Office. They then *wait* to hear if their registration has been accepted or if it has been rejected and they must leave the country. If they are recognised as an ‘asylum seeker’, they receive an asylum registration card (ARC) and are relocated to housing provisions in designated ‘dispersal areas’ (Robinson et al. 2003). The person seeking asylum then *waits* to be called for an ‘asylum interview’, after which they *wait* again for a final decision from the Home Office. According to government guidelines, it should take six months from a screening interview to a person receiving a decision about their claim. However, the time it takes for the Home Office to reach a conclusion is often much longer, with a 2021 report from the Refugee Council showing that this takes, on average, between one and three years (Hewett 2021).

An ‘asylum seeker’ in the UK is, then, a person that has asked for asylum but has not received a decision about their claim. If the government agrees that the person does require protection in line with the reasons stated in the 1951 Geneva Convention, they are granted ‘refugee’ status. This usually means that they are given five years ‘leave to remain’ after which time they must apply for further ‘leave to remain’. For this reason, a person seeking asylum and those with refugee status are not distinct but, rather, they are living with varying levels of precarity (Lewis et al. 2015; Coddington 2019; Shobiye and Parker 2022) that result from the UK’s approach to asylum and immigration. It remains, however, that in the UK, an ‘asylum seeker’ is not afforded the same rights as a refugee or a British Citizen. During the extended periods of *waiting* described, people seeking asylum face debilitating restrictions including having severely limited access to public funds and state services; being prohibited from engaging in paid work; and state financial support failing to cover essential living costs (Mayblin 2019; Coddington 2019). Whilst *waiting*, these measures curtail the agency of people seeking asylum and simultaneously position them as ‘bogus’ and ‘undeserving’ of state support (Sales 2002; Dwyer 2005), whilst ensuring economic marginalisation and removing the opportunity to address this via employment (Mayblin 2016).

Although migration is predominantly conceptualised as a spatial phenomenon, a growing literature considers ‘time’, temporality and the phenomenon of imposed *waiting* in migration governance. Scholars consider, for example, how governments use time and waiting periods to both confer or deny citizenship (Cohen 2018), and also show that people claiming asylum can use time waiting to plan their futures (Rotter 2016). Others, however, provide extensive evidence of the negative consequences (Fee 2022) of imposed waiting, including the ways in which time is rarely linear for migrants and people seeking

asylum experience extended temporary conditions, “stuck in immigration detention, legal blackholes, or intermediary countries” (Griffiths 2021, p. 318); how time spent *waiting* for legal documentation can exclude people from accessing adequate housing provision (McNevin and Missbach 2018); and how *waiting* is used by governments to punish those who cross borders and to deter people from doing so (Bhatia 2020; Griffiths 2017; Ramsay 2017). Others consider the detrimental effect of *waiting* on the mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of people seeking asylum and refugees. Opondo, for example, shows the impact of *waiting* on child refugees’ understanding of the world (Opondo 2016), and Phillimore and Cheung (2021) highlight how long periods of uncertainty have negative consequences for a person’s emotional and physical health.

Turning to state practices of dispersal, while varied strategies are applied across Europe (Robinson et al. 2003), in the UK, once a person is initially and formally recognised as an ‘asylum seeker’, they are subject to ‘dispersal’ under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. This means that they are transported and relocated to areas in the UK with which they most likely have no familiarity. Critics argue that UK policy narratives rationalise this practice as a way of preventing geographical concentrations of ‘asylum seekers’ and to avoid ‘social problems’ and unequal costs for some local authorities (Bloch and Schuster 2005); a narrative that positions those seeking asylum as a burden (Robinson et al. 2003) rather than people seeking safety as bearers of rights. Further, as the system of dispersal is primarily reliant on the availability of cheap housing, people are dispersed to some of Britain’s most deprived neighbourhoods (Darling 2016a, 2016b) where, in the context of far-reaching public spending cuts in the UK, there is increased competition for resources amongst those who ‘have little’ (Hoggett et al. 2013, p. 567). Dispersal is, thereby, identified as a way of governing mobility through mobility, with the aim of excluding, dividing and controlling certain groups of migrants (Tazzioli 2022; Darling 2011). A body of literature has therefore considered the impact of dispersal politics on communities and individuals. Scholars argue, for example, that dispersal disrupts the formation of community networks for people seeking asylum (Zetter et al. 2005) and their processes of homemaking and place attachment (van Liempt and Miellet 2021). Others show that compulsory relocation to areas of ‘territorial stigmatisation’ increases feelings of isolation, marginalisation and liminality (Darling 2016a, p. 486; Phillimore and Goodson 2006; Spicer 2008), which contribute to the powerlessness and social exclusion experienced by people seeking asylum and refugees in the UK (Hynes and Sales 2010; Hynes 2011).

Studies related to both *waiting* and dispersal do not, however, examine the ways in which the experiences of these practices impact a person’s sense of ‘self’. We, therefore, address a gap in knowledge by considering how the ‘slow violence’ (Mayblin et al. 2020) of these features of the UK’s ‘arsenal of [migration] control’ (Bloch et al. 2013, p. 16) can act on people seeking asylum and shape their behaviours.

4. Governmentality, Subjectification and the ‘Colonised Self’

To develop this argument, we apply Foucault’s conceptualisations of power, governmentality and subjectification to the ways in which people seeking asylum in the UK experience the interaction of *waiting* and dispersal. Specifically, we add to the understanding of the ways in which these features of UK immigration practices and policy can be understood as a ‘technology of self’ that creates a ‘subject’ that embodies racialised colonial logic in ways that have utility to the UK government.

Briefly, for Foucault, power is both a repressive and productive relational force (Foucault et al. 2004), exercised through networks whereby “power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them” (Foucault et al. 2004, p. 29). Within this, ‘governmentality’ describes the processes by which societies are governed via a range of control techniques, including those related to formal government, disciplinary institutions, and the ways in which individuals auto-correct and auto-regulate themselves. Foucault emphasises two particular technologies central to these processes, ‘technologies of power’ and ‘technologies of the self’, each relating to “certain modes of training and modification of

individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes" (Foucault 1988, p. 18). Particular forms of power can, thereby, compel individuals—'subjects'—and populations to reflect on their condition and adjust themselves accordingly; power is productive because it creates different forms of subjects.

Previous studies of migration governance have applied a Foucauldian lens to identify international dynamics of power, and resistance, in migration and refugee management (Fassin 2011). Darling (2011), for example, illustrates how 'dispersal' is used as a 'mode of power' by the UK government to divide, classify and control people seeking asylum, and Apatinga (2017) uses the concept of Biopower—or the bottom-up coercion and control of populations—to show how anti-immigration policies distribute effective tactics to control and manage all spheres of life (Foucault 1979). A body of literature also examines the rationalities justifying the treatment of people seeking asylum and refugees in diverse contexts: Oesch (2020) describes refugee camps as ambiguous spaces where multiple forms of power work simultaneously to produce a system of 'variegated citizenship' that both includes and excludes refugees; Wahab (2022) identifies a 'hybrid governmentality' in refugee camps whereby 'modes of power' enacted by Bangladesh's government act on refugee camp residents to simultaneously marginalise them and protect the security of nation state citizens; and Lemberg-Pedersen and Haioty (2020) argue that biometric data collected from Syrian refugees is a form of biometric 'enrollment' and a 'technology of power' that acts as surveillance technology and engages refugees in acts of quasi-citizenship. Notably, others explore how hostile politics applied by successive UK governments lead to counter-conduct and/or forms of resistance by migrants (Wilcock 2019; Schouw Iversen 2021; Saunders and Al-Om 2022). Previous applications of Foucault to migration governance and control, therefore, focus on particular Foucauldian 'modes of power', 'resistance' and/or the rationalities underpinning specific 'technologies of power'.

By contrast, this paper draws on Foucault's concepts of 'governmentality' and 'technologies of the self' to interrogate the impact of dispersal, and extended periods of waiting for an asylum claim decision, on the everyday lives of people with lived experience. Mayblin et al. (2020, p. 111) argue that state-enacted bordering practices in the UK have become a 'site of intense harm, of slow violence' and that they keep individuals seeking asylum 'alive but in a state of injury' (Mayblin et al. 2020, p. 111). Our application of Foucault builds on this and shows that asylum politics in the UK have embodied impacts similar to those documented by Du Bois [1903] in *The Souls of the Black Folk* and Fanon [1952] in *Black Skin, White Mask*. When describing the experiences of Black communities in America (Du Bois [1903] 1996) and Algeria (Fanon [1952] 2008), these authors show how communities can adopt maladaptive strategies to exist in a society where White populations are dominant and privileged. Fanon, for example, describes the psychoaffective impact that colonisation has on Black people. For him, White people expect Black people to behave in particular ways, citing that "I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged" (Fanon [1952] 2008, p. 86). As such, this leads to what he describes as an 'inferiority complex'; as colonised people in Algeria, Black communities self-identified with the socially constructed ideas that their oppressors created about them. Consequently, they can adopt behaviours that reflect these manufactured constructs (Moore 2005), such as behaving in ways that cohere with White narratives that they are culturally inferior and/or savage and/or freed (Fanon [1952] 2008).

Here, then, we uniquely apply the lens of 'technologies of self' to illustrate the ways in which dispersal and *waiting* are modes of power that manifest in 'slow violence' (Mayblin et al. 2020) with profound and embodied impacts for participants in our study. We expand and argue that contemporary UK asylum policies—which disproportionately impact people of colour entering the UK from beyond Europe's borders—are used by the government as 'strategies of control', which reproduce a racialised, colonial power dynamic that keeps people 'within bounds' (Fanon [1952] 2008). Notably, Foucault's articulation of 'technologies of self' locates individuals as active agents immersed in the dynamic of power (Foucault 1988). As such, we sustain that people seeking asylum can interiorise this

racialised dynamic of exclusion. However, rather than being ‘passive recipients’ (Fresia and Von Känel 2016, p. 253), their recognition that autocorrection and autoregulation (Foucault 1988) are the only available responses to their situation can manifest in an internal struggle (Fanon [1952] 2008). In this sense, we link Fanon’s ‘inferiority complex’ with Du Bois’ concept of ‘double consciousness’ whereby Black minorities can be both conscious of how they are in a given situation but also see themselves from their oppressor’s perspective (Moore 2005); people living in a constant condition of inferiority may internalise the idea that they are ‘less deserving’ and/or in need of being saved by White Europeans (Moore 2005). Here, we argue that the combined experience of displacement and waiting can be embodied by people seeking asylum, manifesting in a similar ‘double consciousness’; whilst people recognise that they have the right to claim asylum, they are also acutely aware that the State and its representatives administer this right in ways that position their lives as inferior. For us, this results in outcomes congruent with the colonial logic of power, and the ‘dominant ways of thinking and knowing that produced and reproduced colonial difference: the idea that the colonized were inherently different from (and inferior to) the Western colonizers’ (Meghji 2021, p. 3). We thereby contribute by showing how these time- and space-related dimensions of the UK’s asylum process—influenced by racialised colonial rationales—work on people seeking asylum to create, in Foucauldian terms, a ‘subject’ that we refer to here as the ‘colonised self’.

5. Methods and the Project

The data presented were generated as part of the ESRC-funded project, *‘Everyday Bordering in the UK: the impact on social care practitioners and the migrant families with whom they work’* (ESRC project number: ES/S015833/1). The broad aim of the study was to examine the impact of the UK’s hostile environment towards immigration on social care practitioners and the everyday lives of the migrant families with whom they work. To achieve this aim, the project employed a multi-method, ethnographic approach, influenced by the values of co-production (Campbell and Lassiter 2015) realised in collaboration with the social care services that work with migrant families in two northern English cities. As such, the study is underpinned by an ontological position that values conducting research with, rather than on, people and communities; that views individuals as experts in their own lives; and that aims to break down barriers between service users and providers (Facer and Enright 2016).

Between spring 2020 and winter 2021, the research team engaged in multiple online and in-person ethnographic activities across both cities (Walsh et al. 2022b), with practitioners from varied professional contexts and, separately, with members of migrant families with diverse migratory backgrounds. The approach employed, thereby, generated a rich data corpus including myriad participant observation notes; transcripts from four focus groups and 29 one-to-one interviews with practitioners; transcripts from interviews with members of 12 migrant families; and ‘family diaries’ created by these same families. Here, we focus on the accounts provided by members of seven migrant families (Table 1) with lived experience of claiming asylum in the UK, specifically data generated during semi-structured interviews. As noted in the following table, families had varied cultural, national and familial backgrounds and unique reasons for claiming asylum, and they came to the UK via diverse routes.

Table 1. This is a table of participants.

Pseudonym	Area of Origin *	Age	Gender	Migration Status	Background
Lyia	East Africa	20s	Female	Person seeking asylum	Initially fled from persecution on her own. Living in shared Home Office accommodation,
Aaron	East Africa	20s	Male	Person Seeking Asylum, now Refugee	Fled from persecution with his family. Living in shared Home Office accommodation,
Faahim	Middle East	30s	Male	Person seeking asylum, now refugee	Fled from conflict on his own. Now lives with his wife and infant son
Honour	West Africa	30s	Female	Person seeking asylum, now refugee	Victim of trafficking. Lived in the UK 10 years before claiming asylum. Single mum with teenage daughter.
Kemi	West Africa	20s	Female	Person seeking asylum	Victim of trafficking. Lived in the UK 15 years before claiming asylum. Single mum with a pre-school daughter.
Abu	Northeast Africa	50s	Male	Person seeking asylum, now refugee	Fled from conflict with his family and lives with his daughter (in her 20s) and wife.
Yonas	East Africa	20s	Male	UN refugee	Fled from conflict with his family and lived in a refugee camp before coming to the UK as UN refugees. Lives with his mum and siblings.

* Regions and age ranges are provided, rather than specific countries or ages, in order to protect anonymity.

Ethical clearance for the project was secured from relevant institutions and standard ethical procedures were followed: informed consent was gained and checked throughout the study; details that identify individuals have been changed; and all data were stored securely (Gabb 2010). To minimise issues relating to intrusion and groups feeling over-researched, sites were carefully selected. Throughout, the research team were also sensitive to the fact that discussing migration status and practice interactions may be difficult for migrant families and practitioners. Focusing here on our work with migrant family members, our early fieldwork prioritised developing relationships with families and practitioners separately. This was in order to pay attention to power inherent in the research relationship (Edwards and Brannelly 2017) and to avoid the complexities of initial contact with families being made via organisations. Instead, over a period of 12 months, researchers attended activities with families in order to build trust, support voluntary participation and ensure that family recruitment was not mediated by organisational representatives. As such, practitioners were not aware of which families took part in the interview, and care was taken throughout to protect the identities of all involved. Whilst we acknowledge that qualitative research is informed by a range of subjectivities (Bott 2010), robust measures were taken to recognise and reduce the impact of this on the data generated.

Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically and inductively. Via a process of data saturation, codes were identified and systematically applied to the data. Coding was organised using software suitable to mixed methods and to support the emergence of 'identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behaviour' (Aronson 1995, p. 3). Despite the diversity described in the families interviewed, the accounts of their experiences once they began claiming asylum, and the impact on their lives, display multiple similarities. Here, we consider emergent themes related to the impact of the 'hostile environment' on individuals through the theoretical frame of Foucault's conceptualisations of power, specifically the 'technologies of self'.

6. Research Findings

The existing literature documents the ways in which people seeking asylum in the UK exercise agency in a seriously restricted context by engaging in small acts that remain achievable (Rotter 2016). Hunt (2008), for example, shows that women seeking asylum in the North of England, despite facing multiple barriers, act on an individual and collective level to support their settlement. Similarly, Ramachandran and Vathi (2022) show that, whilst awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, people seeking asylum attempt to establish connections, to gain familiarity with the area and to engage in meaningful activities. In line with this, our analysis does not position people seeking asylum as ‘passive victims’ (Fresia and Von Känel 2016, p. 253). Rather, in the following sections, we present data to show the ways in which two ‘everyday bordering’ (Yuval-Davis et al. 2017) practices—*waiting* and ‘dispersal’—can work *on* people seeking asylum. In doing so, we argue that these government practices act as ‘a technology of self’ and subsequently modify a person’s relationship to power (Foucault 1988). The first section examines how State-controlled *waiting* impacts participants’ understandings of time and the practical implications of this for their lives and their human rights, including the right to asylum,² and the right to active, free and meaningful participation in life.³ This is followed by a consideration of the UK’s policy of compulsory dispersal and the ways in which im/mobility influences a person’s sense of ‘belonging’ and their positionality to others (Zetter et al. 2005; van Liempt and Miellet 2021; Mezzadra and Neilson 2012). We finish by showing how these ‘technologies of self’ are embodied by people seeking asylum in ways that resonate with Fanon ([1952] 2008) and Du Bois’ ([1903] 1996) accounts of enslaved and colonised people, specifically participants’ physical reactions to being the object of UK immigration control; their internalising of the ‘myth’ or ‘rule of difference’ (Chimni 1998; Chatterjee 1993); and their adoption of behaviours that enable them to endure the immigration controls to which they are subjected. The data presented are illustrative of the themes that emerged from an analysis of seven interviews with people that have lived experience of claiming asylum in the UK and are from countries outside of Europe’s borders.

6.1. *Waiting, and Curtailed Agency and Self-Actualisation*

An analysis of interview transcripts confirms that the long and complex process of claiming asylum in the UK is a State-imposed form of ‘slow violence’ to which people seeking asylum are subjected (Saunders and Al-Om 2022; Mayblin et al. 2020). For all of our participants, this was compounded by the fact that claiming asylum was also preceded by times of trauma and uncertainty due to the circumstances in which they left their home countries and the absence of safe and legal routes to claiming protection in Europe (Matos et al. 2022; Watters et al. 2022). Honour and Kemi, as victims of trafficking, had experienced lengthy periods of precarity as undocumented people in the UK (Lewis et al. 2014). Others had made risky, difficult and lengthy journeys through Europe (Belabbas et al. 2022) prior to making their claim (Aaron, Liya, Faahim and Abu), and Yonas’ family had initially fled to a refugee camp before being granted UN refugee status. All had experienced ‘*waiting*’ in states of extreme fear, uncertainty and—for some—exploitation, in ways that erode a person’s capacity to imagine a future (Ramsay 2017). Yonas and his mother and siblings had, for example, lived in the refugee camp in northern Africa for some years before coming to the UK. Here, he describes the ways in which ‘*waiting*’ in this liminal environment led to his mother ‘praying’ as a way to exercise some influence in a restricted context where she had few ‘viable alternatives’ and what Klocker refers to as ‘thin agency’ (Klocker 2007, p. 85):

Yonas: So, when my mum heard that we were going to the UK, she was really happy. Like, she was so happy.

Interviewer: And what was her, what were her expectations for you all as a family?

Yonas: So, she just said that when she was there, she was just praying to get out of that situation. [. . .] She was saying anywhere other than that place was perfect for her, so she was just praying to get out from the refugee camp. She didn't even know, like—she can't even—she wasn't even imagining this, but she just knew in her head, anywhere she went, it would be better than where she is now. So, she was just praying and hoping to get out of there. (Yonas, UN refugee)

As with [Opondo's \(2016\)](#) study of children in refugee camps, the lack of control and/or influence at the core of this 'waiting' can lead to a sense of fatalism for people desperate for protection and, here, a desire to be 'rescued' from an external other. As such, participants describe entering the UK's asylum system after having already been brutalised in ways that resonate with [Fanon's \(\[1952\] 2008\)](#) study of colonised people and their interiorisation of the 'myth of difference' ([Chimni 1998](#)). Starting the process of claiming asylum in the UK is thereby a continuation of, rather than the start of, this process. Aaron, for example, was transported in a closed truck from his homeland by traffickers. During the journey, he had little sense of the passage of time whilst 'waiting' to arrive in a place of safety. Once in the UK, he immediately located a Police station to register his desire to claim asylum. It is after this that Aaron reports 'waiting' to be a more overt bordering practice, deterring people from claiming their right to protection ([Gammeltoft-Hansen and Hathaway 2015](#)).

I have been in jail for 48 h. For one day? Two days? Yes, I think 48 h I was in jail because I entered illegally in the UK. It's a rule, I think 48 h. So, after that they send me in a taxi with Uber to [City] and I have to wait there until I get the shared room accommodation from the support. It's about two months I think. Sixty days. Two months I stayed there, and then they sent me to [city]. (Aaron, person seeking asylum, now refugee)

For Yonas' mother, Aaron and our other participants, the passage of time whilst *waiting* lacks a recognisable linearity and routine ([Grace et al. 2018](#)). Whilst Aaron attempts to recall and make sense of this phase of his life by drawing on familiar temporal measurements, these periods of *waiting* are, instead, illusive and controlled by external others that 'send' him to locations that 'they' deem appropriate. This State-imposed curtailment of a person's ability to influence the future, or decisions that have life-changing consequences, is described by [Grace et al. \(2018, p. 904\)](#) as a harmful, 'violent uncertainty'. Yonas' description of his mum's disempowerment and Aaron's powerful account of the resultant psychological and related physical impacts illustrate the extent of this 'violence':

The whole year I was stressing on why I was here, and everything was out of control for my mind. Just out of control. There are external factors that I cannot stop or push [. . .] So, I can't even eat food. When I eat it I just take it out because of the stress. It was too much. Every day I was crying [. . .] I mean the time that I spent waiting for the interview, and getting the response from the government it's just wasted. (Aaron, person seeking asylum, now refugee)

Here, Aaron describes how the apparent state suspension of his agency leads to internal conflict ([Fanon \[1952\] 2008](#)); as a person claiming asylum, he is eager to establish a secure and safe life, but the stasis of his waiting inhibits this with embodied impacts. Similarly, Liya recalls the distress of being made to *wait* for medical treatment—whilst also *waiting* to be housed after her initial 'screening meeting'—and how this, in turn, impacted her mental wellbeing. At this time, she had a serious and painful skin complaint, and she described how, despite seeking medical attention, she was recurrently told to 'wait' for an undefined period of time. Here, Liya's human right to have access to health care is overshadowed by this unquantified *waiting* of the asylum process, and her physical pain and the condition are subsequently prolonged:

When we went to [Town1] it was then when I told them that I am to go to hospital. They told me to wait. I showed them the thing that was happening. It was in my bottom, my hands and stuff. They told me to wait [. . .] I'm suffering from it even now. At that time, if I could, if I got help or the right medicine at that time maybe I would have been better by now. (Liya, person seeking asylum)

The recurrent and relentless nature of the *waiting* is tangible in participants' accounts, as is the sense that time has been 'wasted' and opportunities lost for Aaron, Faahim and Liya. However, as many people seeking asylum are fleeing persecution in their own country, they have little choice but to *wait* in these often-deprived conditions (Mayblin et al. 2020) and in ways that impact not only a person's emotional health but also their physical wellbeing (Phillimore and Cheung 2021).

Data analysis also shows that the subjective and objective effects of this State-controlled *waiting* on a person's body and mind (Grace et al. 2018; Phillimore and Cheung 2021) are further compounded by the material restrictions of being legally recognised as an 'asylum seeker' in the UK and receiving an application registration card (ARC). Whilst the process of being identified as such 'legalises' a person's status and presence in the UK, it also formalises their exclusion from work, travel and access to public funds or educational opportunities (Morrice et al. 2021; Coddington 2019; Marinucci and Riva 2021). Faahim, for example, explains that whilst *waiting* for a decision on his asylum claim, he wanted to 'learn English in college' and hoped to enrol at university if his claim was successful. However, he expressed frustration at being unable to access educational opportunities as a person seeking asylum and that when he was granted 'leave to remain' and able to 'go to the college and they give you, like, 10 h a week', his advanced English language skills were dismissed. As such, he was still not learning English to a level that would enable him to apply to study at university, and, instead, he felt that 'in the class, all they're teaching you, it is like kids' stuff that is not high level'. Participants, therefore, indicate that the restrictions imposed on them whilst *waiting* for an asylum claim decision in the UK result in them having seriously curtailed or 'thin agency' (Klocker 2007) when striving to manage and improve their own life conditions (Mayblin et al. 2020). This impact of waiting on people seeking asylum in the UK, therefore, has synergies with the impacts of colonial power on colonised people. As described by Fabian (2014), by perpetuating a discourse that colonised peoples (here, people seeking asylum) are less advanced, administrations deny them a presence in the same age as the colonisers (or those not subject to asylum control); there is a denial of 'coevalness'.

In Foucauldian terms, waiting as a bordering practice thereby contributes to the creation of a subject that is not able to self-actualise and, for Du Bois ([1903] 1996), can experience a 'double consciousness'; they know what they need, but they are also aware that their behaviours are bound by State restrictions on the present and their futures. Consequently, data illustrate the ways in which *waiting* and the control of 'time' act as a dimension of power that works *on* people seeking asylum to erode their often already diminished sense of self and 'worthiness'. Whilst *waiting* with restricted rights and entitlements does present obstacles to the life opportunities of people seeking asylum, this also works *on* people as 'the subjects' of power. This leads to participants being aware of the limited 'worth' that their lives are given by external others, with consequences for how they position themselves in UK life. Aaron, for example, knows that he has the right to claim asylum in the UK but also expresses acceptance at the 'slow violence' of being detained 'in jail' when he arrived, 'because I entered illegally in the UK' and because 'It's a rule'. Similarly, for Liya, the fact that she 'didn't get anything' for her skin complaint led to her reluctant acceptance that to *wait* is the only 'viable alternative' (Klocker 2007, p. 85) to the frustration and upset of being unheard:

There is no use going back to that walk in service again [. . .] In my mind I was like there's just no point, I will just keep suffering, and wait for a month. (Liya, person seeking asylum)

The waiting inherent in UK asylum claim practices therefore undermines a person's agency to orientate themselves in the world, but it is also a 'technology of power' that operates in similar ways to the 'rule of difference' underpinning colonial logic (Chatterjee 1993); the treatment of people seeking asylum, and the related restriction on their right to work, education and health care, creates a group of people positioned by 'politics and publics' as being 'worth less than others' (Mayblin 2019, p. 108). Our analysis develops this argument by showing how the 'violent uncertainty' (Grace et al. 2018) of prolonged state-imposed *waiting* is also a 'technology of self' in that it supports the creation of 'subjects'—people seeking asylum—who recognise that they are positioned as 'less deserving' and that this is what they are expected to endure whilst being 'in' the UK asylum system.

6.2. Dispersal: A Barrier to Freedom, Self-Determination and 'Belonging'

Participants' accounts show that state-imposed im/mobility—the practice of dispersal—is also a 'technology of self' that works *on* people seeking asylum in the UK and modifies their relationship to power. As noted, once a person receives their ARC and related status, they are forcibly transported to designated dispersal areas for 'resettlement'. Data presented show that this imposed and sudden relocation—consistently preceded by physically and mentally overwhelming experiences for people seeking asylum (Ramsay 2017)—further diminishes a person's ability to influence decisions that impact their long-term futures. Furthermore, migration studies give considerable attention to the significance of interpersonal networks in promoting social connections and belonging (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Walsh 2018) in ways that embed or anchor migrants in their host community (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2015; Ryan 2018). The practice of 'dispersal' therefore also removes a person's freedom to determine the 'place and space' in which they live and feel best supported (Zetter et al. 2005) and displaces them from sometimes established networks and modes of belonging (van Liempt and Miellet 2021); it can act as an exclusionary border (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012; Hynes 2011).

Honour, for example, fled her homeland with her daughter and lived undocumented in the UK for a number of years, during which time they developed a supportive social network. Eventually, the family was made aware that they could apply for asylum in the UK. However, the practice of dispersing people claiming asylum does not accommodate human social and emotional needs being met by familiarity with spaces or social connection (Zetter et al. 2005; Strang and Quinn 2021; Parker 2020; Spicer 2008; Goodson and Phillimore 2008). Instead, Honour explains how the dispersal process, infused with the temporal control noted previously, forcibly plucked her family from the security of a known place and imposed sudden relocation to an unknown place:

I've never been to anywhere. So, that morning they came with a van, 'we are moving you'. We said 'OK'. So when I was going they said the accommodation, 'we are taking you to [City 2] now, not [City 1] anymore'. 'OK'. We Googled [City 2]. It's far. We don't have a choice; we just have to go. [. . .] I said 'as long as I can find a roof on our head'. So, when we got close to [City 2] they were like 'we are sorry, the accommodation is not available, we are taking you to [City 3]'. (Honour, person seeking asylum, now refugee)

Similarly, Kemi lived in the UK for some 15 years before being supported by a charity to claim asylum. In this time, she had a child and also developed strong and supportive social relationships in the culturally diverse city in which she lived. As with Honour's family, the dispersal process disregards this, and, consequently, Kemi describes the temporal and geographical experience of dispersal as an externally controlled and, therefore, disorienting and unsettling experience for her and her child:

So, they took us to a hotel. We stayed in the hotel for, was it three days or something? So, I can remember after that they were like, 'OK, next Monday', and the bus came that we were going to [Town 2] on. So, I said 'OK', and I packed our bags and everything, which I did. It was a long journey though. I can't even remember the hours. [. . .] So we came to [City 1]. It was Home Office, like, hotel. I thought I was going to be long there. I didn't, I spend just two weeks there because I can remember when I got there I was like, I wanted to cry. 'Don't worry'. I don't like them saying that to me. 'Don't worry, you won't stay long here'. I'm like OK, amen, amen. (Kemi, person seeking asylum)

The constant movement that Honour and Kemi experience during the early stages of dispersal compounds their sense of dislocation and 'violent uncertainty' (Grace et al. 2018, p. 904). Rather than entering into an administrative process that, in essence, should position individuals as bearers of the right to protection, the dispersal process has no regard for human emotional and social attachment and the well-documented 'ways of belonging' (Levitt and Schiller 2004; Walsh 2018) that enable newcomers to embed in their new lives (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2015; Ryan 2018). Instead, it is disorienting, dismisses a person or families' needs and focuses on the processing of people in ways that are disempowering, dehumanising and give their lives and futures minimal worth (Mayblin et al. 2020), characteristics that resonate with the colonial logic that the European administration is superior and the racialised other is inherently inferior (Chatterjee 1993; Mayblin 2017). In ways similar to Aaron and Liya, Honour and Kemi experience the internal struggle of knowing they need more certainty and stability in their lives but that they have to endure practices imposed by the UK government. Again, the conflict is managed by their surrendering to the strategies of the UK government in the knowledge that this 'processing' is unavoidable if they are to pursue their request for asylum (Fanon [1952] 2008). In this way, dispersal politics, as a feature of the 'arsenal of [migration] control' (Bloch et al. 2013, p. 16), prioritise the creation of a 'hostile environment' above a person's right to asylum.

The seemingly double consciousness described can, however, also lead to participants internalising this exclusionary 'difference' in ways that influence their behaviours. Since the introduction of the policy of dispersal in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, successive UK governments have justified this practice as a strategy to avoid geographical concentrations of people seeking asylum, placing an unequal 'burden' on some local authorities (Bloch and Schuster 2005). However, as noted, this results in people seeking asylum being relocated to areas where cheap housing is available (Darling 2016a, 2016b; Hoggett et al. 2013) and resources are often limited (Darling 2016a, p. 486; Phillimore and Goodson 2006; Spicer 2008). Consequently, like *waiting*, dispersal is a 'technology of power' that controls the location of people seeking asylum (Bloch and Schuster 2005; Darling 2011) but also differentiates and divides them from others living in the UK (Darling 2011). Aaron explains, for example, that whilst he has positive experiences of accessing specialist support in the community to which he was dispersed, there are also many spaces where he does not feel welcome:

I know this place. Almost 100 people in local support organisations [. . .] but I know that some place, it doesn't seem like, this is for us. It's for the people who belong to the real UK citizens. We don't have the confidence that all the parking areas, and everything, belong to us. I mean it doesn't. (Aaron, person seeking asylum, now refugee)

For Faahim, this marginalisation and differentiation also continued after he and his family were granted 'leave to remain' in the UK and they were looking for a local authority or private rented accommodation. At this time, Faahim was acutely aware of areas that he felt were welcoming and would enable his family to 'embed' in their new home city (Ryan 2018), and this was a dominant factor in their housing preference:

There is a lot of home where as a refugee you can't live in it, because like [where] you can live it is full of English people. They were not expecting you to come to there. Okay. Everybody knows that. They know this area, even the police would come to you saying, 'no, this area where you go to, we do not like that'. So the response is 'no', because that's not a good area. [. . .] I am like I need to be, like, I'd prefer to be around people like me, not English people. (Faahim, person seeking asylum, now refugee)

By verbalising that there are places for people 'like us' or 'like me' and other places that 'don't belong to us' (people seeking asylum and refugees) but, rather, to 'the real UK citizens', Aaron and Faahim express how dispersal contributes to the interiorisation of 'difference' (Chatterjee 1993; Du Bois [1903] 1996; Fanon [1952] 2008). Whilst this supports arguments that relocation to areas of 'territorial stigmatisation' increases feelings of isolation and liminality for people seeking asylum (Darling 2016a, p. 486; Phillimore and Goodson 2006; Spicer 2008), participants' accounts also show that dispersal is imposed on people but that it also works *on* individuals. In the same way that the colonial project was reliant on structural differentiation between the coloniser and colonised, and the colonised internalising this difference (Fanon [1952] 2008), we argue that UK hostile asylum politics are, in part, reliant on the people seeking asylum surrendering to the 'slow violence' therein and/or internalising their 'difference'. As a 'technology of self', we suggest that dispersal contributes to the creation of the modified 'subject' that we refer to as the 'colonised self'.

6.3. The Embodiment of Power and the 'Colonised Self'

As identified in previous studies, the bordering practices we consider—*waiting* and 'dispersal'—contribute to the 'arsenal of control' (Bloch et al. 2013) enacted by the UK government to exclude, punish and deter people seeking asylum (Griffiths 2021) and disrupt strategies and opportunities for 'belonging' (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012; Hynes 2011) and homemaking (van Liempt and Miellet 2021).

Whilst showing that these time- and space-based dimensions of power (Foucault 1979) restrict a person's life in the UK, we also uniquely show that these dimensions act as a 'technology of self' and can create individuals that internalise—with embodied impacts—a sense of diminished worth and 'difference' compared to other citizens (Du Bois [1903] 1996; Fanon [1952] 2008). Here, we further argue that the ways in which these 'dimensions of power' interact—within which other 'modes of control' such as restricted access to education are experienced—act *on* people claiming asylum and create the 'colonised self' we describe.

Building on their accounts of *waiting* and 'dispersal', participants go on to describe the ways in which these 'modes of power' are further embodied as a physical sensation. We contend here that this can manifest in the avoidance of both social engagement and/or directing criticism at UK bordering practices. When, for example, explaining their experience of *waiting* and 'dispersal', and their associated inability to control time and the space in which they live, Liya describes feeling that '*you can't breathe*', and Aaron recalls that, '*Just physically it hurts; I have a pain here. There is something, when I get stressed, I don't know*'. Aaron then goes on to make connections between these physical symptoms and the 'fear' that he feels because he does not have control of his future of the people in his surrounding environment:

There is a fear in general, a fear that we do not deserve. There is a fear that those people do not see us the way we see them [. . .] So from that, if you have that fear you don't put yourself in anything that's the big thing. (Aaron, person seeking asylum, now refugee)

This sentiment is also expressed by Liya when explaining how her experience of *waiting* and the geographical location in which she has to live has created a liminal existence. Here, she describes how it makes her ‘feel’ and how, like Aaron, it changes her behaviour: ‘It feels like we don’t belong here in general [. . .] [so] I better stay away from it [specific places]’. As noted previously, participants recognise that they have ‘thin agency’ (Klocker 2007) in exercising control over their lives and make choices within the few ‘viable alternatives’ that they have. Accounts also show that participants feel that there are places that are for ‘people like’ them (Aaron and Faahim), and, here, both Liya and Aaron refer to a collective ‘we’ to which they belong—people that are refugees or claiming asylum. In response to the ‘fear’ described, and the ongoing restrictions imposed on their lives, participants internalise that they are different from ‘those people’ (Aaron) and, rather than engage in wider social life, describe feeling that they only ‘belong’ in communities that they see as sharing their ‘difference’:

There’s Somalis, there’s Jamaicans, Pakistanis. Our next door neighbours are Pakistanis, the other next door is Jamaicans. So, it just feels diverse [. . .] so I’m like, “OK, Yeah, there’s so many refugees, as well, here. Like, even though we don’t know them, they are refugees, as well. [. . .] It doesn’t feel like you’re in a place where you are, you are, you are the only one there. It just feels like you blend in, like. (Yonas, UN refugee)

Obstacles to ‘belonging’, and strategies used to overcome this, have received significant attention in migration studies (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012; Walsh 2018; Ryan 2018). However, accounts here resonate with both Fanon’s and Du Bois’ work: Black people living in a White-dominated society can experience a ‘double consciousness’ (Du Bois [1903] 1996), and colonised Black people can behave ‘within bounds’ expected by White people, including feeling like they should ‘go back’ to where they ‘belong[ed]’ (Fanon [1952] 2008, p. 86). All the participants we consider here are people of colour, and we draw on these concepts to show that people seeking asylum in the UK can internalise the racialised anti-migrant narratives and see themselves through the eyes of the majority culture. As such, we contribute by showing that time and space, as features of migration control—in Foucauldian terms—work on the individual and create subjects that respond to the policy narrative that they do not ‘belong’ in the UK. As described by Foucault, these ‘technologies of self’ lead to participants modifying and acquiring certain behaviours (Foucault 1988, p. 16); they keep their social interactions ‘within bounds’ and, in the absence of being able to ‘go back’ (Fanon [1952] 2008), they identify spaces of *belonging*.

Participants also internalise the colonial logic that we and others argue underpins migration control in the UK (Mayblin 2017) because they understand that their skills and qualifications are positioned as being of less value, or inferior to, formal qualifications awarded in the UK. This is initially because people have to *wait* to receive a decision on their asylum claim before they can use any skills and/or qualifications they gained prior to coming to the UK. If they are granted the ‘right to work’, their qualifications may not then be internationally recognised. Honour, for example, was a nurse in her country of origin, and Abu an accountant, but, despite expressing a desire to return to these careers, both now work in voluntary services supporting people seeking asylum and are resigned to this for the foreseeable future. Similarly, Aaron and Liya, despite explaining that they had both initially hoped to study at a university in the UK, have modified this aspiration because they are not able to access educational opportunities whilst *waiting* for a decision on their claim. Scholars give considerable focus to the obstructive nature of both the higher education border in the UK and the complexity of procedures for validating and translating qualifications from the country of origin (Lambrechts 2020; Murray and Gray 2021; Murray 2022). Data analysis shows, however, that the external control experienced during *waiting* and ‘dispersal’ contributes to participants limiting their aspirations and what they expect from the UK government, and, instead, they display fear and avoid assertion. Liya, for example, describes how her previous treatment and curtailed agency now mean that ‘Sometimes you get scared [. . .] if I contact them [education providers] what do I have to say. What am I supposed to say? Something like that’, and, similarly, Aaron, rather than

'asking for more' from the education system, now feels that 'we ourselves have to take it [the lack of opportunity]'.

A further way in which this embodiment of the colonial logic is expressed is when participants express only gratitude and avoid criticism of the UK government. For us, this resonates with Fanon's ([1952] 2008) assertion that colonised people in Algeria internalise the colonial logic that they have been saved by the White oppressor. Abu, for example, came to the UK with his wife and adult daughter to flee conflict in his country of birth. Below, he describes the widely criticised accommodation (Phillimore and Goodson 2006; Phillips 2006) that they were housed in upon arrival in positive terms:

It was very good really but, you know, we have to stay all three of us in one room. It was OK for us. It's OK for us, and stay for the second interview. We feel we were doing ok, as I told you, you know. We were staying in one room with a bathroom inside. We go to one kitchen. All of us. More than 200 guys, or something like this. (Abu, person seeking asylum, now refugee)

Later, during a family group interview, his daughter describes how lengthy bureaucratic interactions with State housing provisions negatively impacted Abu's mental wellbeing. However, Abu is quick to minimise this, stating:

I don't want to mention that because it was, I've had so many good things. I don't want to mention, you know, that small thing [. . .] They find this flat for us, so I don't mention that because it's a teeny thing amongst so many good things.

By describing the overcrowded conditions of the hostel accommodation (Phillips 2006) as 'OK', and by not wanting 'to mention' his family's negative interactions with the State, Abu seemingly avoids drawing attention to his family and being critical of the 'rescuer'; he does not want to appear unthankful for the protection his family has since been granted. As such, the conflict revealed between Abu's internal wellbeing and external presentation is similar to that of Algerian people in Fanon's work; Black people in White-dominated contexts can self-identify with the socially constructed ideas that their oppressors create about them and modify their behaviours accordingly. Here, Abu's desire to express gratitude, whilst genuine, coheres with White narratives that people granted asylum have been 'freed' from their previous lives (Fanon [1952] 2008). While acknowledging that previous studies document how bordering practices contribute to people claiming asylum in the UK resisting 'slow violence' (Mayblin et al. 2020) in varied forms (Saunders and Al-Om 2022), we show that the practices described also contribute to the creation of a 'subject'—the colonised self—that we argue has a function to the UK government.

7. Discussion

Overall, this paper makes a new empirical and theoretical contribution to sociological understandings of migration governance. Firstly, we add weight to a growing body of de-colonial inter-disciplinary knowledge that positions contemporary international and national migration controls as cognisant of its racialised colonial origins (Mayblin 2014; Krause 2021; Abuya et al. 2021; Achiume 2019; Landau 2019). We do this by uniquely applying Foucault's concept of governmentality and subjectification, supported by Fanon ([1952] 2008) and Du Bois' ([1903] 1996) theorisations of enslaved and colonised peoples' experiences, to the narratives of those that have claimed asylum in the UK. In doing so, we make important connections between the structures of power, control and hegemony that have emerged from the colonial era and remain in the present (Chatterjee 1993; Quijano and Ennis 2000). Specifically, we show how 'colonial logics' can be internalised by people seeking asylum in the UK in ways that lead to them modifying their behaviours to enable them to endure, despite being subjected to 'slow violence' (Mayblin et al. 2020).

Foucault's theories of power have been applied to the governance of asylum in the UK and the ways in which the policy of dispersal and associated periods of *waiting* are dynamics of power used by governments to control and regulate behaviours (Odhiambo-Abuya 2005; Cabot 2012). We develop these theoretical understandings by illustrating how the externally controlled practices of dispersal and *waiting*—practices also characterised by further debilitating restrictions (Sales 2002; Dwyer 2005; Mayblin 2016)—can affect a person's agency, erode their self-worth and aspirations and seriously limit their ability to self-actualise and orientate themselves in the world. By positioning the practices as 'technologies of self', we contribute by showing that these impacts are a form of 'slow violence' (Mayblin et al. 2020) but that they also work *on* people seeking asylum, leading to embodied outcomes and subsequent behaviour modifications (Foucault 1988) that have utility to the UK government.

We further add to the understanding of the relationship between contemporary migration governance and Britain's colonial history by combining our application of Foucault with scholarly considerations of the ways in which imperial rule was enacted and is reproduced. Chatterjee (1993), for example, argues that colonial administrations relied on 'the rule of difference' that positions the coloniser as superior and the colonised as inferior to justify the colonial project. Fanon ([1952] 2008) and Du Bois ([1903] 1996) further show that enslaved and/or colonised people, living in a constant condition of inferiority, may perceive themselves through the eyes of a White-dominant population and internalise aspects of 'the myth of difference' (Chimni 1998). For Fanon ([1952] 2008), this is experienced as a conflict between the internal and external that can lead to Black people experiencing an 'inferiority complex', and, for Du Bois ([1903] 1996), this can manifest in a 'double consciousness'. Whilst both result in Black people modifying their behaviours, for Fanon ([1952] 2008), Black people can adopt external behaviours that cohere with the oppressors' socially constructed representations of the 'colonised'. For Du Bois ([1903] 1996), however, this results in a 'double consciousness' whereby Black people are aware of their own identities, whilst also recognising how they are perceived by the dominant White population. Our analysis shows, then, that 'waiting' and 'dispersal' are 'strategies of control' that also rely on 'the rule of difference' and operate *on* people seeking asylum in the UK in ways that resonate with Fanon and Du Bois' theorisations. As 'technologies of self', these practices work on the bodies and minds of our participants—albeit to varying degrees—to create 'subjects' that manage the implication inherent in UK asylum politics that they are 'worth less than others' (Mayblin 2019, p. 108). For some, this is embodied and experienced as physical and/or mental health challenges. Others employ strategies that include a reluctant recognition of their curtailed agency; avoidance of being critical of the State and its representatives; and the restriction of social movement to where people feel they 'belong'.

This 'subject' contrasts with accounts of people seeking asylum as agentic people who resist and challenge control (Wilcock 2019; Schouw Iversen 2021; Saunders and Al-Om 2022). Rather, we argue that for our participants, the restrictive conditions within which people live seriously limit their already 'thin agency' (Klocker 2007). The result is, as noted by Fanon, a 'subject' that manages the 'slow violence' of the asylum system, leading to 'subjects' who stay 'within bounds' defined by the State, both bureaucratically and symbolically. In the same way that Fanon describes colonialism as a 'total project', reliant on structural differentiation between the coloniser and colonised and the colonised internalising this difference (Fanon [1952] 2008), we argue that UK's hostile asylum politics are reliant on 'subjects'—people seeking asylum—internalising rather than resisting the 'myth of difference' (Chimni 1998); we refer to this 'subject' as the 'colonised self'.

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Notes

- ¹ Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution'.
- ² The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (art. 1) and 'everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status' (art. 2). Additionally, 'everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person' (art. 3).
- ³ Article 1 of the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development states: 'The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.'

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