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**Northumbria  
University**  
NEWCASTLE

Forced Migration and Anticolonial  
Geographies of Regrounding:  
An Ethnography of the Voluntary and  
Community Sector  
in North East England

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PhD

2022



Forced Migration and Anticolonial  
Geographies of Regrounding:  
An Ethnography of the Voluntary and  
Community Sector  
in North East England

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the requirements of the University of  
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degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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*A distinction must be made between that writing which enables us to hold on to life even as we are clinging to old hurts and wounds and that writing which offers to us a space where we are able to confront reality in such a way that we live more fully. Such writing is not an anchor that we mistakenly cling to so as not to drown. It is writing that truly rescues, that enables us to reach the shore, to recover. — bell hooks*



## Abstract

The moral panic of 21st century discourses on migration serve to justify increasingly dehumanising treatments for those who cross borders. In this hostile political ecosystem, the framing of a certain kind migration as threat is premised on the so-called natural continuity between territory, national sovereignty, and citizenship. The Voluntary and Community Sector's (VCS) response to the abject treatment of migrants has largely been forged through a humanitarian discourse, paradoxically aligning with that of the purported democratic state. The role of the VCS, especially when it is routed through the state-sanctioned model of charitable organisation, does not sufficiently challenge the nation-state's position so as to uproot its inherent racism. This thesis builds upon the work of many scholars who have argued that the formal status of citizenship never satisfies one's desire for belonging, especially for racialised migrants. It argues that to adequately approach contemporary migration, a dis-integrative perspective is necessary. By examining three fundamental relationships at play in the framing and ways of addressing migration in the UK, I rethink the trinity 'national belonging, integration, citizenship' and move towards an alternative articulation of belonging that takes seriously the socio-materiality of our social worlds. The lens in this thesis therefore connects the relationships between (1) the VCS and the state; (2) integration and asylum; and as a recognition of my own intervention in these questions, between (3) participation and the researcher. Through a long-term engagement with, and exploration of, two charity organisations working with migrants in the North East of England, I critically engage with expressions of belonging that are premised on other terms than those set out in the collapse of European Empires. Those are mutual trust, common interest, decolonised attachment, and feminist material solidarity, which are defining features of what I conceptualise as 'Regrounding'.



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## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the *Faculty Ethics Committee* on 26.07.2019.

**I declare that the Word Count of this thesis is 81,758 words.**

Name: Kahina Meziant

Signature:

Date: January 16, 2023



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

What would it take to imagine a different kind of future – one in which the hierarchies that currently structure human mobility stopped making sense; a future in which political questions about mobility started from premises other than those associated with borders, citizens and migrants? Why do such alternative starting points seem almost unimaginable, despite a well-established body of critique that has long challenged the givenness of prevailing geopolitical boundaries and their associated subjectivities? How might this critique be extended in ways that can shift horizons of the possible?

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McNevin 2019, p. 2

Oh yeah, so, do I feel that Segue equips its members with tools for adapting to, to British society? On the whole no, I think the main frontier or main issue if you like, that really gets in the way of everything is communication. I don't feel like we strive enough to find out what our members' languages are, what languages they speak, and communicate with them on their level. It's a lot about like, living from our perspective, of the people who run it, as opposed to the perspective of, or from the understanding of someone who is a member with Segue. I feel that there's a lot of research and insight into what our users' needs are, and if we were able to communicate a bit more clearly with them to find out what those were, we would just be more on a level and understand. They would understand us more and we would understand them more, and I feel that anything like that you know, anything that bridges the gap like that is going to help someone adapt to the society that they live in. Yeah, I do feel strongly that what Segue should be about is cross cultural learning as well as obviously supporting our members' wellbeing, that's got to come like, first and foremost, but cross cultural you know, transferred knowledge and learning, and capital basically. I don't feel that

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we effectively communicate with our members enough to do that, so yeah, therefore, I feel like we don't even know how, how they would better be integrated into society and we can't really communicate from our side what it means to be British, even though I wouldn't say that the British cultural identity is that strong particularly, you know, it's still, I know that it's still, take an estimated guess and guess that many of our members who come would be very curious you know, to learn more about life within the UK, and how people live, and etc. and, likewise, people who run it, or the people who are native to the UK who come, I am sure would be very curious to know from the other side.

—Calum<sup>1</sup>, volunteer and trustee at Segue, reflexive interview on April 4, 2020

### 1.1 Opening

Borders are porous, mobile, material, and immaterial; they contain, control, but also hold (Favell 2022). They can be elusive, yet when they are intentionally mobilised by state power, they invariably establish a hierarchy between those who are to live freely and those who are not (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012; 2013; Picozza 2021; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018). During our interview in April 2020, Calum volunteer and trustee of Segue, one of the two charities featuring in this thesis, summarised all that I try to problematise about borders, the way they materialise, structure thoughts about the world, and the way that people in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in the UK come to view what is commonly known as 'integration'. Calum joined Segue, one of two organisations that this thesis is based on, as a substitute music tutor for when Jack, the appointed tutor, could not make it. He was born in the UK and spent all his life here. When we started talking about Segue and my research, he was full of insightful comments that exposed the central question of this thesis: to what extent can the VCS create spaces that foster 'dis-integrative' (Favell 2022) approaches to migrants' establishing in the UK? The need for such an approach arise from the central realisation that integration is a project that can never be fulfilled for racialised migrants.

Thinkers have argued that the long colonial history of Euro-American countries is a testament to the construction of the social order, the ruins of which we live in today and continues to centre 'integrative' (Favell 2021) approaches to mobility and multiculture: the subject vs. alien split (Bloom 2018; Sharma 2020). While on the surface, this order is founded on a binary principle inclusion-exclusion, whereby autochthony (and/or wealth) entitles one to inclusion by default, in a globalised world that thrives on international and intercontinental flows of goods and people (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018), more nuanced terms under which inclusion is favourable have been proposed, to create what has been termed *differential inclusion* (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012;

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<sup>1</sup>All names attributed to people, places and organisations are pseudonyms.

2013). This is a model of recognition that is rooted in a globalised market economy that cannot simply afford to prevent *all* movement, and instead filters, surveils, selects, and hierarchises people and their labour, spatially and temporally (Back et al. 2012; Darling 2013; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

At the same time, with a reported 63% increase in the number of asylum applications in the UK in 2021 (GOV.UK 2021), totalling 48,540 applications, the “culture of hospitality” (Darling 2013) that exists in the UK constitutes the bedrock of civil society’s response to the violence of borders and differential inclusion. While Jonathan Darling rightly points at the ways in which urban politics of hospitality and ‘welcome’ work to establish the city’s ‘moral precepts’ (Darling 2013, p. 1785), a critical examination of practices of what he – following Walters – calls “domopolitics” (2013, p. 1785), or the politics of governance that creates (and celebrates) the nation (or locale) as a *safe* harbour that must remain so, exposes further bordering practices. Notably, Bagelman (2013) also formulated a nuanced critique of the Sanctuary discourse and posture in relation to questions of asylum. Specifically, she illustrates how such “domopolitics” in fact *depoliticises* border struggles practices, such as the wait for people in the asylum system, by providing spaces of temporary relief. Importantly, both critiques grapple with the tension between providing support, and not doing so because of the high risk of co-option. With this in mind, my contention is that we need to scrutinise civil society structures and practices, and in particular the VCS that does the work of supporting “refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to integrate with the local community” (e-mail exchange with Marie and Sharon, both Segue trustees, 12.05.20221) in light of colonial history and the taken-for-grantedness of national sovereignty as *the* form of belonging that counts.

Winter 2021 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> month of my involvement with Segue and forms the empirical heart of this study. It is by way of an in-depth ethnography that I came to ask the central question that I bring up in section 1.5, and the contributions laid out in chapter 8. These can be articulated through three relationship that shaped my understanding of the process of integration of migrants: (1) the relationship between the VCS and the state; (2) the relationship between integration and asylum; and (3) the relationship between participation and the researcher. My involvement with Segue pushes beyond the frame of classic ethnography that mobilises participant observation (Cragg and Cook 2007) and interviews, by including a commitment to accountability to the communities that are subject of research, democratising the research process, and hoping “to contribute towards social change movements” (Cahill 2007, p. 268), which is why I termed this approach *participatory ethnography in the context of an organisation* (or engaged institutional ethnography), as chapter 4 discusses at length. Alongside Segue, I also took part in another group in the region, although more distantly, called Green Space Garden (GSG). This allowed me to bring contrast to my exploration of the VCS, which, as I discuss in chapter 2, is highly heterogeneous. As such, this thesis sits within

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and speaks to debates in critical geography of migration, with an explicit focus on the processes of so-called ‘integration’ and the intervention of the VCS in this effort.

After this introduction, I begin the chapter with a brief ‘state of affairs’ of the asylum process in the United Kingdom, as it is fundamental to understand how bordering through immigration policy works in order to understand how less visible bordering practices are folded into integrationist discourses and reproduced in the VCS. Then, I describe the project’s conceptual boundaries, its contributions to geographical literature, and the methodological foundations of this study. The subsequent section introduces the two charities with which I have collaborated throughout my PhD, and then proceeds to unpack the central research question that guided the inductive process. Section 6, ‘a note on language’ acknowledges and problematises the use of terminologies of ‘forced’ migration, migrants, and, while I do not believe there is a resolution to this question, I explain the reasoning behind the language choices I made in this thesis. In this section, I also discuss the ethical commitment I made to my participants, specifically focusing on how to protect the anonymity of the groups and people who were involved in this thesis. I therefore explain which strategy I used to do so. Finally, in the last section, I outline the general structure of the thesis.

### 1.2 Anticolonial Geographies of Regrounding

Like many scholars in recent critical theory (Berlant 2016; McNevin 2019), I believe that, as Les Back (2021) puts it, “simply listing troubles is not enough” (p. 5). That is, although the work of critiquing is essential, it is not divorced from that of imagining other worlds, or in Anne McNevin (2019) words, extending the critique to shift “horizons of the possible” (2019, p. 2). This is not to say that this thesis’ propositions are optimistically hopeful. Instead, it is in line with Back’s “worldly radical hope” (Back 2021, p. 7), which requires work, paying attention to the present, as well as being ready for the unexpected in the ruins of “unfolding catastrophe” (2021, p. 7). Anticolonial struggles, predominantly in the Twentieth century South Indian context showed how a shared commitment to ‘do the work’ of fighting the settlers can be the common ground upon which resistance operates (Davies 2019). What these struggles teach us, according to Davies, is that fighting colonialism was never a unified, homogeneous movement, but rather a heterogeneous collection of activities and practices “which crucially were productive of new geographies of the world” (2019, p. 2). In other words, an anticolonial approach foregrounds the importance of plurality allied with a shared commitment to *effectively* decolonise the world, which means to do away with the structures (legal, material, systemic, relational, psychological) and the value-system that contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of a colonised world, including borders and im-

## 1.2 Anticolonial Geographies of Regrounding

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migration controls<sup>2</sup>. The point of anchoring this work in anticolonial theory, thus, encompasses a series of practices enacted by the VCS, but also by me, the researcher, in doing the work of shifting some of the lingering colonial structures in voluntary and community organisations at the heart of this work. This is how I articulate my commitment to social justice in this thesis.

As hinted at, colonisation is not only happening around us, but also to and in us. Unwittingly, our bodies are born into an assignation that we can do nothing about, yet this assignation will determine a large part of the life we will lead, as Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) put it in reference to colonial encounters, “in one stroke, bodies were classified and assigned a given place on the planet” (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, p. 205). Importantly, this twist of fate defines how people will be able to move. As Favell (2022) describes, “movement across borders...are a feature of a highly globalised world” (p. 6), yet the geographies of mobility are uneven and contribute to reinscribe (and expose) classist, racist, and sexist norms about who has the right to freedom of movement (Picozza 2021), who is moving only to sustain the freedom of the few (El-Enany 2020), and who is constrained to ‘fugitivity’ as the only form of free movement (Hesse 2014). McNevin (2019) argues that under the current global structures of “governmentality” (e.g., state, intergovernmental, humanitarian and non-governmental organisations), the management of migratory flows operates as a rational form of administration of rights, and overall control (McNevin 2019, p. 6).

On a similar line of thought, Pallister-Wilkins (2022b) urges to scrutinise humanitarian help, not because the practice of saving lives is wrong, but to identify the ways in which it works to reinforce the nation-state, sovereignty and bordering practices and framings. These framings do so by opposing sovereign saviours to stateless victims. When people crossing sea borders reach the shore, such frameworks force the latter into a bureaucratic machine that operates like a black box, where the various forces of the governmentality machine *converge* to ensure that no single top-down force can be singled out and made responsible as culprit of the violence (McNevin 2019), and instead, only be celebrated for saving people from ‘failed democracies’. While the UK is privileging a closed borders policy via an explicit engineered hostility toward people crossing borders (Goodfellow 2019), the convergence of forces at work in filtering passage is one described by Favell (2021) as *integrative*. This process is not unique, and similar strategies are in place in the United States, such that, in that context, McNevin describes it as one that sets out migration on a linearly progressive timeline with the “end-goal” of citizenship (McNevin 2019, p. 4).

To envision an alternative way of moving across borders, conceptualisations of the autonomy of migration and ‘no borders’ movements, have come a long way. Focusing on the *dis-integrative* (Favell 2021; 2022) aspects of mobility (e.g., the way borders are being reshaped, national forma-

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<sup>2</sup>According to Gilmore (2022), interpersonal relationships also exhibit the structures of systemic violence. As a result, relationships and the ‘everyday’ are important sites for its reproduction; therefore, if we wish to end cycles of violence, we ought to alter our interactions with– and the way we relate to each other and the planet.

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tions damaged) offers avenues to think through what feels like an unsettling phase of transition between orders, which Berlant (2011) called ‘the glitch’ (p. 198). Thinking outside of the nation-state is an anticolonial practice in itself, which necessarily implies to resist humanitarian (and, I argue, charitable) forms of solidarity, particularly in relation to people crossing borders. For that, it aspires to *decolonise* all people’s attachment to place and colonial geographies as set out by the Imperial order (Sharma 2020). This, in turn, foregrounds the need for a decoupling of the taken-for-granted connection between lineage and entitlement to place (e.g., national sovereignty and autochthony), and a greater understanding of the Earth as *all of* humanity’s only commons (Sharma 2020). This is where *regrounding* comes into play. By using this expression, I am attempting to do some of the political work of hope by formulating another way to be mobile that does not suggest or require any form of assimilation to be both recognised *and* to have rights.

The prefix *Re* suggests a repetition that indicates the nonlinear, transformative and re(o)curing process by which people go through over and over as they move. *Grounding* goes beyond the literal relation to the soil, although it is in the context of my engagement with a gardening project that I came to think about the term as fitting for an expression of belonging that is anchored in materiality and social relations while not being static (see chapter 6 ‘Regrounding’). It says that having roots somewhere does not preclude the possibility to ground somewhere else and does not undo original attachment(s) to other place(s). Regrounding implies that it is something one does (as much as possible) on one’s own terms, while being facilitated by those already in place. As such, it can be wired through music or sonic practices as chapter 7 shows, and through other forms of artistic, and socio-material practices. In essence, regrounding is a process of grounding oneself anew on one’s terms that does not imply cultural homogenisation, and that is first and foremost about fostering an attachment to place through socio-material formation rather than claims of autochthony (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2019).

### 1.3 The National Asylum Support Service (NASS)

In *Bordering Britain*, Nadine El-Enany (2020) describes how immigration and asylum in the UK are woven into the same ongoing project that saw the very creation and splitting of borders through the era of Empire. The colonial enterprise that endeavoured to keep “the spoils of empires” out of the reach of colonial subjects (El-Enany 2019) was founded on a racist and gendered premise that has been maintained ever since through the expansion of borders, in various shapes and forms, with “consequences... as much psychological in rationale as they are spatial” (Gill 2016, p. 52). While the social and legal framework that forged the ‘borderscape’ of the UK is traced in chapter 2, this section provides some background to the very process that structures one’s arrival to the UK and the way it ties in with civil society and integrationist politics: the creation of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). It is important to note, however, that the UK’s politics of Integration

### 1.3 The National Asylum Support Service (NASS)

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-capital 'I' - was designed for the assimilation of settled ethnic minorities into British society, and not for people seeking refuge in the country. Indeed, as I go on to develop, the latter were never meant to 'integrate', which is made clear in the very handling of the process of asylum characterised by principles of deterrence (e.g., long claim processing waiting time (Bagelman 2013; Fortier 2021), politics of hostility and criminalisation of migration (Goodfellow 2019)). That being said, integration or integrative politics - small 'i' - are also finding their articulation socially, and, I argue, in the VCS, which NASS has partly instrumentalised.

NASS was implemented under the Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999 as a "specialist agency" (Gill 2016, p. 52) tasked with the administration of the dispersal system for people seeking asylum. The objective to disperse people "away from the South-East" (Gill 2016) came out of the perception that when left the choice, people seeking asylum would choose to settle in larger metropolises or in port cities (Bloch and Schuster 2005) with the effects of straining local councils who inherited the responsibility of providing support to a large number of migrants, which reportedly had negative social effects on localities (Bloch and Schuster 2005). NASS thus became the national administrative body for the provision of financial support and accommodation around the country to people seeking asylum in the UK, on a no choice basis. Much of the task to house people in the system was then handed to private corporations (Cassidy 2020; Lukes et al. 2019), as explained in chapter 2. However, as Gill explains, an important feature of NASS "was the contracting of charitable agencies to provide 'one-stop' advice services (see figure 1) in each of the main regions of the United Kingdom" (Gill 2016, p. 65). In particular during the first two years following NASS's implementation, "six organisations facilitated the system at a regional level: the Refugee Council, Migrant Helpline, Refugee Action and the Refugee Arrivals Project in England, the Welsh refugee Council in Wales, and the Scottish Refugee Council in Scotland who all received grants totalling £34 million from the Home Office" (Gill 2016, pp. 65–66). Their role: operate as the 'face' of the Home Office by supporting the process of seeking asylum from a legal point of view to material needs as well as offering an important psychological support in detention centres provided by social workers (Briskman and Cemlyn 2005).

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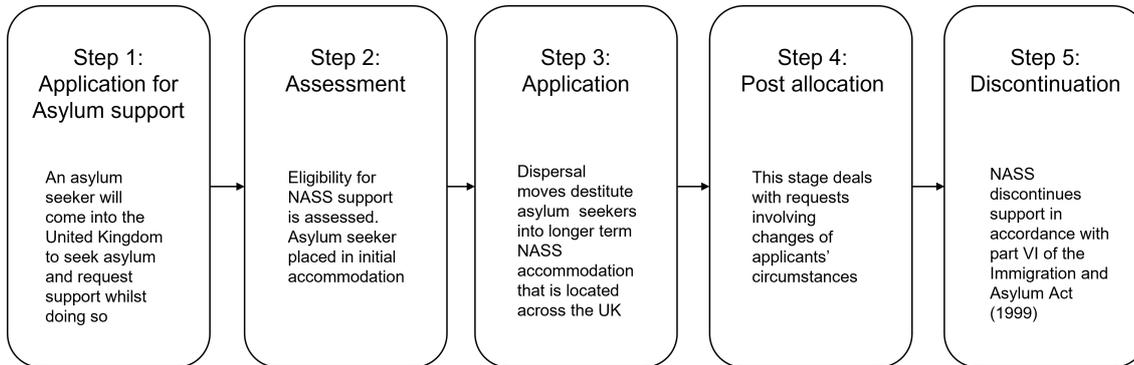


Figure 1: “End-to-end National Asylum Support Service” (Gill 2016, p. 54)

In civil society, many people who were “drawn to supporting asylum seekers in some capacity” (Gill 2016, p. 55) would apply for jobs as part of the service, not aware that the agency was not set up to support asylum seekers’ best interests but would in fact become complicit in practices of segregation or forced mobility, and even criminalisation under the pressure of police authorities (Gill 2016). Calum, my conversation partner in the interview cited in the opening section, had previously worked for the Home Office as an adviser of pathways to citizenship, five years before he joined Segue. During our interview, he expressed how frustrated and helpless he felt in that position, due to the lack of scope he had to provide support: “I was just very much like a monkey, trained to answer a phone basically” (interview with Calum, 04.04.2020). While he did not talk about it further, similar emotions were reported by staff in the VCS in other accounts that found themselves “enmeshed in managing an unsatisfactory situation” (Briskman and Cemlyn 2005, p. 719). “Buffering” is what Gill termed the process by which the Home Office increasingly distanced itself from the situations of people seeking asylum in the UK (Briskman and Cemlyn 2005, p. 51). Part of this process, far from being new, is a legacy device of imperial and colonial rule: bureaucracy (Isin 2015). By increasing the number of layers of “middlemen” (Gill 2016, p. 65) in the process, the Home Office made it more challenging to trace the source and reasoning (or lack thereof) of asylum seekers’ unmet needs, and worked to further ‘engineer’ (Gill 2016, p. 49) their isolation and alienation by way of criminalisation or ‘administrative errors’.

In March 2020, I received a text message from a regular Segue participant, Zoran. Although I had seen him a few times, he had only arrived that year, and thus was worried whether he would be able to establish himself in the city as his asylum case was pending. Over the phone, he recounted in tears that an employee from ACOMS, the housing company in charge of the asylum hotel where he had been staying for several months, had arrived unexpectedly to send him to the city of Bradford, in West Yorkshire, where he knew no one. Zoran texted me almost every day while he was living in a new area hundreds of miles away from the place he had begun to call home, describing his concern and the shock that this unexpected removal had caused him. He called me four days

later, after several of us staff and volunteers of Segue had contacted local organisations who could intervene, to let me know he was on his way back. When I asked him whether he knew why he was transferred, he replied that no one could explain and that all he was told was that “it was an administrative error”. In *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt (1970) describes bureaucracy as the tyranny of public life. The tragedy of this form of governmentality is that it is ruled by “Nobody”, which in turn reinforces the unknown ‘tyrant’:

Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant. —Arendt 1970, p. 81

Further to being enmeshed in the estranging process of asylum support provision, the VCS found itself faced with criticisms pointing at their alleged co-option with the unfair system of asylum and dispersal (McGhee et al. 2016; Tyler et al. 2014; Zetter et al. 2005). Adding fuel to the critiques were concerns with the fact that the VCS did not engage in active campaigning against these policies (Gill 2016; Hynes 2008). While other reports did not qualify this claim (see McGhee et al. 2016), it is important to note that the VCS is not a monolith, as will be explored in the next chapter. Thus, expressions of support and resistance, albeit not always in explicit forms, do take place. Visible advocacy and resistance in the work of anti-deportation and detention campaigns as well as No Borders movement have been and continue to resist borders and advocate for liberation. As a result, while critiquing colonising practices (bordering, hierarchy, racialising, homogenising) is essential, so is acknowledging the importance of creating spaces -albeit on different terms- that serve as stable anchors in the ongoing uncertainty of seeking asylum. These spaces, however, must be scrutinised too if they are knowingly or unknowingly reproducing similar practices.

## 1.4 Green Space Garden and Segue

This thesis is based upon extensive research with VCS organisations that are not politically aligned or have an overtly activist agenda. The rationale for not exploring differently/more radically positioned organisations is because I was curious to question and open up understandings of what constitutes ‘politics’, what these spaces can enable that more radical groups maybe cannot, and what the potential of the subtle politics of charity groups is to challenge existing policy on matters of migration. Another drive for focusing on activity groups that fall under the category of arts, creative and manual practice, stemmed from the understanding that they hold the potential to express complex ideas about multiple identities that go beyond discursively presenting oneself and the world. In addition, I was curious to understand what VCS organisations do in the UK as a way to understand the political culture and structure of a country I knew barely anything about. Two charity organisations form the basis of the empirical work in this thesis: Segue and GSG. While

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Segue was not a registered charity when I joined the organisation, it became one after less than a year (more on this in chapter 2). As such, I did not specifically seek registered charities to be the focus here, but it turned out to be the case. Both are located in North East England. While there were practical reasons for my choice to focus on this region (I live there), the dispersal system in place has seen a consistently large proportion of people seeking asylum sent to the north of the country. By December 2021, the Home Office reported that “the North East had the highest number of dispersed asylum seekers relative to its population (19 for every 10,000 inhabitants)” (Sturge 2022, p. 19). Although Segue and GSG are both registered charities working with migrants in the city, as my thesis demonstrates, they operate very differently from one another.

### 1.4.1 Green Space Garden

GSG provides training and socialising opportunities with a commitment to empower ‘hard to reach’ people while addressing environmental challenges through organic gardening activities aimed specifically at refugees and asylum seekers. Tonderai, the founder and project coordinator, defines himself as a migrant. He went through the asylum system more than a decade ago. His own experiences with isolation and poor eating habits inspired him to phrase his charitable activity in terms of ‘empowerment’. One of his long-term aims was to ‘upskill’ migrants so that if and when they return to their home country, they may apply the skills they learned with him to “reverse climate change” (Tonderai 2019). GSG prides itself for being “not funded by these mainstream funders or by the Government” and to empower people across the board, from so-called migrants to graduate students (including me, in Tonderai’s words). For him, the effects of climate change on his native country require immediate response and are the primary reason he fled and wishes to return.

On a video he shot for the purpose of a fundraiser event for his charity that I was co-organising, he remarked, “if it goes the way it is going right now, it will be a desert in the next five to ten years and this is why some of us are here in the UK because we are looking for greener pastures. But is it greener?” (Tonderai 2019). Tonderai sees environmental issues and migration as very much interlinked. As a result, I was also drawn to his charity to grapple with his argument that there is a systemic cycle involving climate change and migrations that can be partially resolved by learning skills in the UK (e.g., organic growing, permaculture, tree planting) and returning to one’s country of origin to share and apply gained new knowledge. According to him, the goal is that through information exchange, the effects of climate change may be reversed, and land and soils can be rehabilitated so that food can grow again. While this viewpoint may have colonial undertones, it is how Tonderai expressed himself and does not reflect my own. In chapter 6, I explain what exactly GSG does and with whom they work. In particular, their approach contrasts with ‘integrative’ ideas

of migration by centring ‘empowerment’ and a much more fluid definition of belonging, insofar as connections between a ‘homeland’ and the place to which one migrates are ongoing.

### 1.4.2 Segue

Segue was founded in 2009 as a space to look “into the creative needs of refugees and asylum seekers” (Segue 2014). They provide a weekly music tuition where the target group can learn to sing, play drums, guitar, or the violin. Their current mission statement is as follows: “[Segue] provides opportunities for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into the communities in which they live. We use music, song writing and team activities to build relationships within the group and with the wider community. We aim to improve relationships and understanding through shared positive experiences.” (Segue 2020). The organisation went through several iterations, one of which was marked by the sudden death of the founder Helen Knowles in 2017. When I joined the organisation in May 2019, the lead organisers were still recovering from the loss of Helen and felt overwhelmed with the task that suddenly was resting upon them. The charity’s legal status changed over the course of my project, which provided some more perspective on the role that the status of organisations *and* people can play, particularly in terms of the possibilities for political action that it precludes.

I have received formal consent from Mary, Segue’ chair, to conduct my research project *alongside* them. This special position granted me full access to all aspects of the charity, as I was also a volunteer, in charge of many different tasks in the general running of the group. For example, I was one half of a duo charged with putting together a crowdfunding and patronage page, but also general advisory, buying and preparing the snacks for the weekly nights, organising special events, taking photos and videos, and other miscellaneous tasks. Undertaking critical research while being an ‘insider’ was no easy thing. I talk about this at length in the methodology in chapter 4. Nevertheless, it is through a particularly fortunate engagement with Segue that I was able to get a sense for the way in which such non-openly political spaces (can) open and inspire more politically radical positions. My chameleonic position (Saldanha 2007) combined with a commitment to reciprocity (Huisman 2008) by continuously sharing the fruit of my inquiry with the people that form Segue is central to my epistemological and methodological approach. I learned with Segue by doing the work of a volunteer, all while being informed by theory. As such, ‘collecting data’ constituted an ambiguous exercise, since each task to complete, each discussion to have, and each exchange to witness, had both implications for my PhD project *and* for sustaining the charity. Because I have fostered a continuous dialogue as part of an epistemological commitment to critical dialogue (see chapter 4), a large part of analysing my data also happened through discussions by feeding back my observations.

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In sum, while I occupied the role of volunteer as part of GSG for four months (September – December 2019), which formed the basis of a broadly typical ethnography (e.g., ‘deep hanging out’ and participant observations), I qualify my engagement with Segue as participatory, engaged ethnography. This collaboration evolved over 20 months, beginning in May 2019. I am still in remote contact with the organisations, although I have stopped formally attending meetings in Summer 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic was a big hit in my research progress. GSG stopped activities over the winter months, as per seasonal conditions, but never started again in the new year due to the series of lockdowns.

Segue paused activities in March 2020 and shifted their music tuition online. During that period, while I continued to attend meetings (which became more frequent, as we were trying to figure out how to operate the transition and how to support Segue’s members in the best way possible), it had become critical that I start analysing the data collected writing. While I obtained consent to utilise all of the data collected and used in this thesis, it was contingent on maintaining the anonymity of the people involved, as well as the organisations as accountable entities. As a result, I do not reveal the specific city or site of the action, people’s true names, and I adjusted some biographical elements of people’s experiences where it did not interfere with the meaning and analysis of the narrative and would ensure further that the person could not be identified. I have a dedicated section on ethical imperatives in chapter 4.

### 1.5 Research Question

In this thesis, I aim to contribute to understandings of the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations in the UK that are positioning themselves as actors in support of people in the asylum system, who were pushed out of it (e.g., destitute) and more broadly, anyone who, in Scheel and Tazzioli’s (2022) words “has to struggle against bordering practices and processes of boundary-making” (p. 3). Specifically, by providing on the one hand an in-depth, engaged (institutional) ethnography and on the other hand a slightly more distanced ethnography of UK-based VCS organisations, I aim to advance debates in Critical Geography that look at the reproduction of structuring mechanisms that hinder the ability of people to emancipate themselves from charity support (Bagelman 2013; Cassidy 2020; Darling 2016; Mayblin and James 2019; Tyler et al. 2014). By doing so, I do not wish to undermine the importance of extending a helping hand to newcomers to the city. Rather, my contention is that the politics of doing so requires scrutiny, as they are symptomatic of wider inequalities bound with questions of national sovereignty and contribute to the reification of borders and the Euro-American humanitarian (Pallister-Wilkins 2022b) rhetoric that does not fundamentally challenge the status quo of who needs help and why. Instead, this rhetoric feeds a self-celebratory, heroic nationalism that in essence thrives on the dehumanisation of (racialised) others. Because of the inductive and participatory nature of my project, I did not

begin the research process with multiple questions, and have instead been guided by one main interrogation cited earlier, that is:

- To what extent can the VCS create spaces that foster ‘dis-integrative’ (Favell 2022) approaches to migrants’ establishing in the UK?

Through the process, other questions emerged, that will feature in the rest of the thesis and be summarised in chapter 8.

## 1.6 A Note on Language

### ‘Migrants’ and ‘Migration’

There is no easy or right way of talking about people who cross borders under the conditions set out by racist nation-states. While some terms are negatively appropriated by liberal and far-right discourses (‘migrants’, ‘refugees’), others are victimising and deny individuals’ agency (‘forced migrants’). Some reduce human lives to mere status (‘asylum seekers’) or produce people as lawless subjects (‘undocumented’ or ‘illegal’) and others still reinscribe a classist and racialised difference by naming themselves differently (‘expatriates’). I have not once in the course of my PhD project felt at peace with the idea of generalising and naming the people attending Segue and GSG according to their status, ‘race’, or national category. These categories are associated with a Eurocentric geopolitical history that is racist in and of itself, and which casts the movement of “racialised people” across borders as always-already problematic (Anderson 2017). Using terms associated with migration and ‘migrant’ contributes to reinscribe “the hierarchical human organization” (Gilmore 2022, p. 109) as a natural and neutral force.

As hinted at, a common academic practice is to distinguish between different ‘forms’ of migration, which Favell (2022) points out as problematic. The tendency to focus on “abject forms of forced migration”, he says, denies agency and demands “humanitarian responses”, while never fully addressing the “global inequality...at the heart of the ‘immigration integration’ paradigm” (Favell 2022, p. 7). There are, he says, “wanted and unwanted migration... ‘visible’ forms of immigration versus ‘middling’ forms of everyday cross-border mobility” (Favell 2022, p. 3). The ‘unwanted’, ‘problematic’ migrations that trigger crisis framings and national outcry unfortunately also tend to be seen as “ready-available object[s] of research” that serve as central ontological resource for scholars to build their career upon (Scheel and Tazzioli 2022, p. 3). Less negatively problematised migrations (e.g., ‘expatriation’) do not go through the same level of scrutiny and objectivation, nor are they required or expected to integrate the way that immigrants are. Although the political economy that allows expatriates to migrate is intimately connected with the filtering out and criminalisation of ‘unwanted’ migrants, expats’ migration is not constructed or perceived in the same

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manner (Favell 2022). The “processes of migrantisation” (Scheel and Tazzioli 2022, p. 3) thus concern only the ‘unwanted’ and take away individuals’ power to self-define and update those definitions on their own terms. Concomitantly, ‘wanted’ migrants draw social and economic capital from their mobility.

The chasm between these *forms* is also something I am intimately familiar with. I grew up as migrant, until I was naturalised and became an immigrant. The heaviness of alterity is commensurate to the responsibility and expectation placed upon me to integrate into Belgian society, all while being reminded in the home that I was Algerian, which was no small task to live up to. Not only a national of two countries, I also remained a racialised, Muslim girl despite (and long after) being anecdotally recognised as ‘integrated’ by peers (e.g., friends, acquaintances). It seemed like there was no escape from any of these boxes. Being perceived, described, and defined as an immigrant or a migrant contributes to the erasure of people’s histories and non-Eurocentric geographies, and with it, the far more complex threads of identities that a person is evolving with. As pointed out by Sayad (2004), *emigration* is largely absent from migration scholars’ analysis, assuming that all there is to someone crossing borders is who they ought to become through their *traversée*. The category of the ‘migrant’ is always imbued with racial and classist distinction (Favell 2022), and reinforces the nation-states’ borders as legitimate to define one’s identity. How then can we problematise the unequal ways of crossing borders, and particularly, if we ought to denounce and continue fighting the conditions of those constructed as ‘unwanted’?

To overcome the “epistemological traps” (Scheel and Tazzioli 2022, p. 3) that are implied in the signifier ‘migrant’ addressed at the start of this section, Scheel and Tazzioli (2022) draw on the Autonomy of Migration literature to reappropriate and reconceptualise the term, rather than to do away with it, defining it as: “a person who, in order to move to or stay in a desired place, has to struggle against bordering practices and processes of boundary-making that are implicated by the national order of things” (2022, p. 3). While I find this new perspective rich and valuable, at the time of writing, most editorial decisions concerning this thesis have been formalised (e.g., title of the thesis and most chapters written), leaving little space for drastic transformation. As such, within the text I have decided, as much as possible, to omit the ‘forced’ and speak of ‘migrants’ and ‘migration(s)’, although I do recognise the contradiction with the title. However, it is the way that the VCS problematises and responds to newcomers to the region that is scrutinised here, as opposed to the ‘migrant’s experience’. Through the text, though, and where appropriate, I also use the phrasings of ‘racialised migrants’, if I refer to an aspect that relates to racial constructions, or ‘people in the (asylum) system’, which reflects the terminology used in grassroots organising groups I have been taking part in. This is not to say that these are synonymous or interchangeable, but rather exposes the difficulty to stick with one appropriate *tournure de phrase* for ever-becoming, agentic subjects.

### **‘Regrounding’**

While I do not claim to have found appropriate expressions, I believe that to keep problematising the concepts we use to describe worlds is an essential part of the task of critiquing; in Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s words, “To describe is also to produce” (2022, p. 109) and hierarchies are erected through the words that describe, which hold power through their mediation. In addition, to use a term that does not centre on national sovereignty and belonging as political project, I refer to ‘regrounding’ as the ongoing, repeating process of making one’s home in multiple locations. In doing so, I reappropriate and expand on Ahmed et al.’s (2003) definition of “uprootings/regroundings” that “makes it possible to consider home and migration in terms of a plurality of experiences, histories and constituencies, and of the workings of institutional structures” (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 2). By focusing on ‘regrounding’, here, I emphasise the fluctuating nature of migrations and reject the idea that in migration, one is ‘rootless’ (despite being ‘stateless’ by not being recognised by a nation-state), or deprived of home, and see, in contrast the importance of an understanding of one’s attachment to place, which, as Anzaldúa (1987) argues, is a shift that comes to life through the very process of regrounding “in the borderzone” (Ahmed et al. 2003, pp. 4–5). Nevertheless, throughout this thesis, I talk about ‘integration’ and ‘community cohesion’ or sometimes ‘assimilation’, when there is a need to describe the state politics or the VCS’s posture in relation to newcomers to the city. Once more, these terms differ in what they do, but they all fall within a register that foregrounds a binary relationship between sovereign and migrants that denies the latter’s right to be on their own terms.

### **1.7 Thesis Structure**

In chapter 2, I broadly set out the context that saw the emergence of asylum and migration as a ‘crisis’ problem in the UK, which justified increasingly racist policy measures. Here, I draw on Bloch, Neal, et al. (2013) to refer to social policy that encompasses legal, discursive and affective registers. I explain the fraught nature of the ‘crisis’ framing that is consistently applied to describe the influx of people attempting to reach the UK and justifies the intensification and multiplication of borders (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018). By developing the colonial character of the descriptive ‘crisis’, I suggest understanding the ‘real’ crisis as one of the project of the nation-state. I also talk about the charity sector and its political history or how it was folded into the engineered catastrophic politics of liberal and neoliberal, racist projects. With McNevin (2019), I believe that “differential mobilities are too often ... decontextualised from the histories and policies that produce and rationalize uneven flows and stoppages of people” (2019, p. 2). As such, by sketching out the contours of a history of social policy in the UK, I aim to draw connections between policy and VCS intervention. Indeed, one of my contentions is that the pervasiveness of a long history of austere social policy coupled with neoliberal political economy impregnated the sector as a whole

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– albeit heterogeneously – determining its capacity and its posture. Nevertheless, I explain in the chapter that nuance must be applied in critiques of the VCS, and argue that there is always already potential for resistance in the fabric of the organisations I have taken part in.

In chapter 3, I lay out the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. By starting with an examination of the concept of citizenship and tracing it back to Ancient Greece and Rome, I reiterate the point above about the importance to contextualise constructions that are taken-for-granted. I examine how citizenship has come to shape people's identities and ability to move on the terms of the state. The connections to colonial endeavours are laid out here to make the case for these differentiated statuses and border controls as legacies of colonial rule. Then, I identify key contemporary bordering practices by drawing on the work of Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), Hesse (1996), Back et al. (2012) and Wemyss (2009) to speak more specifically to the racial hierarchising that inheres in the UK nation-state's project, as a way of restricting access to the "spoils of empire" (El-Enany 2019). I discuss the ways in which these hierarchies are fought over by anticolonial movements, and differentiate them from humanitarian approaches, in which, I argue, some VCS organisations fall into. Before concluding, I conceptualise 'regrounding' and argue for a geographical understanding of attachment to place that is deterritorialised and divorced from the centralised need of recognition by a state authority, taking Berlant's (2011) point that attaching our desire to an object as uneven and under-promising as citizenship is cruel.

In chapter 4, I develop my epistemological approach, and the rationale for adopting a participatory methodological posture of inquiry. I address the question of who the rightful subject/object of research in migration studies should be, and explain how and why I have tried to avoid the scholarly pitfall of relying on migrants' voices' to build credibility through 'authenticity'. To justify the choice for few interviews and limited reliance on the discursive, I expose my position as critical researcher/volunteer/socially engaged person, as well as the multiple identities of racialised migrant I embodied for my interlocutors as defining features of this study. These layers of identity and politics influence the way I understand the world around me and approach the phenomenon of migration. As such, I considered my active, embodied practice as an episteme. To make the case for the value of scrutinising the VCS, I expand upon the concept of institutional Ethnography (IE) which proved particularly useful to interpret an ethnographic inquiry into the sector, and suggest that active participation provides an added layer of situated understanding that would benefit geographers interested in exploring and exposing the mechanisms at play in structures that administer and support the lives of those upon whom we build our discipline (Billo and Mountz 2016, p. 204).

This leads to the three empirical chapters. Throughout these chapters, I aim to illustrate what I have come to identify as "structures of 'whiteness'" (Hesse 1996, p. 85) that dictate the type of relations that are built across the spectrum of those accessing the VCS for support and those acting

as coordinators and organisation leaders. These, I argue, are intimately connected to the national charity framework which set out in clear what charities can or cannot do and define the kind of interventions voluntary and community organisation can undertake, preventing people working in these organisations from acting as counter power, and achieve emancipatory goals. While I expose the different ways in which a ‘white governmentality’ (Hesse 1996; Nayak 2012; Wemyss 2009) impregnate some VCS organisations, I also demonstrate that through the cracks of a bleak political climate, it is possible to do “hope’s work” (Back 2021) by planting seeds, opening up a critical dialogue within institutions, and collectively imagine an alternative economy to state-sanctioned solidarity, which could support a non-sovereign, fluid attachment to place: *regrounding*.

In chapter 5, I harness the musical register to describe the problematics inherent to the State’s project of multiculturalism/diversity and show how speaking musically also opens possibilities for a redefinition of the terms of difference. I document and conceptualise the ways in which the VCS’s pursuit of harmony operates as structuring (and silencing) mechanism through which inequalities and hierarchies are re-enacted. Segue is at the heart of this critique, in which I deconstruct and expose the “modalities of politicisation and depoliticisation” (Darling 2014, p. 74) through which asylum and migration are addressed. I illustrate how by prioritising harmony (under the guise of “community cohesion”) the group risks distracting from questions of resources and power distribution, criminalisation of migration, everyday bordering practices and ultimately prevent people from regrounding. I argue that this phenomenon does not remain unchallenged within voluntary and community groups, but that the power of colonial legacies embedded in the very structures of governance of Segue prevents its anti-racist realisation. I start by justifying the use of the language of music to conceptualise harmony as a strategy for ordering, before looking at several instances in Segue through which seeking order produced silence. In conclusion, I illustrate how the paradoxical processes of (de)politicisation play out in the structure of Segue through mechanisms such as consultation. Ultimately, this chapter aims to show how the seed for an alternative economy of harmony can be planted in the third sector. One that foregrounds an emergent culture rather than a strictly pre-determined one that falls under the remits of integrationist politics.

In chapter 6, I bring GSG into focus as a VCS organisation that enabled me to think at once of other ways of supporting/facilitating regroundings, and envisioning anticolonial attachments to place. To make these claims, I recount four stories emanating from field notes that I found meaningful for their capacity to pose the socio-materiality of VCS organisations as rich terrain for capturing the unfolding relationships between people and their environment. I argue that practices of sociability grounded materially offer a typology that challenges the territorial, exclusionary model of belonging. One example of this is drawn from a grassroots gardening project in which the connection to the land and to seeds coming from different parts of the world allows migrant women to root themselves figuratively and literally in the North East. This, however, does not mean that they stop

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being rooted in the place where they came from; it is what regrounding is about. This distinction of practices reflects the underlying proposition that an anticolonial approach to solidarity organising is rendered difficult in times of austerity. At the same time, a focus on the materiality of these solidarities both reveals the limits of a territorial model and the opportunities of material geographies to foster a sense of belonging that goes beyond in/exclusionary geopolitical framings. This idea, however, does not undermine or deny the political salience of differences, but rather attempts to contribute to enriching the existing vocabulary of belonging by emphasising the relational and material dimensions of the process.

In chapter 7, I recount an “intervention” that speaks to the potential of centring improvisation and/of sonic performances as a vehicle for claims to be made, regardless of achieved formal citizenship/sovereignty. I show how the concept of regrounding is not bound to the literal ground by telling the story of an improvised musical performance in a local pub, that demonstrate how regrounding can be wired through socio-material connections mediated sonically. The transgressive nature of this performance is also dissected and supports the existing body of work (Hughes 2018; Katz 2001) that argues for broadening the definition of resistance to include the transgressive capacity of being where one is not expected to be and deviating from predetermined structures to allow for co-creation. Here, the disruption in the normal setup of Segue music classes opened up possibilities of claim-making that go beyond sovereignty and opened up transformation of the habits and obligations that structured classes or performance. The necessity to illuminate moments (however fleeting) and sites (however liminal and transient) of potentiality is crucial for collective claims to be made and alternative value-systems to emerge. This, however, is no evident or unidimensional task and the chapter also addresses the limitations of the framework of resistance and acts of transgression by explaining how the perception of transgression is uneven, and always subjectively situated.

Finally, in *Le Mot de la Fin* (chapter 8), I bring together three contributions that each speak to a particular dynamic that helped me make sense of the ecosystem within which my research took place: (1) the relationship between the VCS and the state (practice/application); (2) between integration and asylum (conceptual); (3) and between participation and the researcher (methodological). I also suggest two avenues for further investigation in political geography and identify the limits encountered during this work. Through my ethnography and the writing of this thesis, I have come to wonder how the tension between the need to provide charity, as a form of humanitarian help, sits with that of dismantling the system that thrives on the very distinction between those who can help (sovereign) and those who require it (non-sovereign) (Pallister-Wilkins 2022a). By examining the VCS through the lens of racialised borders that divides along these lines, I argue that there is a necessity to not take VCS organisations for granted, nor to do away with them entirely. Here, I urge

researchers to bring critical dialogue into their scholarship, and onto the 'field' where possible, as it remains central to unlearn in order to do solidarity differently.



## Chapter 2

# Tracing an Engineered Crisis

The traditional acceptance of legal categories as defined in international and domestic law in and outside academia has the effect of concealing law's role in producing racialised subjects and racial violence. It further impedes an understanding of law *as* racial violence. Addressing the historical contingency and artificiality of legal categories, the violence in their production and ongoing material effects allows us to understand how Britain remains colonially and racially configured. It also helps to mitigate against a liberal politics of recognition and opens the way for the development of emancipatory and reparative discourses and strategies for migrant solidarity and racial justice.

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El-Enany 2020, p. 11–12, emphasis as in the original

### 2.1 Introduction

My first meeting with Segue was in May 2019. In the heart of town, inside the Matisse Art Gallery, we convened at 10:15 a.m. in the café housed in the gallery. As I entered this magnificent structure for the first time, my eyes widened. Its 'baroque-meets-art nouveau' style lent it an air of sophistication. This museum seemed to draw an older crowd than the other museums in the city and, once in the café, the elderly clientele were even more difficult to miss. As soon as I walked in, I noticed how quickly the place filled up with mostly elderly people in groups, pairs, or on their own. It must be said that our Board meetings always took place as soon as the Gallery opened, around 10 o'clock, and always on weekdays, which probably explains why this kind of crowd would be most visible. In spite of the room's grand appearance with its high ceiling, ornate decorations, and paintings, it had terrible acoustics. Conversations were drowned out by the cacophony created by the echoes of chatter and spoons twirling in coffee cups that reverberated throughout the room. I had no idea at the time that it would be the first of many long and, to be honest, quite boring meetings

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with Segue's Board members in this café. Later, I would understand that there were many factors that contribute to a meeting's length and formality. The space, the bureaucracy, the absence of the people for whom Segue exists, the bad acoustics making it difficult to hear some voices, reflected – for me – the existential question of what Segue is, and how it operates. This chapter addresses this problem. It asks: where and under which conditions does Segue operate? How has the organisation emerged, and how is it placed within the wider network of migrant support groups in the city? These questions speak beyond the specificities of this organisation and raise wider questions about the relationship between race, policy and the migrant charity sector in the UK.

Throughout its history, Segue's status has changed multiple times. From an unincorporated association to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), and a charity, different versions of the organisation stood the test of time since it was founded by Helen Knowles in 2009. This first observation is important, as it exposes the impermanence of the legal *status* (as a concept that applies to both people and organisations) and lays bare its fleeting value. In essence, what Segue *does* is what matters more, but in this chapter, the status of charity will be a guiding thread. At the time of writing, the group's formal status is anchored publicly in the charity commission register, where a series of details about Segue are available, such as the names of trustees, the charity's function, roles, financial history, spending, the governing documents, and some contact information. Throughout my time with Segue the majority of us – volunteers, staff, Board members – recognised the burden that registering as a charity represented, as well as the burden that lengthy meetings and bureaucracy posed. Some simply stopped attending meetings, or only showed up once a year for the Annual General Meeting (AGM). “I went once, but you know, all we get is free coffee” Abel, one of Segue's oldest regular and active members who fled Iran in 2007, told me when I asked him why he did not want to take a more active role in the organisation. Yet, despite realising the extra work that it would engender for us to do so, we did proceed with registering as a charity in December 2019.

George is one of the trustees and has been involved in the organisation for several years. He is retired and thus devotes his time to several charities across the region. During one meeting, he explained that a charity in the north of the city gets £350,000 a year from the same trust that is funding Segue's latest project, as if to say, “see what we could have?”. “Segue isn't that kind of organisation” answered Victoria<sup>1</sup>. So, what kind of organisation is Segue? Meeting after meeting, I attempted to answer that question. I became acquainted with the UK and slowly understood through the PhD and my encounters with other non-profits, the importance that charity and volunteering take in this country, in contrast with Belgium, where I grew up. No matter whether an organisation is incorporated as a Charity or not, it became clear to me throughout my research

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<sup>1</sup>At the time of my fieldwork, Victoria is a long-standing volunteer and Board member of Segue. She also seconds the violin tutor, Ella, when she is unable to be present.

that the UK's VCS does not operate outside of the state's politics, which, as I develop in the next chapter, is interwoven with the politics of the nation. While the charity sector is not homogeneous, and not all critiques apply to all charities, non-profits and charities in particular that are involved in 'migrant work', are bounded by Government policies that have a long history of racism, which led many scholars and activists to be sceptical about the use of their services (Fassin 2012; INCITE! 2007; Picozza 2021; Spade 2020; Tyler et al. 2014). What I call here the "Voluntary and Community Sector" has been referred to in a variety of ways by different authors<sup>2</sup>. To make matters more confusing, the work done by voluntary and community organisations with forced migrants is also referred to in a heterogeneous manner. Since forced migrants may or may not be applying for asylum, I chose VCS and the language of 'migrant charity work' to establish the foundation of my argument.

In this chapter, I cover some of the key moments that are attributed to the emergence of the racist social (and legal) policy context (Dixon 1981; Panayi 2010; Titley and Lentin 2011) that charities operate within in the UK. I refer to and use the term 'policy' following Bloch, Neal, et al. (2013), as broadly "a reference to a field of activity to a specific set of proposals and intentions, to decisions of government, to a programme, and to a process of decisions and implementation" (p. 22). In other words, 'policy' spills beyond the legal realm to encompass programmes, practices and processes that can be discursive (e.g., growing narrative in media and political discourses around preserving national identity by strengthening borders), affective (e.g., register of fear and 'scapegoating' of cultural takeover of racialised others and 'welfare chauvinism' (Kymlicka and Banting 2006) which emerged as a result of the decimation of the welfare state), as well as legal (e.g., legalising the 'filtering out' of 'bogus' asylum seekers). The reason for focusing on social policy is that human welfare provides a good vantage point from which to examine the evolving relationship between society and power, including social relationships that involve questions of difference, and particularly migrations (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013, p. 20). With this in mind, I illustrate how a policy context articulated via these registers has emerged to pervade into the work that is undertaken by charity organisations active in the area of migration. In addition, I align with Bloch, Neal, et al. (2013) to envisage 'race'<sup>3</sup> policy as being "crisis-driven" (p. 21) and would add that the narrative of the crisis is fundamentally *co-constitutive of* 'race' and migration policy (De Genova 2018).

While questions more specific to the construction of the 'migrant' and citizenship constitute the core of the next chapter, here, I focus on social policy and its implications for organisations like

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<sup>2</sup>For example, Mayblin and James (2019) refer to it as Refugee Third Sector (RTS).

<sup>3</sup>And consequently, migration-related policy too, as migration and 'race' are overlapping identities/containers, particularly in the history of policymaking. Following Lukes et al. (2019), "migrants are racialised and ethnic minorities are, in popular imagination, frequently imbued with the (negative) attributes of immigrants regardless of their birthplace" (p. 3191).

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Segue, which – in my opinion – ‘try their best’ and are ‘well-intentioned’ but encounter racialised logics in their work, due – mostly – to the backdrop of racist social policy. After this broad introduction, section two unpacks the triangulation between colonial rule, production of migrants and refugees and the ‘crisis’ narrative. In section three, I trace the major policy developments that have had profound effects on the lives of ethnic minorities and migrants. To hone in on the specific impact of social policy on the VCS, I describe the Conservative government’s “hostile environment” as a way of situating the current policy landscape in which Segue operates. As a means of describing the policy context and its effects on practice, I draw on sociology and political geography’s analyses of borders and border processes, particularly ‘everyday borders’ (Cassidy et al. 2018; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018) and ‘differential inclusion’ (Back et al. 2012; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) to illustrate the relationship between policy and practice. Section four covers the politics of the VCS and asks: ‘to what extent is it acting independently?’ and ‘what scope is there for resistance?’ Finally, in section five, the focus shifts back to Segue before concluding with an invitation to bring nuance to critiques of the VCS, and Segue in particular, when it comes to challenging anti-migration policy. By focusing on the UK’s social policy in immigration matters, the aim of this chapter is threefold. First, it is to help the reader understand the context and basis of the racialised treatment and abjection of those who seek asylum and categorised as migrants in the UK today. Second, that it will contribute to a better understanding of why organisations such as Segue exist. Finally, I wish to demonstrate how neoliberal politics (such as a increased vigilance, corporatisation of public services, reduced government spending) influence the VCS, as well as how racism became intertwined to create a systemic dependency that leaves little room for true emancipation in charity (Gill 2016).

## 2.2 The Coloniser’s Crisis

It is difficult to talk about migration without talking about ‘race’ (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013; Lukes et al. 2019), and it is difficult to talk about both ‘race’ and migration in 21<sup>st</sup> century UK, without touching upon the neoliberal state (McNevin 2011; Titley and Lentin 2011). As the scale and pace of a global “economy of flows” of people and goods/commodities (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2019, p. 26) led to the neoliberalisation of labour markets<sup>4</sup> that saw some “places, territories and scales [being favoured] over other sites for capitalist accumulation”, the “disposability” (De Genova and Roy 2020, p. 353) of people in ‘less favourable’ territories has increased to meet the demand of booming Euro-American economies. As a result, “[s]ome places and people have been excluded or marginalised completely from these developments” (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2019, p. 26). The way globalised markets differentially benefit people translates spatially, in

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<sup>4</sup>For example, by limiting the intervention of the state in the economy (privatisation), the economic growth paradigm, deregulation of markets of capital, and global free-market agreements (Rustin and Massey 2015).

sustained migratory movements, and into contemporary bordering processes as an inherent part of the functioning of this neoliberal world order underpinned by a capitalist economies.

This economic logic “has always been entangled with racial oppression” (Fraser 2018, p. 2) and continues to reinscribe multiple hierarchies that are also scalar (e.g. ‘core’ and ‘periphery’), and political (e.g. ‘metropolitan citizens’ and ‘colonial subjects’) (Fraser 2018, p. 7). Importantly, neoliberal globalisation is not a monolithic theoretical object, but rather a set of activities, and it is necessary to reveal the ways in which certain processes are tied to this imperial structuring of society and geography. However, the circumstances of extraction and exploitation that underlie racial capitalism (Gilmore 2022; Kenton 2020) are not solely the responsibility of neoliberalism, but discussing this is outside the scope of this thesis (see Potter et al. 2008, for more). The purpose of this section is to describe how the paradoxical relationship between ongoing neoliberal policies, tightening border control, and growing crisis discourse triangulates to ‘produce refugees’ and the crisis narrative associated with them. In turn, this justifies the tightening of im/mobility restrictions, criminalisation, and access to citizenship and welfare provision. According to Bloch et al., the history of asylum and immigration policy can be split into four major phases dated as follow: 1905-1945, Post-Second World War-1980s, late 1980s-End of 20th century and 2000s onward (2013, pp. 51-52). In this section, I highlight some of the key moments across these time periods, that were particularly meaningful in this triangulation between border control, neoliberalisation and the crisis narrative.

### **Constitutionalising the ‘Crisis’**

While cross-border mobility has always been part of the UK’s history (e.g., through forced labour), the question of controlling and managing international migration to the UK is more recent. It is only in the post-second World War and the aftermath of the British Empire that civil society and the government authorities in the UK have been more intensively debating migration (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013). This is not to say that migration to the UK was non-existent prior to that point. To the contrary, the UK’s immigration history is long and spans people from places near and far, as for example the Aliens Act 1905 illustrates. However, the 1948 British Nationality Act (BNA) is particularly meaningful in the case of Commonwealth migrants from non-White countries, which triggered a series of increasingly racialised policy narratives about immigration. According to El-Enany (2020), the BNA is the policy that created the UK citizenship status. At the height of Empire, the status encompassed all “Britons together with all nationals of independent Commonwealth countries and those of British colonies” (p. 77). Alongside the legal recognition of subjecthood, the BNA offered an entrance door to the heart of the colonial power, as it granted the right to come, work and remain in the UK, resulting in a significant post-war increase in non-White Common-

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wealth migration<sup>5</sup> but also a political discourse that began to associate migration with race (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013).

For Hansen (1999), this piece of legislation “was the legal foundation for the transformation of Britain into a multi-ethnic society” (p. 68), to the discontent of most, and importantly, a dissatisfaction that cut across Labour and Conservatives parties. Only two years later, in 1950, the Cabinet of Ministers sat down to amend the Bill in order to restrict “‘coloured migration’ into the country” (Hansen 1999, p. 68)<sup>6</sup> well into the 1960s. In the same period, the UK became one of the initial 26 signatories of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, therein agreeing to *protect* refugees and *welcome* them onto its territory (UNHCR 1951). This, in El-Enany’s words, was nothing more than a way of “legitimising the post-imperial lie” (El-Enany 2020, p. 136). Thirty years later, in the second phase of this immigration policy history, 1981 makes a decisive break with the ‘open door’ policy of the post-war era. On the one hand, access to citizenship was revoked for *some* Commonwealth citizens – those who are non-White<sup>7</sup> – and, according to critical lawyer David Dixon, the BNA<sup>8</sup> – which did not apply to refugees, and was different to the 1948 Act – constitutionalised both the criminalisation of forced migrants and announced the categorising of migrants into *deserving* and *undeserving* based on their race. Hence, the term of “constitutional racism”:

The Bill is to be read, firstly, as the formal adjunct to a series of proposals for further restriction of black immigration (of which the new immigration rules were the result) and for intensification of action against illegal immigrants and overstayers (which produced the ‘fishing expeditions’ by police and immigration officers in 1980, the increasing persecution of those falling, because of administrative extension and judicial confirmation, within the widened definition of ‘illegal immigrant’, and the consequent increase in deportations) —Dixon 1981, p. 94

“The context of Britain’s colonial identity” (El-Enany 2020, p. 133) was not unrelated to an increase in migratory flows (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013). As pointed by El-Enany, between the 1960s and 1980s, “the vast majority of asylum seekers in Britain are from its former colonies” (El-Enany 2020, p. 134). Through heightened racialised rhetoric in relation to migration and (later) asylum,

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<sup>5</sup>Of which the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* carrying 417 people (Panayi 2020, p. 33) from the West Indies was a token.

<sup>6</sup>And thus, created different categories within the Act, in which subjecthood was granted without citizenship. The belief is that this was designed to preserve “whiteness as the basis of their nationhood” (El-Enany 2020, p. 79) for white settlers living in non-White Commonwealth countries who may find themselves astray in case of independence. That way, they would always remain subjects of the UK and could claim citizenship upon coming back (Hansen 1999).

<sup>7</sup>Although this was pre-empted in the 1962 Act – as I will go on to discuss.

<sup>8</sup>There are two BNA’s. One dated from 1948 that grants British Citizenship to all Commonwealth members, and the other from 1981, which creates three categories of citizenships: British citizenship, British Dependent Territories citizenship (BDTC); and. British Overseas citizenship. More on this in section 2.3.3.

the Government justified the use of stronger border methods for managing the arrival of newcomers from non-White countries.

Immigration, nationality, and citizenship policy were forged through and alongside racist narratives, allowing the trope of the 'crisis' to imprint on British society, justifying violent responses in the form of policing, surveillance, racialising, and criminalising forced migrants. Notably, Stuart Hall's (Hall et al. 1978) *Policing the Crisis* describes what this crisis entails – a society-wide 'moral panic':

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereo-typical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.

—Hall et al. 1978, pp. 17–18

What Hall et al. suggest here, is that the so-called crisis does not arise from an isolated event (or presumed reoccurring event), rather, it is the “the social processes by which such events are produced, perceived, classified, explained and responded to” that make way to crisis narratives (for which policing responses are justified) (Hall et al. 1978). The 'crisis', then, is the modality through which migrants are held responsible for the ills of society and general failing system that the demise of the welfare state is only one visible symptom of (Hall et al. 1978, p. 50). The crisis 'mood', notes Hall, was characterised within the police “by a growing impatience, frustration and anger” (1978, p. 50), which exposes how the affective logic of the crisis discourse intersects with the judicial. Much later, the crisis framing was deployed again, notably in 2015 when a large influx of people were leaving Syria to reach Europe. Similar to the Thatcherite narrative, the construction of the so-called 'refugee crisis' alludes to the engineered media-driven moral panic that locates the crisis in the constructed threat that migrants represent to Europe's culture(s), security and economy (De Cleen et al. 2017).

As mentioned in chapter 1, not all migrants are journeying equally, and it is important to distinguish those that the UK's social policy aims to *manage*, and importantly, to present the 'migrant' not merely as a victim of those social policy, but as agent that must “struggle against bordering practices” as defined in the Introduction chapter 1 (Scheel and Tazzioli 2022, p. 3). As such, in this chapter, it is some of the key successive policy changes that regulate the flows and rights of differently categorised human 'aliens', that is brought to attention. In addition, as Fraser notes, “[w]e need only think of current conflicts surrounding migrants and refugees to see how easily

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these geopolitically enabled hierarchies of political status become racially coded” (Fraser 2018, p. 7). These hierarchies and their interpretation are of particular interest for this chapter because one of the central arguments is that state’s policies rub off on VCS structures.

Addressing factors contributing to forced migration, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) talks about “Major migration and displacement” producing events (McAuliffe and Khadria 2019), at the root cause of mass migration in recent years. Conflicts, violence of an extreme nature, political and economic instability and increasingly, environmental and climate change constitute major driver for migrants to leave their home (McAuliffe and Khadria 2019). In turn, examining the triggers for these events inextricably links to colonial and ongoing imperial practices, such as the extraction of raw materials in European former colonies, the “persistence of economic exploitation”(Kohn and Reddy 2017), or following Lenin’s view, the “military competition between [Western] states over [non-Western] territories that could be dominated for their exclusive economic benefit” (Kohn and Reddy 2017). In fact, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report explicitly recognises the influence of colonialism on migration and problems related to climate change:

Vulnerability is a result of many interlinked issues concerning poverty, migration, inequality, access to basic services, education, institutions and governance capacities often made more complex by past developments, such as histories of colonialism (high confidence).  
—IPCC 2022, p. 1478

Ayşe Çağlar (2016) writes in a comprehensive critique of Ranabir Samaddar’s (2020) latest book *The Postcolonial Age of Migration*, “[...] we need a postcolonial perspective to extricate their visceral presence and effects in the age of migration, which in turn requires the acknowledgement of imperial lineages in nations” histories (Çağlar 2016, p. 1). Understanding current conflicts, poverty, and environmental catastrophes in the context of imperial histories reveals the paradoxical nature of this framing and raises the question of, “*who* is really enduring the ‘crisis’?” While for authors previously cited here it is a crisis of a cultural, economic and security issue (De Cleen et al. 2017), for others it is rather one of hospitality (Gill 2016), for others still, the crisis is that of

mass migrant deaths during perilous crossings of the Mediterranean (not uncommonly fleeing geopolitical conflicts in which Britain has been implicated); abuses perpetrated during immigrant detention, incarceration, and deportation; state-sanctioned Islamophobia through putative antiterrorist programmes; and the escalation of post-Brexit anti-immigrant hate crimes.  
—De Genova 2018, pp. 1767–1768

In other words, it is a crisis engendered by white supremacy of a racially orchestrated order (De Genova 2018).

### 2.3 A Brief History of Migration-Related Social Policy in the UK

As I noted earlier, social policy encompasses and finds its expressions in a wide range of areas of concern. Although it specifically focuses on housing, the timeline below shows how policy that concerns immigration and citizenship has evolved over the last century in great detail, starting from 1905 (see figure 2). This is not a comprehensive timeline of all important policies, but it does provide an interesting angle by placing major policy changes alongside world events that engendered migration. By drawing these moments together, my goal is (a) to expose the evolution of an increasingly racialised, hostile, bordering migration regime, and (b) to illuminate the evolution of a tendency toward assimilation/integration of difference.

#### 2.3.1 1905 – 1945: Alienation

In the UK, the 1905 Aliens Act was regarded as the first piece of legislation aimed at tightening immigration controls already in place with the 1835 Mauritius Ordinances (Sharma 2021b, p. 173) and establishing the tone for future policies (Panayi 2010). According to Panayi, these were motivated by two main factors: “the needs of the British economy” as well as “public opinion hostility” fuelled by “the xenophobic press” (2010, p. 308). It was also the first act to establish a link between immigration and welfare. At the time, those migrating to the UK were largely the “poor and sick Jews” fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013, p. 53). They were labelled as ‘aliens’, hence the name of the policy. The legal requirement upon which their admission to the UK was contingent was “to possess valid passports and be registered upon arrival by officials of a new immigration bureaucracy” (Sharma 2020, p. 92). If migrants were receiving ‘poor relief’ (e.g., a financial assistance given to some from state or community funds) they could be deported within a year. As a result, small volunteer organisations intervened to assist Jews, such as the (then) ‘Poor’ Jews Temporary Shelter in East London, which still operates today, as the Jewish Soup Kitchen and the Jewish Board of Guardians (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013; Newman 2005, p. 53). These non-profits appear to be among the earliest in the UK to provide ‘charity’ assistance to migrants, and they demonstrate the type of role that subsequent VCS organisations are required to play in mitigating the violence of immigration policy. By establishing an exclusive preference for ‘Britain’s own’, who were deemed to be of a more superior race, the 1905 Act was already reflecting the Darwinian logic that underlies contemporary immigration policy (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013; Panayi 2010). The threat posed by so-called ‘aliens’ to British traditions, or a sense of who qualified as able to become British, was already well-ingrained at the time, and featured clear racial, cultural and religious dimensions (El-Enany 2020).

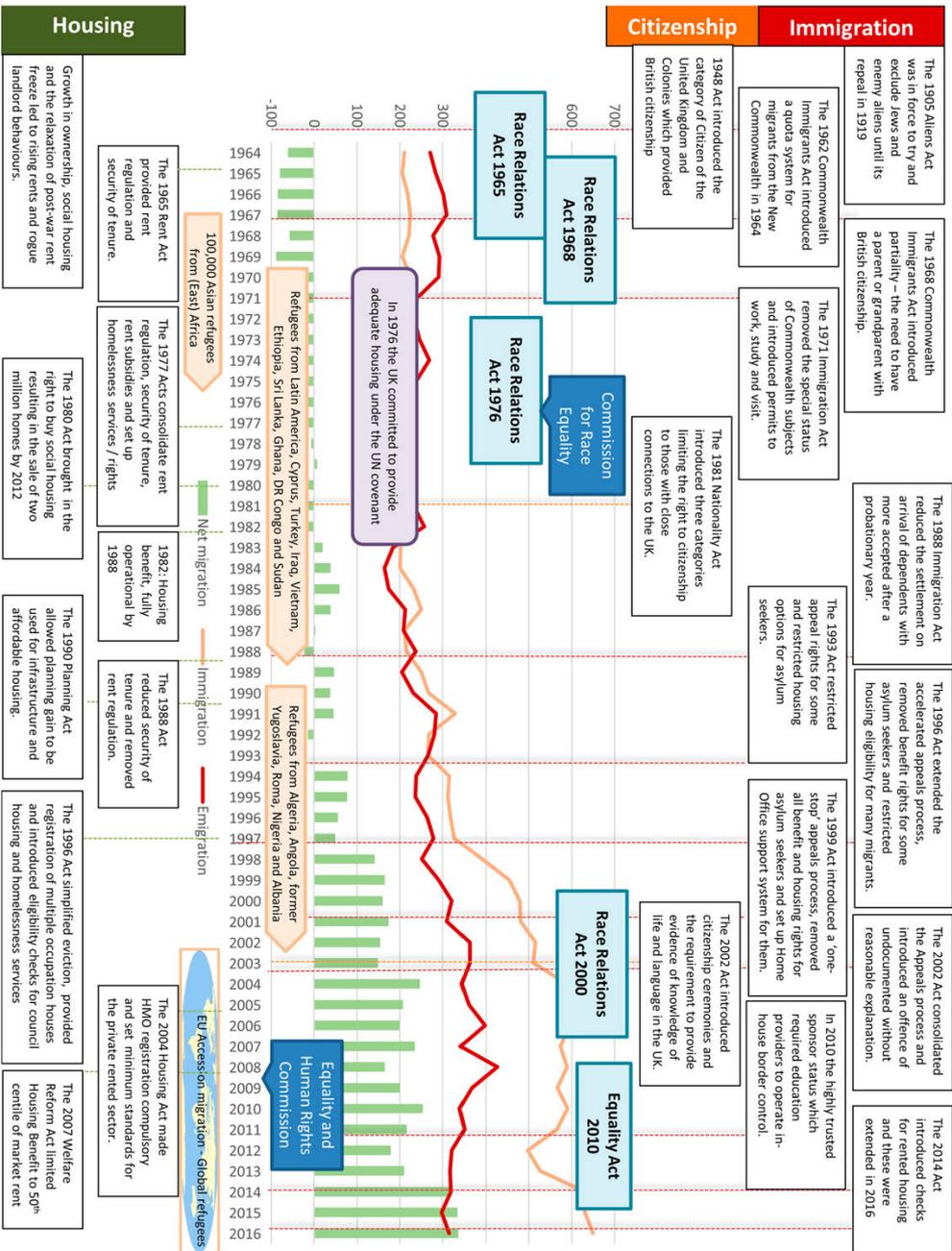


Figure 2: Timeline of some of the key legal and migration changes affecting migrant and minority housing in the UK, 1964–2016 (Lukes et al. 2019, p. 3192)

## 2.3 A Brief History of Migration-Related Social Policy in the UK

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### 2.3.2 1948 – 1962: Whitening the Nation

The racialised dimension of immigration legislation crystallised during the following wave of policy, which saw the introduction of the 1948 BNA, and granted rights to all people born in Commonwealth countries to emigrate to the UK. Later, the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, effectively undid the former's efforts by allowing entry to the UK not based on citizenship, but on "how passports were issued" (El-Enany 2020, p. 96). In essence, the Act dispensed some subjects from immigration control (those with passports issued in Britain or Ireland), whilst others "would be treated as 'aliens' for the purpose" of that particular control (p. 97). This, according to El-Enany (2020), exposed once more the "fragility of British subjecthood" (p. 97), as it also withdrew automatic rights to work for Commonwealth citizens, who had "to apply for a voucher from the Ministry of Labour" (p. 97). The arrival of the *Empire Windrush* from Jamaica to Tilbury marked the post-war era (Panayi 2010; 2020). Welfare was once again at the heart of the country's promise to newcomers who built and obtained access to the National Health Service (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013). This was not a generous act of kindness on the part of the UK. It was calibrated to respond to the countries' labour "shortages" (Panayi 2010, p. 60), until the second motivating factor for immigration restriction hit, namely rising public concerns linked to the increased visibility of migrants.

Barnor Hesse (1996) also emphasises that this period of migration policy coincides with the end of Empire and an acceleration of decolonisation in British colonies, leading to a reframing of 'race' from a politics of 'Empire' to politics 'as Nation' (Hesse 1996). Later Acts consolidated the racial divide that would structure entry rights to the UK. For example, the second Commonwealth Immigration Act (under Labour) of 1968 states unequivocally that if one has family ties to Britain (via blood or adoption), they can register to become British citizens. In other words, white Commonwealth citizens were welcome to settle in the UK, whereas non-Whites from the Indian Subcontinent, Africa, and the Caribbean "were unlikely to be able to establish such a link", resulting in their exclusion from "freely entering the UK" (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013, p. 57). MP Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech in front of the Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham in 1968 is a good example of how a racialised crisis narrative (with a 'moral panic' mood) was deployed by the political class:

That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect. Indeed, it has all but come. In numerical terms, it will be of American proportions long before the end of the century. —Powell, 1968 cited in El-Enany 2020, p. 113

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He talks about the “presence of racialised people” in the US and compares it to the situation in the UK to show that it is not impossible to stop. This explicit racism raised concerns and was not ignored in Parliament, with “at least a dozen unsuccessful attempts” to “legislate against racial discrimination” (Hepple 1969, p. 249). Among which a series of Race Relations Act throughout the 1960s which attempted to ban racial discrimination, making it an offence.

### 2.3.3 1980s: Constructing Asylum

The 1981 BNA passed by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative party marks a decisive point in immigration policy. While the category of ‘subject’ was already formally abolished, British Citizenship was held at a distance from former Commonwealth citizens who were not subjects, as they were given five years to apply for the ‘new’ Citizenship (Dixon 1981). As shown in the timeline in Figure 2, three categories of ‘membership’ emerged: British citizens, British Dependent Territories citizens, and British Overseas citizens. This last category was no more than a “subterfuge” according to Labour MP Roy Hattersley (El-Enany 2020, p. 128) as it only exposed the efforts to increase the impermeability of UK borders for racialised people, whilst White former subjects were encouraged to join “the motherland” (2020, p. 126).

In 1987, the “Immigration Act (Carriers Liability)” (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013, p. 58) was the first piece of immigration policy to punish any private carrier vehicle that carried passengers with “incorrect documentation” (2013, p. 58). Effectively, they are used as an immigration control tool and a precedent for the arsenal of future “everyday borders” (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018) that will be implemented in the following three decades. Despite all policy efforts, the number of people migrating was still rising (Panayi 2010). At that point, a number of conflicts erupted in various parts of the world (see Figure 2 for detail about regions), forcing people to flee their homes, thus ‘producing refugees’ (Lukes et al. 2019). The perceived threat to national integrity then shifted from ‘aliens’ to those that became constructed as ‘asylum seekers’ (Panayi 2010).

In keeping with her neoliberal agenda and promises made in the Conservative’s manifesto regarding good ‘race relations’ (see Figure 2) Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher responded with an increased immigration and border control arsenal. With the latest piece of legislation, asylum seekers had limited access to welfare and work, so she established a new agency to “administer support for eligible asylum seekers” (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013, p. 60) which introduced more bureaucracy and stratification among the ‘migrant’ population, which found itself in an administrative ‘maze’ (Bagelman 2013). Bureaucracy, in fact, becomes another tool in the arsenal of immigration control and management (Gill 2016). The narrative of scarcity of welfare resources and “overpopulation” (Back et al. 2012, p. 141) in the press and political discourse further entrenched the negative image of racialised asylum seekers among British people, who increasingly perceived migrant ‘others’ as undeserving of the privileges associated with citizenship (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013). It instilled a

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growing feeling of hostility towards racialised people but specifically against those going through the asylum system, and led to growing criminalisation of asylum (Tazzioli 2021).

### 2.3.4 1990s: Enter Stage (New) Left

From 1997, to ensure that “the remoteness and isolation” of asylum seekers was maintained and reinforced, New Labour, then in power, used a variety of means, including criminalising asylum seekers, to deter people from coming to the UK (Gill 2016, p. 49). Alongside that, the political and media narrative continued to stir emotional reactions to the incoming flow of people, by portraying them as taking advantage of the (welfare) system, and thus justifying stronger policy measures (Gill 2016). Subsequent Acts of Parliament saw the withdrawal of access to the labour market for newcomers (1996), and importantly, the establishment of the NASS, which was tasked in 1999 with administering the mandatory ‘system of dispersal’ of asylum seekers across the country (Gill 2016) as another tool in the state’s arsenal. Housing became a key area of focus as it enabled the state to im/mobilise people seeking asylum in specific location on a no-choice basis. The scheme caused massive social and economic exclusion due to spatial alienation, because applicants were not<sup>9</sup> allowed to choose where they will live and are sent across the country to “‘spread the burden of asylum’” (Darling 2016, p. 231; Gill 2016, p. 49). As pointed out by Darling (2016), the rhetoric of the ‘burden’, articulated ‘discursively’ and ‘symbolically’ “signals the achievement of the neo-liberal politics of asylum accommodation” and positions asylum as a “managerial issue” Darling (2016, p. 239) that is privatised and decentralised (Clayton, Donovan, et al. 2016). It is important to note at this point that immigration management tightened under the Labour government. Tony Blair’s office, as explained in the introduction, established the dispersal system (NASS). Between 2007 and 2009, another Labour Party leader, James Gordon Brown oversees the introduction of a new legislation that further entrenches borders: the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013, p. 64). As a result, there is a general continuity in the handling of migration, asylum, and citizenship that cuts across the left and right wings of the political spectrum which established, preserved, and entrenched the “differential inclusion” system of migration over time (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012).

### Community Cohesion

Importantly, for matters of immigration, the “community cohesion” policy discourse was established to ‘responsibilise’ local communities in fostering good community relations, and order. This narrative grew out of conflicts and unrest between the police, racist groups and racialised youth in northern England in 2001. General ‘disturbances’ in Bradford, Brunley, Oldham (Amin 2002) were “at the epicentre of this unfolding social project” (McGhee 2003, p. 376). Importantly, this

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<sup>9</sup>And are still not allowed to.

## Tracing an Engineered Crisis

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programme was not intended for arriving “migrants” who were being processed through the asylum system. It was conceived as a set of integrative policies for established racialised others in the aftermath of 9/11 and this violence, which instilled Islamophobic sentiments through terrorism rhetoric and its association with otherness and notions of incompatibility. Increasing emphasis on the presumably unique ‘values’ of Britishness, problematised and vilified the presence of non-Whites (Amin 2002; Clayton 2006).

Worried about the ‘disharmony’ evidenced in these northern towns, the Labour Government problematised race relations through the lens of ‘community cohesion’ (see table 1). In an effort to better understand how to promote “community cohesion”, the Community Cohesion Review Team (CCRT) was set up and tasked with addressing a presumed absence of ‘cohesion’ in those affected areas. A typology of ‘cohesion’ domains of action was drawn up based upon the assumption that communities (notably racialised communities) were living ‘parallel lives’ (Amin 2002, p. 968). Amin notes that the ‘community cohesion’ programme pursued the double goal to establish “clearly matters of national social standards and policies” as well as “an attempt to (re)engineer localities as ‘integrated communities’” (Amin 2002, p. 972). In light of this and drawing on El-Enany (2020) but also Picozza (2021), colonial undertones can be seen in attempts to include on the terms laid out in community cohesion and integration discourses. As noted by McGhee, this programme was flawed by its deliberate overlooking of the “material and socio-economic marginalisation” and “social capital” of those affected by community cohesion policy, which effectively depoliticised the issues that caused so-called “community ‘disharmony’” (see table 1, McGhee 2003, pp. 383–384).

It is questionable whether the objectives of such examples of extra-governmental efforts to engineer inclusion and cohesion are genuine. In an interview published in *Race & Class* in 2000, Ambalavaner Sivanandan speaks to the setting up of the Community Relations Commission (CRC), Race Relations Boards, and similar agencies as part of a strategy meant to “create a tranche of Black middle-class administrators who would manage racism” (Owusu 2016, p. 12). While the agencies he mentions were established in the 1960s and 1970s, the political discourse’s motive and narrative continued into the 1990s and 2000s, and thus still hold relevance for this discussion. For Sivanandan, it is the rise in protests, community initiatives and organising, demonstrations and general visible expression of discontent that triggered such policy responses. As such, he says, the CRC and the likes were about “how to absorb and negate disquiet” (2016, p. 12), rather than to actually support ‘inclusion’, and successfully managed to fragment struggles and communities through stifling strategies. Although this is not the central subject of this thesis, it is critical to investigate the differentially produced figures of racialised migrants and the rationale behind building systems that entrench additional separation. In addition, the significance of the question increases because organisations such as Segue frame their mission in terms of integrationist discourses, which histor-

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Domain	Description
Common values and civic culture.	Common aims and objectives. Common moral principles and codes of behaviour. Support for political institutions and participation in politics.
Social Order and Social Control	Absence of general conflict and threats to the existing order. Absence of incivility. Effective informal social control. Tolerance; respect for differences; inter-group cooperation.
Social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities	Harmonious economic and social development and common standards. Redistribution of public finances and of opportunities. Equal access to services and welfare benefits. Ready acknowledgement of social obligations and willingness to assist others.
Social Networks and Social Capital.	High degree of social interaction within communities and families. Civic engagement and associational activities. Easy resolution of collective action problems.
Place Attachment and identity	Strong attachment to place. Inter-twinning of personal and place identity.

Table 1: Typology of social cohesion domains as proposed by the CCRT (Home Office 2001, para 3.2, p. 13, drawing on Forrest and Kearns 2001). The Labour government’s endeavour to harmonise racial relations resulted in the 2001 publication of the Community Cohesion Team Review Report. It was decided to form this ‘task force’ in order to look into and make recommendations on how to deal with the specific concerns of regional diversity.

ically were not intended for asylum seekers but for established postcolonial migrants, thus blurring the distinction between migrants in different positions. Sivandan draws attention to the fact that there was likely never any purpose to integrate racialised people into British culture, regardless of their position.

### 2.3.5 2000s: Right-Wing Hostility

In 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron in coalition with the Liberal Democrats announced a tightening up of immigration restrictions and legislative measures set up to curb the number of applicants. This included, “pathways to citizenship”, “control through detention”, and the, “tagging and biometric documents” (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013, p. 63). The coalition’s series of measures

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Date	Legislation	Key elements
2009	Borders, Citizenship, and Immigration Act	The Act increased the residence period required prior to naturalisation from 5 to 8 years though it can be reduced to 6 through voluntary work known as ‘active citizenship’. Refugees will have to meet the language proficiency requirements and/or Knowledge of Life in the UK test before being granted citizenship. The welfare of children in the UK to be safeguarded and promoted by immigration officers.

Table 2: The Borders, Citizenship & Immigration Act of 2009 was introduced under PM Gordon Brown and Home Secretary Jacqui Smith in an effort to strengthen the UK’s borders and make British citizenship a privilege earned through service. Adapted from Bloch, Neal, et al. (2013, p. 64)

represents a clear trajectory in immigration policy, with the narrative that the UK’s national identity and integrity are jeopardised if immigration is not properly managed. The implementation of “technologies of temporal management”, such as tagging and biometrics, served to slow or block the incoming flow of migrants, as noted by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), and exposed the “border regime” that is strengthened by the implementation of such technology (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, p. 133). As a result, the UK was able to facilitate its “need for labour” by storing migrants in detention facilities (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013, pp. 62–63).

While the discourse on ‘community cohesion’ was targeting settled racialised communities, elements of this integrative ethos are also evident in these immigration policies, not only by making access to the UK more difficult (e.g., criminalising carriers as set out in the 1987 Act), but also by making citizenship more difficult (e.g., by extending the period to naturalisation from 5 to 8 years) (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013). This is significant because it demonstrates how migration policy and citizenship became articulated through the community cohesion discourse. It also exposes the fleeting, unstable nature of citizenship as a concept. ‘Pathways to citizenship’ was designed to demonstrate successful integration through a set of affective and moral standards encapsulated in the principle of passing a “good character test” (El-Enany 2020, p. 158). Racially marginalised people were now at risk of being denied naturalisation or having their citizenship revoked (El-Enany 2020) if it was later determined that they had compromised national values. This strengthened the precarity of racialised people (this is further discussed in the next chapter). As shown in table 2, the period for naturalisation was extended or, in the spirit of encouraging “good character”, incentives to join the voluntary and community sector were put in place.

Following New Labour policies of restricting access to citizenship, the Conservative Party ramped up the process. During the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition in 2012, when Theresa May

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was Home Secretary, a policy strategy known as the “Hostile Environment” was developed by a working group (Griffiths and Yeo 2021). When she took office in July of that year, she began putting it into action. The policy that aimed to portray some immigration as ‘illegal’ and distinguished ‘irregular’ unwanted migrants from ‘wanted expats’, could not be pinned down a single “policy document...nor clear aims and objectives” (Griffiths and Yeo 2021, p. 522). It was designed to infiltrate society in an obscure fashion, which typically saw a dramatic expansion of everyday borders (Griffiths and Yeo 2021). As part of that, the Home Office implemented a “culture of disbelief” (Anderson et al. 2014) to operate as the first point of hostility in migrants contact with the UK (Grierson 2018). The creation of the Interventions and Sanctions Directorate (ISD) was tasked with the “operationalisation of the hostile environment ... to ensure that access to benefits and services is restricted for irregular migrants and that sanctions are enforced”, which they could do because they would work with a range of private ‘partners’ (Griffiths and Yeo 2021, p. 526). In addition, the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016 formalise private actors’ responsibility for immigration checks, such as employers, landlords, bank employees, etc. (Griffiths and Yeo 2021) and to share migrants’ data with the Home Office under threat of sanctions.

May’s fear-inducing strategy was not limited to state policy, but also and most importantly, instilled through strong political discourse, campaigns and other right-wing parties acting from within local communities itself. Notably, the “Go Home vans” campaign set out by the Home Office was aimed at encouraging voluntary departure, and instil fear (Jones et al. 2017). In order to comprehend the hostile environment and the role it plays on the voluntary and community sector, this information is critical. The VCS occupies an ambiguous space in this equation. Although it works with the state, it differs from it at the same time. It resists some of its violence against migrants, but it also exerts control and management in subtler and unintentional ways that are not explicitly stated, as I go on to develop in the next section.

This historical overview attempted to identify significant moments and aspects in policy discourse that reveal the inclination and trajectory of British immigration and asylum policy. The purpose was to demonstrate how racism has infiltrated the law throughout history and how closely it is tied to the colonial history of the UK. It is to demonstrate that the existing climate around migration and access to citizenship has been constructed since the British Empire imposed its hegemony and continues to work now through the continuation of the national sovereignty project (more on this in chapter 3).

### 2.4 The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in North East England

In this section, I take the point made by Mayblin and James (2019) that “while other policy fields have been the subject of extensive research, the relationship between the state and the RTS [Refugee Third Sector] has received very little academic attention” (2019, p. 379, see also McGhee et al. 2016). Intricate and “heterogeneous”, the VCS is impossible to generalise (Gill 2016, p. 65). Volunteer and community groups in the context of asylum can be “refugee-led or not”, and this includes civil society organisations like cooperatives and social movements, non-profits, or charities (Gill 2016) with varying degrees of informality. Even within each of these broad categories, there is a great deal of variation. For example, not all charities are the same in terms of their goals, structures, finances, operations or politics. Charities are also legally regulated by the Charities Act, which has strict rules and principles that a group must abide by. These rules and principles, as explained below, do not come without their politics.

These politics must also be considered in light of their geography. If it is impossible to examine the VCS on a national scale in general terms, it is not simply due to the sector’s heterogeneity (i.e., different types of organisations). In order to comprehend the uniqueness of the North East context, it is essential to take a closer look at the historical presence of White, Asian, Black and other ethnically diverse groups and the factors influencing demographic changes. Historically, the presence of a Yemeni community along the coast of the North East region explains the greater presence of Arabs in the city of South Shields. The port city represented an economic focal point where Yemeni and Somali seamen settled at the start of the 20th century, prejudicially earning the name of ‘Arab Colony’ (Martin 2021). During the Second World War, members of these communities served with the British Army and were later subjected to violent acts of bigotry by white civilians, sailors, and soldiers (Griffin and Martin 2021). As Martin (2021, p. 145) explains, although the region’s coastal towns “were the most ethnically diverse settlements in the region, they were not discrete and bounded entities, but the product of multiple encounters and processes” that are inextricably linked to the development of the wider region and the country’s imperial history. Martin (2021, p. 161) suggests that “the commodification of colonial labour” could explain the rapid expansion of Asian, Black and other ethnically diverse populations in the country and in the North East region in particular at the beginning of the 20th century. The combined effects of the end of the World War II and the disintegration of the British Empire resulted in a decline of these populations.

In the early 1990s, only 3% of the population identified as ‘non-White’ in Newcastle, the region’s largest city (Bonnett 1990). By 2020, this demographic rose to 10.7% (Newcastle City Council 2021). Data from the UK 2011 Census showed “out of all regions, London had the smallest percentage of White British people, at 44.9%, and the North East had the highest percentage, at

## 2.4 The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in North East England

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93.6%” (GOV.UK 2018). According to Bonnett (1990), the first major policy for racial equality was established by the City Council in 1983, marking the beginning of debates on racism. Local Education Authority (LEA) policy statements provided the impetus for anti-racist politics, in contrast to cities like London, where, as Bonnett (1990, p. 262) explains, “anti-racist vanguards were well developed before sympathetic LEA policy statements were produced and where local pressures forced change along”. As a result, the North East is in a unique position when it comes to analysing the composition of volunteer and community organisations working in asylum and migration. Anti-racist ideologies were not developed uniformly across the country, which may also explain why civil society formations in the North East can be perceived as following a broadly-speaking “liberal-educationalist” and ‘multiculturalist’ posture in relation to anti-racism, which, in Bonnett’s (1990, p. 262) terms, “is able to maintain a self-image of itself as a vanguard vis-a-vis a ‘white highland’ educational community whilst filtering out the ‘unacceptable’ political content of ‘London’ anti-racism.” As such, the specifics of migrants support work in the North East discussed in this thesis reflect the political geography of the city’s composition over time and reveal how this type of work is historically underdeveloped in the region (Clayton, Donovan, et al. 2016), and only recently emerging (Cassidy 2020).

### 2.4.1 Dependency and Emancipation

While some charitable organisations explicitly engage in “political activities” by being willing to collaborate with government agencies (e.g., Refugee Action, and the five other charities mentioned in chapter 1) others focus on advocacy and campaigning (e.g., The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants), and still others on “filling the gaps” left by an absent welfare state (Cassidy 2020, p. 95) by delivering administrative services and access to necessities and financial support. Finally, other still focus on providing opportunities for socialisation, manual and creative activities, just like Segue and GSG. These organisations have all become necessary for UK society to support those who have been pushed out of the welfare system as a result of increasing austerity measures (e.g., cuts to government departments and local authorities’ budgets, cuts to welfare spending), and have been relegated to the asylum system, which operates independently of it. Although not all VCS fall into the category of “charities”, I focus on this type of organisation here because it was the status under which both Segue and GSG – the organisations at the heart of this thesis – operated at the time of my data collection. As mentioned, The GOV.UK (2011) is the legislation that oversees and regulates the charity landscape of charitable work (see Appendix A.1).

To be clear, organisations with a “political purpose” (GOV.UK 2011) cannot be charities, and this is particularly relevant to migrant charity work. When it “supports the delivery of its charitable purposes”, the ‘purpose’ is distinct from political ‘activity’, which is accepted. To add to the complexity of navigating the sector, questions of finances greatly influence the freedom of organi-

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sations to conduct ‘political activities’ that are bound with the terms of the funding contracts they are receiving (Lewis 2005; McGhee et al. 2016). McGhee et al. (2016) investigated the charity *Refugee Action* and its relationship with the Home Office. As *Refugee Action* was integral to the implementation of NASS, this case (along with five other charities, as previously mentioned) is unique in that they applied for the Home Office tender and therefore knew that their independence from state politics would be limited (Gill 2016). For Tyler et al., one of the pressing questions for a constructive critique of the non-profits’ oeuvre is: Has the neoliberal trend towards the ‘professionalisation of dissent’ diminished political opposition to immigration detention in Britain and the wider world? (Tyler et al. 2014, p. 3). In the UK context, McGhee et al. also interrogate the “political space” (McGhee et al. 2016, p. 25) that the organisation benefits from being closely involved with the Home Office.

Similarly, interested in the processes at work in institutional relationships involving political influence, Milbourne and Cushman (2015) described them as ‘coercive’, ‘mimetic’, and ‘normative’ and defined the relationship between the state and voluntary organisations as “isomorphic”. Simply put, an isomorphic relationship in the field of organisations and institutions is a phenomenon that involves “conforming to dominant arrangements in the surrounding organizational environment” (2015, p. 467). “For many years” they add, “the [voluntary sector] has acted as a critical friend to the state, highlighting shortfalls in welfare and providing additional services, while increasingly during the New Labour years, being drawn into delivering outsourced public services” (2015, p. 480). Starting in 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrats coalition effectively “decimated” local voluntary organisations by withdrawing the financial support they were receiving and reassigning it to private corporations that are often not as well positioned to reach into the communities (2015, p. 464). This, in turn, had significant repercussions for the organisations’ workers, both financially and emotionally (Clayton, Donovan, et al. 2015), and contributed to a voluntary sector that had to give up its aspirations – or “limit alternative practices and aspirations” and become more dependent on the state (Milbourne and Cushman 2015, p. 467). Indeed, there are three main effects of isomorphism, or conforming to state discourses and arrangements: 1) homogenisation in the voluntary and community sector, 2) increased competition for grants, and 3) decoupling of an organisation’s mission and values from its day-to-day operations and internal arrangements that provide “external legitimacy” (and thus, increased chances of accessing funding) (2015).

Writing about the non-profit sector in general and its dependency on private funding bodies, Arundhati Roy (2016) notes: “In the long run, NGOs are accountable to their funders, not to the people they work among ... It’s almost as though the greater the devastation caused by neoliberalism, the greater the outbreak of NGOs” (2016, p. 335). In a neoliberal state where welfare is outsourced to the private sector, metrics such as impact are key to compete for and maintain funding (Spade 2020). This means that non-profits, rather than working to uproot the problem at its origin be-

## 2.4 The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in North East England

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comes entangled with, and forced to work “according to the funder’s beliefs” (Spade 2020, p. 23). Isomorphic relationships also refer to this form of relationship whereby the non-profit’s work becomes politically and philosophically compromised. It also means that the organisation is held accountable by those who enable the service, which can contrast with the interests of those who benefit from it. Hence, it is not rare that in the process of becoming ‘incorporated’ (registering as a charity), alongside finance, a series of other changes appear in the organisation, such as change in language, culture or behaviours (Milbourne and Cushman 2015).

In *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*, Spade (2020) advocates for a voluntary and community sector that operates independently of governmental or philanthropic ventures that have consistently framed their ‘solidarity’ through the spectre of humanitarian aid. He argues for the remaking of civil society relations and social movements on the basis of solidarity by painting a comprehensive portrait of how charities operate internally and in civil society. He notes that contemporary charities involve a mechanism that situates individuals on a “moral worth” scale (2020, p. 22) that determines whether they deserve help or not and cites ‘lawful immigration status’ as “eligibility requirement” to take part as an active agent of the organisation or as a recipient (2020, p. 22). If Spade speaks from the point of view of the US, this internal (‘everyday’) bordering is not unheard of in the UK context. “Petty sovereigns” (Butler 2009 cited in Joronon 2016), “professional of the management of unease” (Bigo 2002, p. 64), or ‘petty bureaucrats’ (Gill 2016) are ‘figures’ who operate as border officers and are threatened to be sanctioned if they fail to adequately police migrants. This is made more blatant since the 2016 Immigration Act that vowed to “prevent illegal migrants in the UK from accessing housing, driving licences and bank accounts” and “introduce new measures to make it easier to enforce immigration laws and remove illegal migrants” (*Immigration Act 2016* 2016).

While VCS workers are not explicitly operating this form of bordering, when organisations are accountable to funding bodies, impact markers require the recording and sharing of personal data such as ethnicity, gender and postcode. This happened while I was volunteering at Segue and works to enforce a racialised categorising of the individuals attending the charity’s activities (which, in turn, is well-perceived by funders who grant money for ‘multicultural community’-type projects). While there was no communication as to why this information was required (besides for the purpose of measuring impact on the community), one of my contentions is that this mechanism (inadvertently or not) pushes the VCS to act on behalf of the state to integrate racialised others and further entrenches the split between the sovereigns on one side of the border and the migrants who aspire to join the other side.

As expressed earlier, the nature of VCS organisations varies greatly. With that in mind, it is important to note that Segue operates differently to a charity like *Refugee Action*, previously mentioned. The question of which form of charity Segue should be had been grappled with in the group. While

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some were active proponents of the informal ‘community group’, charity leaders (e.g., chair and trustees) maintained that registering was necessary insofar as most funding bodies grant money to formally registered charities. By actively participating in shaping Segue (see chapter 4), I learned how difficult it is for a charity to maintain independence in the face of so many pressures. This is also due to the nature of these funding bodies, which are based on a neoliberal principle in which competition determines who receives funding and the amount is determined by impact, which is not a measurable value for the type of work undertaken by Segue. Going through this process also introduces a different vocabulary into the organisation, as I noticed with Segue that trustees – who are a requirement under the Charities Act (GOV.UK 2011) – occasionally referred to the organisation as a ‘service’ provided to ‘users’, which contrasts with the language used by staff, who prefer the terminology of ‘members’ (I understand this as a ‘white governmentality’ tool, which is further discussed in chapter 7). Typically, if Segue wanted to keep its independence and pursue its ‘grassroots’ aspiration, implying that it would run more informally (e.g., less long-winded meetings and AGMs, typically) it would have struggled to access funds, as most funding bodies require a charity registration number, which would mean that the music tutors could not be paid. In addition, when a group becomes a charity, a set of rules apply that cover the type of activities and purpose, the governance structure, the modes of operation (and control via a Board of Trustees and Annual General Meetings), the Charity commissions applicable. Charities must meet certain criteria in terms of ‘public benefit’, which are listed in Appendix A.2, alongside a definition and a step-by-step guide for setting up a charity.

### 2.4.2 Scope for Resistance?

However, as previously pointed out by Milbourne and Cushman (2015), isomorphism alone does not explain how organisations had to go to great lengths to rethink their management structures, or as termed by Miller and Rose, their “technologies of government” (Miller and Rose 1990, p. 7) on a scale that frequently exceeds their aspirations. It also ignores the capacity of non-governmental organisations to oppose exclusionary and discriminatory state practices. (McGhee et al. 2016). Concerning the outsourcing of welfare services, once more, Milbourne and Cushman (2015) identify three strategies that have profoundly altered the nature of voluntary and community organisations: “marketisation, managerialism, and associated monitoring regimes” (p. 468). According to them, these are key dimensions of governmentality (in the Foucauldian sense – which will be discussed as part of empirical chapter 7) that have pervaded the grassroots organising of many charities, with far-reaching consequences. Again, using Segue as an example is instructive. As staff and volunteers, we<sup>10</sup> were deeply concerned about the absence of individuals who have a lived experience

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<sup>10</sup>I was a volunteer.

## 2.5 Segue: Co-option, Apoliticality, Resistance?

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of ‘forced’ migration as active members of staff<sup>11</sup>, and we discussed some of the obstacles to that several times: regular long meetings, heavy bureaucracy, a large number of responsibilities and a relative command of UK legislation required, knowledge of the geography and key actors in the local VCS, the ability to report to funders and the skills to gather the information they require, and more. A member of staff expressed in one of our interviews<sup>12</sup> how difficult it would be in today’s charity landscape to effectively train someone who does not have this capital already to take on all of the responsibilities that Milbourne and Cushman’s maretisation, managerialism, and monitoring entail. For these reasons, it is critical to emphasise how these governance mechanisms, as Jonathan Davies (in Milbourne and Cushman 2015, p. 469) explains, constitute hierarchies and hegemonic state powers that are purposefully rendered invisible in some more grassroots organisations which serves the state’s neoliberal agenda.

When it comes to contesting, voluntary organisations have demonstrated at multiple occasions in multiple contexts that it is possible to emancipate *marginally* from the pressures of isomorphism and governmentality, though it does not come without dilemmas. McGhee et al. (2016) for example, show how *Refugee Action* appears to “strike a balance” between “insider” and “outsider” roles in relation to the Home Office. Their resistance took the form of inside influence on Home Office policy, while their outsider role remained to advocate for refugee rights. While the authors recognise the “atypical” nature of this relationship, they urge scholars to move beyond dualistic discourses of domination vs. co-option in which the ‘state – VCS’ relationship is portrayed as coercive isomorphism, with the latter being the victim of unequal patterns of dominating governmentality, particularly in the migrant VCS. Clayton, Donovan, et al. (2015) too, argue that *resourcefulness* in the VCS of public services delivery to marginalised people operates as a “temporary” form of resistance (2015, p. 21). But for the proponents of mutual aid, this is not enough. As Spade (2020) argues, resisting state and corporation co-option is a “struggle” that cannot be achieved ‘from within’ the system (2020, p. 52).

## 2.5 Segue: Co-option, Apoliticality, Resistance?

When the project founder of Segue died unexpectedly in 2017, she left behind an important legacy in the form of a community project that to this day, serves as a “strong foundation” for forced migrants arriving in the city. Many people told me that the organisation had never been the same since her death, and I could feel the delicate balance throughout my time there. With so many different viewpoints on the board, it has been difficult to keep the group’s ethos in line, especially since Helen represented a strong leading voice with a vision. Besides, the realities of austerity

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<sup>11</sup>This needs to be nuanced insofar as three members of the group have taken more active responsibilities in the past (one as a Trustee, one as a Treasurer and another one was covering for the Treasurer in her absence to refund participants’ travel costs).

<sup>12</sup>This is further developed in the empirical chapters of the thesis.

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politics and a hostile environment added to the increasing difficulty of navigating the future of Segue. Migrating to the UK is becoming increasingly complicated and dangerous as a result of the state's role in regulating both migration flows and migrants themselves (Syal 2022). In this context, migrant charity work is caught in a bind when it comes to determining how to fund the assistance that it wishes to provide 'migrants'. For example, Mark, one of Segue's music tutors, confessed to me:

When we were going for funding originally, we didn't want to take funding and Helen [and us] both agreed we didn't want to take funding from like, banks and all that, and a few people thought that was ridiculous, but like we didn't want to take money that was coming from you know, profits from the arms trade and that kind of thing

—*Pre-interview with Mark – 04.06.20*

In light of this, how does Segue fit into the VCS landscape? As laid out in the introduction, Segue was founded in 2009 and defined itself as “a community education and integration project [that] build bridges across racial and cultural divides” (Segue 2014), which in essence fitted perfectly with the community cohesion and integration programme set out by New Labour. The organisation was never designed to contest the system or advocate policy changes in favour of migrants. While it is important to differentiate the logic of deterrence that underpinned asylum policy, from that of assimilation/integration of the community cohesion policy designed for racialised others, these socially produced categories of migrants found overlapping responses in the VCS.

Segue sought to bring together migrants and 'locals' through collective music-making, in a way as to encourage *harmonious* social relationships across cultures (see chapter 5 for more on harmony as an 'ordering' and 'silencing' tool). The organisation's Board of Trustees at the time and for many years included 'migrants' and a volunteer labour force of around 30 people. Segue was not only a creative space at the time, but also a drop-in where 'migrants' could get IT and legal advice as well as a social space with shared food, tea and coffee. Although I was not given too much detail on how decisions were made at the time, or how much the representation of forced migrants on the Board of Trustees influenced the project's direction, in my exchange with Mark, I learned that there was an “insider group” making decisions, and possibly some form of hierarchy in place set up – and led – by Helen:

[T]he actual manager was Oliver, who was from Northern Ireland, and he had come to the session for quite a few years and then we ended up getting money for two separate project manager role type jobs. They got money for loads of different jobs over the years, but yeah, Oliver ended up being like the manager for a long time, but I do feel like there was a time when it was, quite a struggle. There was a group of, the insider group of people who set it up again, in this iteration if you like, of I don't know, yeah it

## 2.5 Segue: Co-option, Apoliticality, Resistance?

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was, it was just members of the group who set the new one up. Because it was running as a charity for like, nine years maybe, seven years and then it folded not long after Helen died, and you know, and at that time it did have like, on the Board of Trustees were all, all you know, middle class white British citizens [...] But I [er] remember Helen would like have her favourites, and like it definitely pissed other people off that she would like go to the end of the earth to help one person out, but then like just sort of someone else's struggle would go by the wayside, do you know what I mean.

—*Pre-interview with Mark, 04.06.2020*

When I joined Segue, the charity's founder had died nearly two years beforehand, and the group was temporarily dissolved shortly after her death. It seemed to have left an unfillable void in the organisation and halted all activities for a period of time. No one in the organisation ever explicitly stated this to me, but it appears that Helen held the majority of the decision-making power in the organisation. For Segue to continue, existing members and staff first had to grieve the loss of a leader. Once Marie dear friend of Helen then became Chair, Segue began redefining what the group is whilst making a point to extend Helen's legacy. Segue was a 'community group' and not incorporated as a Charity when I joined in 2018. It had just lost a vital source of funding which meant that the staff who were delivering the music tutorials could not be remunerated, as they had previously been. The resulting financial strain threatened the project's viability, despite the continued popularity of the drop-ins. As a result, volunteer assistance was appreciated, and this is how I first became involved in the project, before I decided to work with the organisation as part of my PhD. Segue is used to welcoming researchers who are interested in the topic of migration in general, and the presence of researchers in the space did not seem to bother the trustees or members. In chapter 4, *Relational Lived Experience as Methodology*, I go over the circumstances surrounding my involvement in the project. During my time working with this organisation, I witnessed a gradual transition from a community group to a charitable organisation, as well as some resistance to it.

Ella, a staff member who I introduce in later chapters, offered to collaborate with me on fundraising as an introduction to my volunteer work. At the time, there were five volunteers working on this task (we ended up being only two). Aware of the underlying pressures associated with bureaucracy and accountability to funding bodies, the decision was made to focus on establishing a crowdfund. We chose a platform that appeared to be particularly active in the region and had a strong emphasis on community service. However, most mainstream crowdfunding platforms, even though they reach more people, appear to have a more (but not solely) short-term goals that our project which was looking to fund running costs over a longer time period.

However, we encountered administrative challenges that represented significant setbacks early in the process of creating the community group's page. For example, the majority of the costs we

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accounted for were ‘running costs’, such as music tutors’ wages, and room rental. This was not approved, and we were advised to enter more ‘capital costs’, which backers are more likely to pledge toward, according to one of the platform’s staff. These are one-time expenses for tangible ‘things’ such as instruments, safeguarding training fees, mailing address fees, and website hosting. After we made those changes, we ran into another problem: determining an appropriate payment method. The issue came up as Segue was using a bank account that did not provide online banking services and always requires the presence of at least two Trustees if cash needs to be withdrawn from the bank. Financial accountability was essential, and it was overseen by our treasurer.

Our crowdfunding solution was put on hold while we looked into alternative payment options. In spite of their extensive experience working in the non-profit sector and in-depth local knowledge, the Chair and a key Trustee were retired and lacked basic technological knowledge that other members saw as critical to the project’s success. This is why some of us, as volunteers, had to spend a lot of time explaining how some of these new technologies worked, and online payment and crowdfunding were two of those. We were confident that our project would be approved once we had established a secure online payment method, but another obstacle arose. One of the platform’s requirement was that we produced short video clips that would be sent to local councils and funding agencies that could support our project. *Impact* was the main concern here. To be considered for funding, the crowdfunding platform (and consequently the councils) required ‘evidence’ that the project was already making a difference in the lives of forced migrants. As a result, Ella proposed that members of Segue who were forced migrants speak to the camera and explain how the organisation is beneficial to them. We decided against it after a few clumsy attempts at reading scripts and putting two members in an uncomfortable position.

As previously stated, being registered as a charity is required to access most trust funds. Ella and I were working on the crowdfunding application at the same time that we were working on a grant application to a well-established Trust, as some Trustees had requested. The amount of work was enormous, as were the technical, operational, and ethical considerations that had to be taken into account during the process. We shifted our hopes from crowdfunding to the Trust grant because it seemed more promising and less constrained in terms of justifying operating costs, as well as because we were bidding for a larger sum. Meanwhile, talk about Segue’s future status had resurfaced. The majority of those in attendance at meetings agreed that registering as a charity was the best course of action, while others strongly disagreed. As a result of this discussion, one long-standing volunteer left Segue. The fact that accessing grants from funding bodies (such as the Trust we were applying to) required the organisation to be registered as a charitable entity was central to the decision to register. Furthermore, the status ensured VAT exemption for our fundraising activities in accordance with “Article 13A(1)(o) of the EC Sixth Directive on VAT, first adopted by the UK in 1989” (GOV.UK 2020).

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The arguments for one side or the other were hazy, and at the time, I was just getting acquainted with the UK VCS and was trying to figure out the quickest and most pragmatic way to save the project, with no knowledge of the various types of organisations and their responsibilities. My contribution to this debate was limited, simply because I was motivated solely by the desire to fund Segue for the following three months. The affective nature of austerity politics became apparent when in retrospect, I realised that the tension and precarity against which we were operating was ‘orchestrated’ (Clayton, Donovan, et al. 2015) through incremental measures<sup>13</sup> implemented throughout the social policy history cutting across immigration, national formation and neoliberal politics. As Clayton, Donovan, et al. (2015) put it:

Public attitudes are subject to manipulation and the language of austerity, resurrected during the latest crisis (Cameron 2009), seeks to persuade and legitimate policy measures through an activation of emotions. In this sense, austerity can be viewed as the construction of a threat and as a means of regulating behaviour. —2015, p. 4

In the midst of their own personal crises (financial, health, work-related), members of the organisation had to deal with the pressure of providing an essential space for forced migrants to socialise. Voluntarism was a key component of the ‘Big Society’ project launched by Prime Minister David Cameron in 2010 (Clayton, Donovan, et al. 2015), and it was used as a justification for a reduction in welfare spending. Defaulting to ‘crisis’ mode forced us to make decisions based on pragmatism and immediate needs, ultimately undermining our ethos and preventing all attempts to be reflexive. However, and importantly for discussing the scope for resistance within austerity context, these conditions were discussed and actively critiqued, as this quote from Mark shows:

[When it comes to Segue] I’m just like, ‘how am I going to run this session?’ I’m not really sort of thinking about it as, ‘we are an organisation who are going to go out and say things to the world’, I’m not even thinking on levels of what, what sort of pressure we are putting on any government or any sort of like, statement that we are making as an organisation you know, I’m just thinking about leading my session as a one singing session or a fun drumming session, do you know what I mean.

—*Pre-interview with Mark 04.06.20*

While he attributed this prioritising to “the system” (see chapter 7 for more on this), he also confessed hating internal politics. As well as illustrating the organisation’s need for funds to do the bare minimum – for Mark, the bare minimum appears to be teaching and sharing music in a ‘fun’ environment – but for what purpose? In spite of this, he used our interview as an opportunity to pause and reflect on the power dynamics he was re-enacting:

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<sup>13</sup>Clayton, Donovan, et al. (2016) proposes that “third sector organisations have been used instrumentally by local authorities (themselves subject to various pressures) to achieve efficiency objectives, rather than to form sustainable partnerships” (2016, p. 731).

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I could imagine a cynical voice being like, yeah, this is bullshit you know, you are just getting paid to do it as well. I was talking to someone who was saying, you know, *“it’s always the white men who or just white, white British people who will have the paid job in a charity work”* and the asylum seekers, there will always be the person of colour volunteering you know, and it’s like, oh yeah, and I mean ... Segue has always tried to be like, you know, I don’t know, when Europe was great, do you know what I mean.

—*Pre-interview with Mark, 04.06.2020*

As a volunteer and staff member, I saw that some of the tasks I was assigning to myself and others were intrinsically related to the greater context of austerity, hostility, and intended lack of resources for this type of labour. This weight was often shared among active members of organisations, whether paid or unpaid.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the important events in the history of migration policy in the UK. The reasons for emphasising these points was to make visible the dynamic that emerges: the histories of immigration and asylum policy reveals co-existing political impulses to, on the one hand, ‘keep out/expel’ and on the other, ‘bring in’, on specific terms. In this context, the essential components of this policy development are articulated and practiced through hostile migration regimes and integration discourses that govern and speak to the relationships between civil society and government structures, such as the state.

The hope is that the context provided here contributes to laying out the foundation to better understand the way in which the VCS works in the context of providing services to people in the system. The language of ‘crisis’ is a insightful starting point to dissect the way in which different categories of migrants were produced socially and legally. While most of the early migratory flows to the UK came from (and still do) formerly colonised countries (El-Enany 2020), connections can be drawn between migration in the post-war era and more contemporary migration. The main difference being in the way in which the former was actively produced as one to be integrated or assimilated into a putative, culturally coherent British society, whilst the later was (and still is) actively deterred from establishing in the country (Squire 2011) and is increasingly produced as illegal (De Genova and Roy 2020). This is illustrated by the different systems (e.g., welfare vs. asylum system) and bordering mechanisms that each ‘category of migrant’ must go through in order to make a life in the UK. My argument here is that the integrationist approach presumably designed for established racialised others seeped into the VCS and became part of the common sense understanding of charity and welcome for migrants.

‘Racialised others’, while undergoing severe forms of violence and systemic racism, are not criminalised or ‘illegalised’ in the same way that more established migrants do (Anderson 2013), although they are more susceptible to be than white Britons. As a result, if established migrants’ access to welfare support, jobs, and overall spaces of sociality remains largely constrained, there is still scope for them to be portrayed as ‘good immigrant’ by demonstrating how well integrated they are, and thus ‘deserving’ a better living. The legal framework that administers the lives of people in the asylum system operates independently of the national welfare system. NASS is the body that in essence governs asylum seekers’ lives, and while it does so, it instils hostility by way of ‘moral panic’ (Hall et al. 1978), just like at the turning point in 2001 that saw the increased policing of racialised others, and the slow convergence of anti-(im)migration rhetoric fuelled by Islamophobic sentiments. If the differences matter, the points of convergence show that the bedrock of the UK’s position on immigration is a racist one, that only accepts ‘otherness’ on its terms, if it means that the ruling class is not going to be challenged (Back et al. 2012) and ‘British values’ preserved. However, this conditional inclusion formally represented by the status of citizenship is not immutable. Not only can it be retracted at any point (as the Windrush Scandal or the case of Shamima Begum showed), but importantly, it does not symbolise the full acceptance of the individual to society, as El-Enany (2020) points out. While the question of citizenship will be further elucidated in the next chapter, I think it is important to signal here that as an object of desire for differentially positioned people crossing borders, it is a particularly fragile one, that sheds light on what I believe to be the ‘real’ crisis: that of the underlying philosophy at the roots of sovereign nation-states.

The role of the VCS in this equation can seem confusing. On the one hand, under austere politics that implied drastic cuts to local authorities and reduced welfare spending, the sector was forced to ramp up the provision of vital services for the general public (Clayton, Donovan, et al. 2016). On the other hand, the VCS could be seen as reproducing the state’s agenda when it comes to integration of ‘racialised others’. As McGhee’s paper title “Moving to *our* Common Grounds” indicates, ‘cohesion’ can be seen as an other – less loaded – way of saying ‘assimilation’ or ‘integration’ (McGhee 2003). Again, this was not designed as a set of policies meant to oversee the integration of people in the asylum system. However, it seems like a convergence happened, which can be illustrated in the way in which Segue originally set up its mission statement. The use of similar language around cultural bridging and integrative politics suggests that while they continue to be deterred from coming to the UK, there is an understanding that some will eventually ‘make it through the fishnet’ and those will need to be integrated on similar ‘Common British’ terms. As hinted on, the next chapter delves into the history of citizenship and how it became one of the modality through which mobility is managed. This is because citizenship is one of the central ways through which questions relating to immigration and integration have been conceived. In addition, I develop the concept of ‘regrounding’ as a way of contesting the centrality of citizenship and integrationist understandings of belonging.



## Chapter 3

# ‘Regrounding’: Toward an Anticolonial Expression of ‘Belonging’

### 3.1 Introduction

Building on the preceding chapter’s discussion of the history of social policy as both defensive/ordering mechanisms and a means of integrating ‘others’ on certain conditions, the concept of citizenship has been the primary vehicle by which forms of inclusion into the nation state have been developed. In this chapter, I explain how this came to be by examining the history of citizenship formation and its dimensions. I propose a critique of citizenship understood as a mechanism for legitimising racialised, unequal access to freedom and rights, and through an anticolonial critique, I articulate a search for alternatives to citizenship, –thus conceptualising ‘regrounding’– and include the potential role of the VCS in this regard. This chapter reflects the theoretical journey in an attempt to make sense of the research encounters outlined in chapter 4.

Indeed, by taking an inductive approach to research, I allowed myself to be theoretically informed by my participants, their experiences, and the engaged work that I was doing with the organisations. This project’s trajectory was shaped in part by the people I spoke to, as I used the praxis of what I called ‘*engaged* institutional ethnography’ (see Billo and Mountz 2016, specifically about Institutional Ethnography in Geography), in which reflection (both collective and individual) informed the research’s direction. As a result, because non-citizenship and the process of becoming a citizen was a central topic in my early interactions with my informants (implicitly or explicitly), as well as the starting point of some of my personal interrogations, I begin here by examining the

## **‘Regrounding’: Toward an Anticolonial Expression of ‘Belonging’**

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roots of citizenship, as a legal and affective relationship to the state. I draw particular attention to the *classed, racialised and gendered* character of early definitions of citizenship. Here, I also address the questions the analytical framework of citizenship raised for geographers on the assumed triangulation between the nation-state, sovereignty, and colonialism as decisive forces in what we might term, the ‘project of citizenship’. For this, I draw particular attention to the UK context, as this is the national context in which I have chosen to conduct my research and this thesis is therefore based on.

Incorporating anticolonial critiques of the nation-state and citizenship into my reflections, as evidenced by my journey toward recognising the consequences of being exposed to the institutional violence of inclusion mechanisms, I then consider anticolonial critiques of the nation-state. To demonstrate how more subtle racism and violence inhabits charity organisations, I draw on critical literature on Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs), civil society, as well as more autonomous projects that seek to respond to, and struggle with, the repercussions of ‘white governmentality’ (Hesse 1996; Nayak 2012) and ‘differential inclusion’ (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Segrave 2019). This is to ground the analysis of subsequent chapters in a critical perspective of the VCS. I also bring in the conceptualisation of ‘hierarchies of belonging’ (Back et al. 2012, p. 139) that helps move away from the insider/outsider dichotomy and paint a more nuanced picture of the way in which migrants are unevenly able to become part of British society. Finally, the chapter ends by examining how to forge new attachments to place that are deterritorialised, and what is meant by *regrounding*. I also point toward recent work on pluralism that seek to prefigure other ways of ‘living with’ and negotiating social difference inhering in migration. I highlight here the importance of imagining new ways of belonging and new objects to which our desires might become attached (Berlant 2011).

It is my contention that the use of citizenship and inclusion as key modalities of understanding and language should be continually re-evaluated in order to make sense of the ways in which one is, becomes, relates and constitutes oneself as a (political) agent. As such, this is not a thesis *about* citizenship or the proverbial ‘migrant’s voice’, but rather a critique of efforts to integrate those constructed and perceived as ‘others’, of taking other ways of negotiating social difference and being ‘in relation to’ seriously, and of figuring out what it means to belong in the face of uprooting. In the chapter’s concluding section, I argue for more work that addresses the intersection of the relationships to others and the structures (e.g., charitable, humanitarian) that, unwittingly or not, contribute to the reproduction of commonplace ideas of what it means to belong based on nation-states’ rhetoric.

### 3.2 Histories of Citizenships

Gershon Shafir (1998, p. 2) summarises the legacy of over two millennia of citizenship - “[the] central axis of Western political philosophy” that spans across the Greek *polis*, Roman Empire’s *res publica*, the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. The frameworks of citizenship and its meanings continues to evolve over time and space, placing more or less emphasis on legal framework, membership, entitlements, and moral values. Citizenship is therefore not a monolith, and responds to the context in which it is based (Gorman 2006). In the Greek city-state, historical geographer Daniel Gorman (2006) argues that “man’s highest function was the political, and where citizenship was a privilege that held both rights and responsibilities” (2006, p. 13). An understanding of “civic values and ethics” was an essential part of Aristotle’s view of what it means to be a “good citizen” (2006, p. 13).

The caveat to the Greek model of citizenship is that it was fundamentally exclusive only available to a few, and “supported by a slave hinterland” (Gorman 2006, p. 13). Early models of citizenship put a high emphasis on people’s moral compass, and only those deemed ‘fit’ to elevate themselves to the realm of public life earned the status of citizen. At the same time, this assertion also entails a split between *polis* (i.e., “the public sphere of the political life”) and *oikos* (i.e., “the private sphere of the household”) which enshrined a gendered order alongside a hierarchy of importance between the two, where the first would be seen as holding higher moral worth (Shafir 1998, p. 3). As such, the Greek model of citizenship excluded not only slaves, but also women not deemed virtuous enough to take part in the public life and institutions of men (Faulks 2000; Linklater 1981; Shafir 1998). Humanity, alongside citizenship is at the time a quality only attributed to *some* men.

The Roman model, although inspired by the *polis* is described by Gorman as “based not on the city but on the idea of a commonwealth, [that] was outward-looking”, and is decisively said to have “had a greater affinity” with the British Empire (Gorman 2006, p. 13). The system of strata set up in the Roman Empire established the first model of citizenship that is status-based and legally anchored (Shafir 1998). The other originality of Roman citizenship is that it is also defined by the legal capacity for individuals to own land and slaves. If, like in the *polis*, citizenship in the *res publica* represented a departure from the “arbitrary rule” (Shafir 1998, p. 4) of emperors and officers, it continued to entrench the non-humanity of many on sexist, classist and ableist grounds.

In the Medieval city, citizenship was politically and territorially anchored in towns which benefited from an increasing level of autonomy in running their affairs (Faulks 2000). This was also an important period of colonial conquests, against which a growing resistance was forged. Notably, differential statuses in the French colony of Saint Domingue (now Haiti) stirred discontent that contributes to feeding the fire of the French Revolution of 1789 (Bloom 2018). Some of the axioms of modern citizenship were found in the stratification in operation at the time: civil society,

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group homogeneity, the bourgeoisie as the dominant voice, and ultimately in reasserting a stratified system, liberal individualism is the doctrine upon which modern citizenship is forged (Brock 2015).

T.H. Marshall (1950) operated a shift in the liberal view of citizenship. In 1950, *Citizenship and Social Class* – a sociology of the framework of citizenship in Post-Second World War Britain – looks at the history of citizenship through the lens of social change, thus operating a break with the state-centric perspective. Marshall saw citizenship as a set of rights that evolve over time to increasingly include and expand the reach of who benefits from these rights. It is not disconnected from the state, however, because incorporating the working class into citizenship implies incorporating it into the state framework (Shafir 1998). However, Marshall’s analysis reflects the political paradigm of the British Labour Party in force at the time that prioritised democracy and rights granted to all adult men as well as welfare provision (Marshall 1950). Citizenship then became threefold: civic, social and political. What Marshall only partially addressed was how this model was only possible thanks to the political and territorial anchoring of borders within which those granted the status of citizens benefited from greater freedom *in exchange for* their allegiance to the centralisation of political life anchored in states (Shafir 1998).

This form of citizenship is essentially another form of loyalty to an order centralised in the hands of a few. As nationality and immigration law history shows (further discussed in chapter 2), this order is not much less arbitrary than previous models of citizenship, as those in power making decisions are a white bourgeois stratum. In other words, the arbitrary rules of religious allegiance of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was replaced by the project of the sovereign - rich landowners who forged citizenship on the basis of classed, gendered and raced categorising (Gorman 2006). Gorman says: “The starkest divide in citizenship status was that between subjects of the United Kingdom and the white-settlement colonies on the one hand, as compared to the dependent Empire on the other” (2006, p. 20). Envisaging citizenship as an emancipatory and liberatory framework today continues to raise similar questions: for whom is it freeing? Who decides the terms of the ever-evolving framework? Which relationships are nurtured, and to use Gorman’s expression, who composes the ‘slave hinterland’ that maintains the order? What are individuals *allowed* to liberate themselves from? With a new set of civil rights and duties associated with citizenship (such as voting), power is not only centralised in the state anymore.

### **3.2.1 An Affective Relationship to Public Institutions**

The era of the Enlightenment constitutes a turning point in the history of citizenship and nationhood for the whole of Europe. Brubaker’s (1990) essay discusses in great depth the role played by the First Republic (and subsequently) to culturally homogenise the population through an array of “assimilationist” public institutions: “the army, the schools, and the [Napoleonic] administrative

machine” (Brubaker 1990, p. 143). The relevance of the membership to the nation-state is therefore enshrined discursively (through one common language learned at school), culturally and socially (through a shared set of morals and values: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*), politically (through the membership, voting duties, and rights to protection), and territorially (through the securitisation of the borders within and outside of the nation-state by the army). This logic was differentially present across Europe, including in the UK, which led to different genres of nationalisms (republican nationalism in France, liberal nationalism in the UK, based on *jus soli*, and fascist nationalism in German, based on *jus sanguinis*) (Brubaker 1990; Gorman 2006).

In the UK, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are a period of Empire building that was reflected in its wealth and the prestige of the state’s bodies (House of Commons, House of Lords, judicial system, diplomacy) fuelled by the yield from colonial expansion and overseas occupation. However, this is also a period of inner tension within the regions of the country that resist the assimilationist politics of the central state. Although Wales and Scotland became part of the UK, Welsh, and Scottish peoples resisted and retained their cultural, linguistic, religious and civic practices, despite becoming part of the Kingdom, resulting in rising divisions and othering (Prescott 2006). Eventually, this leads to Ireland’s independence at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which came at a deadly cost. This internal alienation is important to point at as it indicates how the processes of institutionalising xenophobia (and racism) unfolded throughout British history to harmonise<sup>1</sup>, order, pacify, and points at the regime of liberal citizenship as the technology *par excellence* to enshrine this order and give it social and cultural legitimacy. Charles Tilly’s (cited in Gorman 2006, p. 16) socio-historical understanding of citizenship is explored by Gorman, for it emphasises the relational character of the concept, one which places people and the state in a transactional relationship and, in my view, advances understandings of the emotional and affective currency that is generated by it Gorman (2006). This citizenship which is animated by a nationalist logic expressed through an emotional register that was “patriotic, militarist, pseudo-scientific, racialist, and finally imperialist” (2006, p. 16).

Despite the presence of the Enlightenment’s rhetoric of rationalism, establishing a legal framework to the membership, states demonstrated the indivisibility of citizenship and emotions and the priority of loyalty and allegiance to the sacred nation and to the state, governing body of the nation (Bagelman 2016; Fortier 2016). For Sara Ahmed (2004), it is the love for one’s nation that engender resentment for those recognised as strangers-threat. The ‘affective economies’ that form the fabric of ‘belonging’ are “social and material, as well as psychic<sup>2</sup>,” she says (2004, p. 121).

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<sup>1</sup>Harmonising, as a principle of ordering is also deployed through charity frameworks and even within them, thus mimicking that of citizenship. I develop this as part of the central argument of chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup>By not addressing the psychic and psychological dimensions of nationalisms, I align with Ahmed for whom ‘Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective’ (2004, p. 119).

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Specifically referring to the Aryan project of Whiteness, she argues: “*it is the emotional reading of hate that works to bind the imagined white subject and nation together* (Ahmed 2004, p. 118, italics as in the original)”. Patriotism, which is an important marker of one’s good citizenry, as illustrated in this quote from 18<sup>th</sup> century French politician Cazalès:

L’amour de la patrie fait plus que des hommes, il fait des citoyens.

Love for one’s homeland makes for more than men [sic], it makes citizens.

—Cazalès, 21 May 1790, cited in Beauchamps 2016, my translation

This is particularly well illustrated by Beauchamps’s (2016) analysis of the trial of feminist and revolutionary Olympe de Gouge in 1791. Beauchamps points out that de Gouge was tried for demanding the expansion of citizenship rights to women, set a precedent for contemporary “practices of denaturalization” (2016, p. 945) that exposes one of citizenship’s paradoxes insofar as she was tried “as a citizen” (2016, p. 944). The outcome of the trial judged de Gouge a *traitor* to the nation, a threat to national politics and the patriotic project (Beauchamps 2016). As Beauchamps points out, emotional registers are actively deployed in the trial (“love for the *patrie*”, fear/terror, foreignness) which exposed how emotions are mobilised in governance, and importantly, that *having* citizenship is first and foremost an indicator of one’s relationship of loyalty and love to a particular order and set of institutions that produces an identification with it.

What the case of Olympe de Gouge’s trial shows as well is the way in which the emotions associated with citizenship are coupled with one’s national identity (“emotional union”, see Beauchamps 2016, p. 947) *before* that with one’s locality or town like it used to be the case in the Middle Ages. This exposes how public institutions administering citizenship can discursively and affectively turn anyone (or anything) into a threat to national identity, and to the maintenance of a ‘coherent society’, one that is “sticking together” bound by shared patriotic sentiment (Ahmed 2004, p. 118).

Such management tools, today, are numerous and deployed in the everyday<sup>3</sup>. For instance, Merolli (2016) argues that integration and/or citizenship exams constitute another technology deployed by some states (including the UK) to manage migration and gives a concrete object that individuals can direct their *desire* toward and adds: “The introduction of integration exams as part of the naturalization process is a tool that states are using to both manage inclusion within the state and reassert its authority over the nation. Naturalization – as a specific form of acquiring citizenship - is about nation-building” (Merolli 2016, p. 960). With citizenship, the fine balancing (or ‘manufacturing’, as Merolli expresses it) of emotions in relation to place goes hand-in-hand with the reinforcement

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<sup>3</sup>The concept of “everyday borders” developed by Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. (2018) speaks to how the affective economy in Olympe de Gouge’s trial has been relegated to everyday practices of surveillance and alienation. As the case of Shamima Begum shows, loyalty to the nation-state is still enforced by the court of law, but “everyday borders” captures how people in the asylum system are made to *feel* guilty and fearful in everyday contexts (such as going to the doctors, or to school). The hostile environment is, after all, all about engineering an atmosphere of terror by criminalising people in the system (Goodfellow 2019). It plays into the affective economy of asylum.

of national borders and the state as the body that protects them. In the next section, I discuss the case of the UK's nation-building more specifically and its connections with colonisation and slavery. Indeed, sociologist Nandita Sharma (2021b) notes:

Despite the assumption within much of citizenship and migration studies that immigration controls have been a key feature of state sovereignty since the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which enshrined the doctrine of territorial sovereignty, it was not until the end of slavery in the British Empire that restricting people's entry into imperial territories was regarded as something states should do. —*Sharma 2021b, p. 169*

Drawing on Sharma's work, the next section looks at the relationships between (the end of) slavery, colonisation, the decline of the Great British Empire and the implementation of the filtering technology: immigration control.

### 3.2.2 An Ongoing Colonial Project

So far, in this chapter, I have set out how the concept of citizenship came into being in Europe. We have established how the type of citizenship we currently know is a legacy from the frameworks set up in Ancient Greece (participation) and Rome (membership/status) that were iterated over time and space through conflicts and expansion. I have also mentioned that these frameworks of recognition were fundamentally racist, classist, sexist and ableist. These multiple exclusions were both internal and external to the territories in which citizenship was enforced and practised. As the example of Olympe de Gouge illustrated, being part of the national territory did not automatically grant access to rights, nor did it provide absolute protection or prevented losing citizenship. Citizenship, then, is an unevenly applied and partial construct founded on the premise of excluding some in order to include others. This binary plays out through an affective discourse and the conjuring of a 'good citizen' with "high moral worth" (Shafir 1998, p. 10).

In Ancient Rome, the salience of the membership and the status afforded by a regime of citizenship in the *res publica* particularly appealed to emperors (Faulks 2000). As a way of legitimizing their political power, they would grant citizenship to the people of the empire as they realized that in doing so, they could expand their rule and territory (2000, p. 10). It is the first instance of citizenship being used to enforce social control and pacification, but it is also a model that, unlike the Greeks, did not necessitate active participation and was merely administrative in nature. It was also stratified, as previously indicated, preventing the emperor from being overthrown 'constitutionally' because the power to vote was solely reserved for some men, as it was in Ancient Greece (2000). This history is particularly significant for understanding the function of citizenship in expansion and colonialist operations.

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According to Tendayi Bloom, colonisation and the development of the ‘Enlightenment’ project are inextricably linked:

[it] helped to generate new wealth for those involved in colonial projects and for the countries from which they came. This in turn helped to make space for new freedoms of thought. [...] But equally, the ideas that were developed at this time made colonisation possible. While there was certainly debate, several of the writers who emerged during this period as key thinkers within liberal discourse explicitly justified aspects of colonialism and slavery in their work... —*Bloom 2018, p. 117*

Bloom identifies John Locke as one renowned liberal thinker who, as an investor in the Royal Africa Company, had a personal interest in colonial occupation and actively supported “not only slavery, but a system of slavery based on race” (Bloom 2018, p. 117). Another feature that takes us back to the Roman concept of citizenship is Locke’s and the ‘Enlightenment’ liberal individualist project (Gorman 2006), which holds that possessing property is a right of every man (in the gendered sense). According to this viewpoint, a man who possesses land and ‘improves’ it (by putting labour into it) becomes the rightful owner. This is Bloom’s interpretation of the Enlightenment’s justification for colonising non-European territories (Bloom 2018).

Extracting natural resources was thus rationalised as a ‘logical’ endeavour, as native inhabitants of colonised lands are considered ‘uncivilised’, ‘backward’, deemed incapable of caring for the land on which they lived for centuries (Bloom 2018), thus entrenching an evolutionist perspective later captured by Johannes Fabian under the expression of “denial of coevalness”<sup>4</sup> (Fabian and Bunzl 2002, p. 25). The spatio-temporal organisation of colonisation thus foregrounds the distinction between the settler and the ‘native’ colonised which is dictated and justified by a racial logic (Picozza 2021). As Picozza (2021) explains, then and now ‘whiteness’ is portrayed as the liberal, forward-thinking figure that has overcome the “aberrations” of “illiberal” (2021, p. 13) forms of governance. And this is the racial logic that underlies the “differential inclusion” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, p. 159) of ‘migrants’ that I discuss in the next section and previously touched upon in chapter 2.

According to Sharma (2021b), the articulation between immigration controls, citizenship and state sovereignty became salient when the British Empire started declining. Until then, she said, “restricting people’s freedom of movement out of imperial territories was the *sine qua non* of the project of civilization” (Sharma 2021b). However, she adds, this does not mean that movement *on the terms of the state* was not permitted; it was indeed forced through colonisation, as a way of

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<sup>4</sup>By that, Fabian and Bunzl (2014) points to the ‘allochronism’ in ethnographic (and anthropologic) work that describes and represents the object ‘other’ a-temporally, outside of time. According to Kevin Birth (Birth 2008), this ‘omission’ served “Western social scientific theories of change” (p. 15) in that it preserved its unchallenged dominant position in the development of “theories of change” (Birth 2008, p. 15).

securing “the profitability of imperial enterprises” (p. 169). More specifically, the British Empire, as “the first to impose capitalist social relations of its subjects” (p. 169) accumulated enormous wealth through the enslavement of Africans and Americans and their trade. This trade necessarily implied to make slaves mobile, as well as to send its own subjects to the colonies where profitability was in peril due to the large numbers of deaths caused by settlers and the labour conditions of extraction. When the *Slavery Abolition Act* was promulgated in 1833, the question of rights came back: “what, if any, rights would the workers recruited to replace enslaved workers have?” (Sharma 2021b) Sharma explains that no set answer was found, but in practice, most of them were sent to populate “White Settler colonies” (2021b, p. 169), later known as Commonwealth countries: Canada, Australia, United States and New Zealand.

The end of the slave trade did not coincide with the end of mobilisation, servitude and exploitation for the British Empire as the ‘coolie system’ that took over after abolition illustrates (Picozza 2021; Sharma 2021b). It is defined by Sharma as “the recruitment of workers, mostly men and mostly from the colony of British India or British-controlled China to work in conditions of contracted indentured servitude” (2021b, p. 170). In order to best control ‘coolie’ labourers, they were prevented from moving freely, or deterred through the instauration of a heavily bureaucratic process – with border/immigration controls. While he does not refer to ‘coolie’ labour, Gill (2016) qualifies border controls as “the quintessential form of modern rule” (2016, p. 23). This immobilisation<sup>5</sup> had determining consequences on the way in which space became fragmented along racial lines, giving birth to a “growing sense of nativism”, particularly in ‘White Settler colonies’ which fomented an increasing White nationalism (Sharma 2021b, p. 171). According to Sharma, the status of ‘migrant’ arose as a result of the imposition of movement regulations of ‘coolie’ labourers and starkly contrasts with that of the citizen. It is an administrative category which is subjected to state officials’ approval and Sharma adds: “Even though humans have moved since time immemorial, Migrants were produced out of a new regime of labour control required by investors reeling from the victory of the slavery abolitionist movement” (2021b, p. 173).

It was the 1835 Mauritius Ordinances that established that the British Empire “ought to be allowed to enact their own immigration controls” (Sharma 2021b, p. 173) as a technology to establish sovereignty and its opposing category, thus resulting in the “legal institution of national citizenship” and the migrant (2021b, p. 173). Nationalist views heightened and justified the deployment of movement management mechanisms, such as immigration controls, in order to protect the sovereignty of the state and the aspiring homogeneous order that arose from the ashes of the British Empire: “the postcolonial system of nation-states” (Sharma 2020, p. 91). This history explains why colonised and racialised people remain excluded from citizenship regimes (specifically, from being recognised “full and equal” citizens (Bloom, 2018, 117), even if they are granted a mem-

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<sup>5</sup>I talk about the im/mobilising force of the system of asylum in empirical chapter 7.

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bership, as Picozza puts it: “Colonial law played a specific role in this naturalisation of political subordination, constructing the subjectivity of the non-European ‘Other’ under paradigms of uncivilised inferiority and incapability of self-determination” (Picozza 2021, p. 15). Importantly, the implementation of this system of governance never remained unchallenged. There are a number of accounts of anticolonial resistance and active challenging of the hierarchy practised on plantations in the United States (Mezzadra 2020) or in British India (Gopal 2020), that illustrate how dissent actively shaped struggles for liberation and movements for self-determination, which is the topic of the next section.

### **3.3 Anticolonial Perspectives on Citizenships and Urban Politics of ‘Welcome’**

The fact that prevailing histories of early forms of citizenship describe it as emancipatory in European tribal societies implies that liberation was important to every human being. However, not everyone was regarded human enough to be granted this liberty (Hesse 2014; Picozza 2021). In my PhD project, the stories of individuals who did not earn the right to freedom under this framework have been (and continue to be) silenced thus creating “a narrative of ‘reality’ [that is] established as the normative one” (Spivak 1988, p. 281).

The multiple exclusions arising from this tension raised questions that are fundamental to the very idea of citizenship as it was and continues to be practised. It is important here to reiterate that citizenship does not exist ontologically; it is coded discursively, and is processual (Spinney et al. 2015, p. 325) and its terms are constantly changing. Coupling the rights afforded by the membership with an affectively and discursively engineered homogenised national identity, modern liberal citizenship cannot lead to the liberation that was promised, as indeed, there is no such thing as a free, homogeneous people in a globalised world. Citizenship alongside borders evolved into a “technology of control of diversity” which promotes and is increasingly “affected by autochthonic political projects of belonging” as described by Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. (2018). This idea that some people are more entitled than others to being and living somewhere because ‘they were there first’, is described in their book *Bordering* (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2019) as “a new phase of ethnicity” that can even surpass it. They add, “it combines elements of naturalization of belonging with vagueness as to what constitutes the essence of belonging, and thus can be pursued also by groups which would not necessarily be thought of be autochthone by others” (2019, p. 34). One of the problems of the concept of autochthony lies in its elasticity and general emptiness. Markers of autochthony are often underpinned by questions of class, as much as they do ethnicity, gender and age (2019).

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In the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, increasing transnational movements as a result of global trade markets (McNevin 2011), wars, the “re-scaling” of Europe, and postcolonial migration, meant that claims to a single national identity or territory became more and more redundant (Kofman 2005, p. 453). Contemporary thinkers (Benhabib 2004; Bosniak 2008; Faulks 2000; Soysal 1994) started advocating for a redefinition of citizenship that goes beyond national membership and in favour of opened national borders. Notably, Yasemin Soysal (1994) argues for a “post-national citizenship” whereby recognition and rights (through a membership) is universal and bound to personhood rather than contained within national belonging. One of the limits of this model is that it focuses on a status-based understanding of personhood, and thus excludes those who fall out of legal frameworks, such as asylum seekers, stateless and undocumented people (Kofman 2005; Schuster and Solomos 2004). Another pitfall, argues Favell (2022) is that post-national rights remain anchored in an “institutionalist argument – which sees them moving towards a completion... which is modernising along the Western model” (2022, p. 18). In other words, the system that governs people is not divorced from inclusive politics, implying that under that system, some will always be excluded, those that do not “transform...into a modern subject” of the “North Atlantic West” (2022, p. 18).

This liberal views on citizenship and migration do not sufficiently address the inherent problem in centralised and globalised forms of governance that lie its core, such as the global inequality it is rooted in (Favell 2022). When Faulks (2000) discusses the value of decoupling the nationality-citizenship relationship, he universalises it in three ways: first, by abstracting citizenship from its long history of hierarchical redistribution of rights, duties, and obligations; second, by ignoring the patriarchal nature of the system since its inception; and third, by ignoring recent colonial and racist history. Thus demonstrating how “modern citizenship became an institution deployed for colonial and imperial campaigns to create governable (rather than merely subject) peoples” (Çağlar 2016, p. 263).

Subsequently, numerous thinkers and scholars in sociology, citizenship studies, and geography advocated for a move to understand citizenship beyond the frame of membership and place a higher emphasis on the dynamism, emotional ties and performativity of individuals’ relationships to places (Favell 2022; Isin and Nielsen 2008; McNevin 2019; Nyers and Rygiel 2014). Engin Isin’s “acts of citizenship” (2008, p. 15) profoundly redefines citizenship as not something that one *has*, but something that one *does* (and importantly, that *anyone* can do, regardless of their legal status), thus breaking with the ‘top-down’ nation-state model (Turner 2016). The insistence on the ‘acts’ is what makes Isin’s framing constructive for its capacity to decentre national-sovereignty but also to attach the claim to a collective body politic and struggle – he defines acts of citizenship as:

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...those acts that transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (that is, claimants of rights) through creating or transforming sites and stretching scales  
—*Isin 2009, p. 381*

In chapter 7, I illustrate how breaking from the routines of structured governance can indeed be transformative and prefigure shifts in power dynamics. ‘Acts of citizenship’ is a valuable framework through which thinking about rights become less about intent and more about transgressing infrastructural norms, or the breaking with the givenness (or ‘script’) of the order in place (Isin 2009, p. 379).

### **3.3.1 Belonging**

Such efforts to define, rework, and transgress citizenships prompted feminist geographers to examine the concept of belonging. As it turns out, there are numerous definitions of the term, and as a result, there is no universal understanding of what it means to belong (Mee and Wright 2009). For human geographers, this concept provides an indispensable framework that encompasses questions of identity (Alexander 2008; Nziba Pindi 2018; Ong 1999), relationality (Askins and Pain 2011; Hörschelmann and Refaie 2014), policy, politics and civic rights (Johnson 2002; McNevin 2011; Yuval-Davis 2006), practices and affective experiences (Ahmed 2004; Duffy 2009; Fortier 2016), and, of course, mobility, space and place (Chambers 1993; Massey 2005; Oosterlynck et al. 2017; Raffaetà and Duff 2013). Where citizenship is restrictive (e.g., most countries do not permit multiple citizenships), belonging’s informality enables a much more integrative perspective on individuals’ connections to the environment and their mobility.

Alongside the spatial, the political questions that belonging raises for individuals who are seen to not belong have prompted reflections and a proliferation of research into the ways in which belonging is contested (Maestri and Hughes 2017; Turner 2016), and exposes the historical givenness of the relationship between belonging, national identity, citizenship, and race. Elspeth Probyn’s (1996) work was a crucial starting point for geographers interested in theorising on these issues, as she debunks the widely held notion that belonging is an intrinsic principle that determines where one ought to be on the basis of sameness or lineage. Her work is revolutionary in that it is the first to demonstrate that belonging operates on multiple layers that intersect but cannot be reduced to a single (national) identity. Geographers examined the particularities of how people forge their ‘sense of belonging’ and how these relate to the ‘politics of belonging’ that emanate from national and supranational institutions, based on this novel understanding (see Kathleen Mee and Sarah Wright 2009’s special issue).

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Land and border issues are inherent to these conversations. A critical geography legacy sheds light on aspects of human and non-human livelihoods that are minimised or ignored in common notions of belonging that include national identity and ‘race’. This is especially well illustrated in the special issue by the work of Muller et al.’s (2009), who examined the everyday practices of border-making in the (now dissolved) Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. Their insights into the ‘politics of belonging’ demonstrate that in actuality, belonging entails fluid connections that are continuously negotiated and that these connections are entangled across land boundaries that are beyond the control of the Australian agrarian agency. As explored by Richard Schein’s (2009) in the same issue, this study echoes the work presented in this thesis in that it illuminates the relationship to land as a contested political site that separates owners and non-owners along a racial spectrum. Marco Antonisch’s developed concept of ‘place-belongingness’ consistently centres on the socio-material dimension of one’s sense of attachment to a place, as well as one’s history, which are often overlooked in definitions of belonging. In particular, he emphasises five elements in his framework that contribute to forming a sense of being “at home” (p. 646-7): auto-biographical, relational, cultural, economic, and legal. Though it is not explicitly expressed, these factors tend to suggest that place-belongingness exists on a time-space continuum that includes an individual’s past and present socio-material circumstances. For example, the socio-materiality of one’s childhood home in a place long left behind (auto-biographical), a sense of shared language and “semiotic universe” (p. 648) (cultural), but also the ability to participate in one’s economy (economy) and the need for a sustained, frequent, and positive contacts within relational fields are indicators of the importance of material conditions in forging a sense of belonging (Antonsich 2010).

‘Regrounding’, thus, builds on belonging and place-belongingness, insofar as it considers these layered definitions foundational to an anticolonial geography of the world. Geographers have emphasised more-than-human and non-human agents and dimensions that raise implications for what it means to belong., typically in the form of food (Bagelman et al. 2017), natural environment (i.e., plants, animals, etc.) (Mee and Wright 2009; Probyn 1996) but also by focusing on the meanings of fences, edges, shared public infrastructures (Howitt 2001; Raffaetà and Duff 2013), and relational (Antonsich 2010) as a means of re-centring the socio-material dimensions of belonging.

Based on this work, and in an effort to approach belonging from an anticolonial standpoint, I (re)conceptualise the term regrounding as an expression that encompasses and goes beyond belonging. In thinking with migrants’ experiences in the organisations presented in this work, re-grounding draws attention to the fluid nature of what being at home evokes. That is, attachment to place is complicated for the people I encountered and cannot be reduced to national belonging, culture, or to a specific time period in these contexts. The meaning derived from the concept of

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‘home’ is multilayered, and, as expressed by Fortier’s (2000) (see also Ahmed et al. (2003)), does not refer to one’s nomadic or sedentary lifestyle (fixity or movement).

### **3.3.2 Anticoloniality**

Thinking about nation-states and its technologies (citizenship, borders, immigration controls) through the work of anticolonial struggles can offer a lot to geographers imagining (and co-producing) an alternative model to relate to others and oneself. As Davies puts it, referring to the Pondicherry ‘Gang’ (critical part of the resistance against the British Empire in India): “[the individuals who moved through Pondicherry] illuminate how anticolonialism was dynamic and heterogeneous in its attempts to resist imperial and colonial domination” (Davies 2019, p. 2). As a project that tries so hard to categorise and homogenise people, nation-states colonise not only overseas territories, but also, argues Davies, in the “colonial centre of power in the metropole” (2019, p. 11). For example, Davies cites the Colonial Office in London as site that operates much of the practices of colonial rule. Another example is the way in which Britons themselves would be mobilised to occupy the colonies. The capacity to arbitrarily (im)mobilise bodies is one that is attached to colonial and Imperial power (Picozza 2021; Sharma 2021b; Stoler 2012). Ann Laura Stoler (2012) defines the colony as a political concept that looks beyond territoriality and encompasses practices that have philosophical and material ramifications:

A colony is the sifted remainder of disparities and of the contradictions that made it up. As an always already unfinished project that can never be settled or finished once and for all, the contests over degrees of sovereignty and gradations of un-freedom produce recurrent forays and standoffs in a thickly embattled space in which no one is really safe. Imperial formations thrive on the tangible and intangible opacities of privilege and privation that reinvent what constitutes the law. —*Stoler 2012*

In other words, Stoler interprets “the colony” as the ruins left behind by settlers. It is a project that was never completed (and could never be) in which we struggle with concerns of sovereignty (and non-sovereignty) as well as freedom and unfreedom, that deepens the chasm between individuals who belong to each of these groups. The last part of this quote makes a crucial point: in the colony (as the ruins in which we exist), Imperial<sup>6</sup> systems persist and thrive on making opaque how and what discrepancies are organised through a murky legal framework<sup>7</sup>. I align with Stoler (2012) and Davies (2019) definitions of “colony” and “colonial power” as “political” and philosophical concepts and “set of practices” that haunt not only the current legal system of the UK, as also argued by El-Enany (2020), but as I argue in chapter 8, the modes of working and structures of some VCS

<sup>6</sup>I would replace ‘Imperial’ by ‘nation-states’ here to reflect the current governing political formations.

<sup>7</sup>This is also why I call for additional IE in chapter 4, since it is essential to continue unearthing the ways in which institutions and organisations that organise lives unwittingly or intentionally restrict people’s liberties and contribute to widening disparities.

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organisations. As such, in the particular context of this thesis, I identify coloniality as an ongoing set of practices and processes, like many have before me, as the asylum system (Fortier 2021; Picozza 2021), “managed migration” (Kofman 2005, p. 454), “white governmentality” (Hesse 1996), “differential inclusion” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, p. 131), ‘everyday borders’ (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018).

In addition, I argue that the institution of charity, and the VCS more broadly, in a liberal state is a practice that manifests as a symptom of a colonised culture. As such, researching the ways in which technologies of control and filtering are deployed in these sectors to reproduce colonial (b)orders (e.g., differential inclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), white governmentality (Hesse 1996), hierarchies of belonging (Back et al. 2012), as previously cited) is lacking. Nevertheless, Cassidy’s work (Cassidy 2020) addresses the VCS the question of its more or less explicit politics and, in doing so, refers to projects of ‘welcome’, such as the City of Sanctuary movement. She notes:

At the same time as some migrants may be ‘more welcome’ than others, so too the wider politics and political projects of welcome need to be understood as dynamic sets of processes and practices, which are continuously being negotiated; perhaps better understood as ‘welcoming’.

—Cassidy 2020, p. 99

Therefore, my critique of inclusion<sup>8</sup> into the national citizenry stems from the belief that in such frameworks too, a selection is operated on similar logics to that of the state (e.g., raced, classed, gendered) (Spade 2020). In addition, I align with Cassidy in thinking that ‘welcoming’ is not homogeneous. Equally, by making ‘hospitality’ the crux of the movement, *City of Sanctuary*, does not exceed or disrupts the limitations of “statist accounts of politics and sanctuary” (Squire and Darling 2013, p. 69). However, their value lies in “the rightful presence” (2013, p. 69) of those often seen as victims of exclusionary framings of rights; in other words, through their very presence in the urban context of the sanctuary city, they do disrupt statist forms of politics (hence the term ‘minor politics’) (Bagelman 2013; Squire and Darling 2013).

The particular value of “anticolonialisms” (Davies 2019, p. 11, emphasis added) lies in its plurality. As illustrated by the multiplicity of pro-independence movements that spurred settler colonies across the globe, anticolonial struggles were never a monolith<sup>9</sup>. As such, an anticolonial critique of the nation-state, citizenship and immigration invites us to think and act “against the similarly

<sup>8</sup>And its heterogeneous declinations, such as integration and community cohesion.

<sup>9</sup>Anticolonialism takes many shapes: For instance, pan-Africanism was a communist anticolonial resistance across Africa, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in Algeria was a response to French colonial rule with a nationalist agenda (Quintero 2020). Tricontinentalism was an anti-imperial movement that was led by Che Guevara and Fidel Castro against the Global North’s cultural and economic supremacy. The legacy of this collection of movements operating under Tricontinentalism lives on today through Tricontinentalist discourse and ongoing struggle for racial justice and emancipation (Quintero 2020).

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broad range of practices and by-products of colonial rule that include racism, militarism, resource exploitation, land dispossession, [and] include resistance to internal and external colonialisms” (Davies 2019, p. 11). Of course, it is important to signal that those anticolonial efforts are themselves not free of inner fragmentation as much as they are not always deprived of nationalist claims, as the Algerian FLN or the Indian National Congress illustrate (Thénault 2012; Yamahata 2019). Yamahata’s (2019) remark that: “the success of national liberation does not necessarily imply the success of anti-colonial movements, as the colonial structure of power remains deeply embedded in contemporary society”.

Yamahata (2019) identifies patriarchy, capitalism, and racism as relics or lingering by-products of colonial orders and concludes that the true worth of anticolonialism lies in its “intersectional and transnational networks” Yamahata 2019. Previously cited examples such as *No Borders*, or *No One is Illegal*, and *Freedom of Movement for All* demonstrate how anticolonial struggles can be articulated across different sites and scales, and speak to specific terms and technologies deployed by colonial and/or nation-states power (Alldred 2003). They contrast with the City of Sanctuary movement because they are not forged on the basis of differentially positioned sovereignties and humanitarian logics (Pallister-Wilkins 2022b). Indeed, the City of Sanctuary movement is a movement that re-imagines “the city as a space of refuge and welcome towards asylum seekers and refugees” (Darling 2010, p. 126). While it does speak of a popular discontent with the shifting Government position from ‘regulating’ sanctuary to “outright restrictionism and deterrence”(Darling 2010, p. 126), and criminalising, it does not fundamentally challenge the terms upon which power draws legitimacy to impose the order in which some people *need* the generosity and care provided by the other half. In Ananya Roy’s (2019) terms, “sanctuary... exists in relation to such forms of power...[and] is continuous with, rather than a counterpoint to, the unending border” (p. 767). In other words, the City of Sanctuary movement leaves the border unchallenged, which in turn explains the stance taken in abolitionist resistance and demands as a necessity to pave the way toward “reconstruction... [and]... redistribution” (p. 762).

To extend the critique of liberal conceptions of citizenship and urban politics of welcome, this section interweaves three concepts that illuminate contemporary modalities by which migrants, on the one hand, and citizens, on the other hand, are produced and managed (Merolli 2016): ‘differential inclusion’ (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), ‘hierarchies of belonging’ (Back et al. 2012), and ‘white governmentality’ (Hesse 1996). These modalities function as ‘invisible technologies’ that perpetuate the unfulfillable longing for citizenship (Berlant 2011). Although they are not the only concepts that serve the purpose of making visible the violent, divisive, and racist project of the nation-state, they are especially significant in the context of this thesis because they speak directly to the dynamics at play within the VCS that I develop in the empirical chapters 5, 6, and 7. These dynamics are important because they reflect the nature of the dilemma for institutionalising ‘help’

### 3.4 Migration Management Through the Lens of ‘Race’

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(Arendt 2006) in the form of humanitarianism and charity: a liberal politics of open borders, extended citizenship rights, inclusion *into a proverbial national community*, none of which works to actually uproot the system and structure that forces people into the camp of those who can offer assistance and those who are condemned to gratitude for the generosity of their saviour.

### 3.4 Migration Management Through the Lens of ‘Race’

As we have seen in section 3.2.2 on the coloniality of citizenship, the end of Empires, legalised slavery, and World Wars spurred a movement to establish mechanisms that could help maintain the Imperialism of fallen Empires and thus would reproduce categories that can be broadly broken down into ‘natives’ and ‘aliens’ (Sharma 2020). As Sharma (2020) notes, immigration controls are one extremely apparent example of these mechanisms, but less visible ones are what sustain citizenship as a fragmented and insidious framework, despite the fact that it is still portrayed as a liberating object of desire (and necessity). Here, quoting Lauren Berlant (2011) is useful to lay bare the antagonism that citizenship represents, particularly in the case of migrants:

... an optimistic attachment is cruel when the object/scene of desire is itself an obstacle to fulfilling the very wants that bring people to it: but its life-organizing status can trump interfering with the damage it provokes. —Berlant 2011, p. 227

According to Berlant (2011), ‘the political’ (represented in this case by citizenship), as the object of desire is in reality the obstacle to the freedom that is sought after by wanting it in the first place. In addition, in the process of seeking citizenship, states manage and organise lives. This also points to how achieving formal status is not the end of racism, inequality, exclusion and violence; as many have pointed out, there is no end to the process of integration and most migrants remain migrants for generations (Çağlar 2016; El-Enany 2020; Secor and Gökarkınel 2004). Thinkers are constantly attempting to make visible the assemblages that sustain (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). In the following sub-section, I bring together texts that highlights some of the less obvious ways in which migrants’ lives and feeling of belonging are regulated by an assemblage of power that acts as a legacy of the colonial order.

For El-Enany (2020), The 1948 British Nationality Act cemented “whiteness as the basis of ... nationhood” (p. 78) by making clear the distinction between subjecthood and citizenship on the basis of race. I traced the evolution of immigration and social policy in the previous chapter, but it is crucial to note here when the ‘ancestors’ of so-called “hierarchies of belonging” (Back et al. 2012, p. 140) and a “differential inclusion” system (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, p. 159) were inserted into the legal fabric of Britain. In short, the 1948 Act granted the status of “Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies” to “all nationals of independent Commonwealth countries and those of British colonies” (El-Enany 2020, p. 77). This move largely encouraged people in the Caribbean

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to embark on a journey to Britain, with, in many cases, active support by British employers facing “post-war labour shortages”, “such as London Transport and the NHS” (El-Enany 2020, pp. 83–84). On the surface, all were ‘welcome’, but many stories and testimonies of people arriving from Jamaica sharing rather negative experiences evoke hostility (see El-Enany 2020, p. 81). By 1962, Britain had retreated under the guise that [Black] Commonwealth migrants were struggling to “assimilate (or later, integrate)” and thus had to be limited due to resource scarcity and “overpopulation” (Back et al. 2012, p. 141). As pointed out by Gavan Titley and Alana Lentin (2011), in the course of the last fifty years, integration became yet another management tool of “good and bad diversity” disguised as a project of “social cohesion” established as a form of White governance. With Tedesco and Bagelman (2017), I believe that “‘Whiteness’ ... offers a powerful lens for tracing the racialization of ... migrant minorities” (Tedesco and Bagelman 2017, p. 10). While ‘Whiteness’ is to be understood here “not [as] a demographic predominance of visible biophysical traits, but a complex system of cultural, spatio-temporal, and political productions that define inter-subjective and communal boundaries of inclusion and exclusion” (Tedesco and Bagelman 2017, p. 10), it is specifically in whiteness’ articulation as governing technology that I draw attention to.

Barnor Hesse’s (1996) definition of ‘White Governmentality’, thus, is understood as the hegemonic (more-or-less explicit) “code” of “conduct” that directs the behaviour of individual or groups (1996, p. 97). It is worthwhile to quote Hesse at length here, in order to grasp how whiteness is played out through governmentality and what it means for the non-White ‘migrants’:

It is a rationale of governing which encapsulates both an activity and a mode of comprehending that activity; it determines who can govern, what governing is and what or who is governed (Burchell et al. 1991, pp. 1–3). It is in this politically intrusive and socially pervasive way that European racism, as a relation of regulating the subordination or excommunication of the ‘other’, has always sought its articulation not simply within the general structure of a ‘colonial governmentality’ (cf. Bhabha 1994) ... but, more complexly, within a ‘white governmentality’. Although my formulation of this is provisional, I describe it as: a preoccupation with government which valorises ‘whiteness’ in the conduct of European activities as the source of legislative culture and the conduct of the ‘non-white/non-European’ as variously a threat, a resource, a fantasy or an epigone to be regulated by that culture. [...] ‘white governmentality’ relies on technologies of the body ... which aim to control and discipline conduct through populist racist ascriptions and moral panics which inform the limitations placed on the ‘racial others’ spatial mobility, economic status, political participation and social visibility.

—Hesse 1996, pp. 98–99

### 3.4 Migration Management Through the Lens of 'Race'

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While Hesse does not specifically address boundaries, his description of white governance implies that the first marker that determines how a person is regarded in society is imprinted on the body; hence, the body itself functions as a border. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) go a step further in analysing the way in which borders – both internal and external – work to *differentially* include migrants, by “filtering, selecting, and channelling migratory movements” (2013, p. 165), thus moving away from a strictly binary inclusion vs. exclusion, which they argue is not sufficient to account for the increasingly “adaptable and fragmented” character of the nation-state (2013, p. 165). Their hope is that ‘differential inclusion’ helps “to map the emergence of a political world beyond the nation-state” (2013, p. 166). This concept shifts the debate away from thinking about citizenship as those who are allowed to be present in the national space (within the border) and toward how those who are present are policed, managed, and racialized – which is points, once more, toward “unfreedom” as pointed out by Picozza (Picozza 2021, p. 15). As such, citizenship remains an uneven and incomplete object differentially accessible to people, and particularly to colonial subjects.

“Within the era of globalization and neo-liberalism” in the 1980s, colonial subjects were ‘scripted’ differently, point out Back et al. (2012, p. 142). The availability of mobile, colonial bodies at this time represented an opportunity to ensure cheap labour and low commodity costs that facilitated Britain’s global economic ascension. Britain’s “multiculturalism”<sup>10</sup> thus evolved to meet the needs of the market and aspiration of a former Empire. Through the differential mobilisation of colonised (or descendants) peoples, Britain developed what Back et al. (2012) termed “new hierarchies of belonging” as the “ranking of immigration status that positions mobile citizens in a globalized world” (p. 143). On the one hand, this illustrates the multi-layered character of ‘belonging’, as not bound to legal status. Back and Shamsir’s informants expressed that the [racial and ethnic] ranking (2012, p. 149) they feel subjected to “reaches into the most intimate social encounters” (2012, p. 149). Additionally, these hierarchies expose how increasingly invisible racism and borders are.

Back et al. (2012) draw on Frantz Fanon’s description of the process by which the colonised mind is conquered to explain how this ranking of rightful belonging unfolds: he contended that colonised groups become conditioned in a racist culture, causing them to see others through the coloniser’s eyes. The black “civil servant is not only the colonial administrator but the constable, the customs officer, the registrar, the soldier, at every level ... an inescapable feeling of superiority develops ... becomes systematic, hardens” (Fanon 1980a, p. 19-20 quoted in Back et al. 2012, p. 148). Fanon points here at the way in which the colonial rule created a situation in which some (arguably compliant) Blacks were chosen to enforce the rule on behalf of colonial officers, and through that, given a relative degree of power. This meant that for Blacks who aspired to become humanised by the colonial regime’s standards, experienced a sense of inferiority that they were made to believe

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<sup>10</sup>Which contrasts with Stuart Hall’s (2000) idea of the ‘multicultural’, as explained by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), “which pointed to the tensions between governmental attempts to manage cultural diversity and the everyday reality of cultural difference” (p. 163).

## **‘Regrounding’: Toward an Anticolonial Expression of ‘Belonging’**

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could be resolved by gaining access to these professions. What Fanon explains, though, is that even when they did reach administrative roles, and were in a position to enslave others (that would have been the ultimate mark of recognition/becoming White), they remained Black, and thus, denied humanity (Hesse 2014). Circling back to citizenship and Berlant’s quote qualifying the [political] object of desire as ‘cruel’, for the very reason that there will always be *something* between an individual categorised as racialised ‘migrant’ and their full and equal recognition.

As the narrative of multicultural Britain was developed and instantiated through the inclusion of non-White British people in politics, healthcare, national news, police, and even border officers, the country found ways to demonstrate its diversity and tolerance. Priti Patel, the current Home Secretary, personifies Fanon’s quote and the scope of the colonial project of differential inclusion which aimed only at conditionally accepting those who contribute to the colonial/national project without challenging it or denouncing its harmful practices; those therefore seen as ‘good immigrants’ (Shukla 2017). As Back et al. (2012) explain, ‘foreigners’ “presence is ‘tolerated’” as long as it does not “challenge the terms of the hierarchy itself” (p. 140). In the current conjuncture, the existing hierarchy is not only accepted, but also entrenched, as the gap between lives worth saving and those who do not deserve to be saved and develops this argument on the same philosophical grounds as Locke.

### **3.5 Nongovernmental Organisations and Civil Society to the Rescue**

With Picozza (2021) and El-Enany (2020), I understand that emancipation and freedom is never an option for people in the asylum system, even when legal status is obtained. Indeed, as Picozza (2021) puts it: “the coloniality of asylum ... produces a patronising order of victims and saviours that is proper of humanitarian logics ... and it creates a parallel between colonial subjects and migrants” (p. 15). By that, she highlights the other form of “unfreedom” that migrants are subjected to: *protection* (Picozza 2021, p. 15). A growing body of work unearths the ways in which humanitarian aid, Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), philanthropy and charitable organisations are often counterproductive in the pursuit of liberation and self-determination, particularly in the case of migrants (Cabot 2016; Clayton, Donovan, et al. 2016; Fassin 2012; Pallister-Wilkins 2022b; Picozza 2021). This is not to say that help should not be extended, but to zoom in on what power structures and dynamics are being reproduced when doing so. In this section, I introduce some of the critiques that challenge the merit of different forms of charitable help, how it relates to questioning the framework of citizenship, and what other ways of relating to and supporting one another might exist.

### 3.5 Nongovernmental Organisations and Civil Society to the Rescue

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One of the thesis' guiding threads is the reimagining of ideas of belonging and attachment that are not only non-state-centric, but also free of associations with national identities or national projects of multiculturalism. Civil society and other non-state actors have developed 'schemes' previously addressed such as City of Sanctuary (Squire and Darling 2013), a 'befriending scheme' (Askins 2016) and various kinds of cultural activities (Ellul-Knight 2019) in this pursuit to encourage a sense of 'welcome' for newcomers.

These initiatives have been critiqued for their role in "mitigating and/or legitimating the use of [...] border control mechanism" (Tyler et al. 2014, p. 3) and/or operating as a form of 'pacifier' in the face of the violence of the asylum process. There is, indeed, an inevitable reliance that emerges between migrants and these 'services' which risks reproducing patterns of state-led projects of belonging and detract attention from emancipatory goals.

As Hesse (2014) emphasises when discussing Black (colonised) communities in the so-called "West", ongoing policing (regardless of legal status) functions as a decisive negation of Blacks' freedom and resistance. Freedom and liberty, he says, "are only possible in their re-writing as forms of escape from the Western hegemony of liberty" (2014, p. 302). In addition, Hesse argues that in doing so, liberal whiteness implicitly attaches freedom to whiteness and contrasts it with "non-white, non-citizen, unfreedom" (Hesse, 2014, p. 299 in Picozza 2021, p. 20). From this reading, we can draw that racialised migrants are trapped in a limbo whereby in a Euro-American liberal society, freedom can never be fully achieved. They are either "relegated to the realm of *fugitivity*" (Hesse, 2014, p. 299 in Picozza 2021, p. 20) or to 'vulnerability' which confines them to relying on (often White people's) goodwill and charity. My research is situated within this conflict between 'unfreedom' and 'welcome' and the possibility of resistance on one or both sides of the 'service'-migrant interaction. With Gill (2016), I agree that the VCS offering support to people in the UK asylum system is vast, "heterogeneous [...] and generalisations are difficult" (2016, p. 65). While some structures and institutions may be perceived as countering some of the violent practises endured by migrants, state co-option inevitably mitigates resistance to maintain the hierarchisation of belonging, access to rights, and eventually prevents self-determination. More specifically, in this thesis, I am attempting to find out the extent to which this is the case.

#### 3.5.1 White Governmentality and the 'Non-Profit Industrial Complex'

Entwined with the UK's history of racial assignation, is that of humanitarian help, "philanthropy and charity" (Mezzadra 2020, p. 426). Mezzadra (2020) notably traces the roots of this form of benevolence to "the history of abolitionism in Britain in the late eighteenth century" (2020, p. 426). He continues, "To intercede 'in behalf of the most injured of the human race,' to confront 'all the varieties of human wretchedness' was the call issued by the prominent British antislavery activist William Wilberforce (1807)" (2020, p. 426). The asymmetry that underlies humanitarianism's

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genealogy confines the “wretched of the earth” (2020, p. 426) to a position of eternal victimhood, in contrast to the gaze of the subject/spectator who has the authority to speak on behalf of him.

There is a moral argument (Gill 2016) that aid should be provided to those in need both within and outside of territorial lines, and this discourse continues to drive International Relations and Development studies (Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013) and feed the narrative of humanitarian discourses (Pallister-Wilkins 2022b). However, historically, these discourses have done so while often overlooking the power differentials that exist and is perpetuated through the relationship between those in need and those that provide help. A significant aspect of this posture is that it indicates a dedication to patching up the wounds rather than addressing the fundamental causes of the disease and eradicate the need for such institutions. This is the argument put forward by the collective INCITE! In their edited volume addressing what they refer to as the “Non-profit Industrial Complex” (INCITE! 2007). Drawing a link between the state and the ongoing need for humanitarian assistance, they write:

the state use non-profits to:

- monitor and control social justice movements;
- divert public monies into private hands through foundations;
- manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism;
- redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society;
- allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through “philanthropic” work;
- encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them

—INCITE! 2007, p. 3

These observations led the collective to ask the question of *why* the non-profit model is the one that triumphed over this century and what other models of social movements there could be. Despite the proliferation of democratic, liberal, saviour narratives “NGOs and UN agencies perpetuate racialised systems of violence and exclusion” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2021, p. 263). Both Mezzadra (2020) and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2021) point at the victimhood and the negation of agency that the benevolent gaze gives way to. They are not advocating for the abolition of all forms of aid, but rather for a greater awareness of the power differential inherent in the interaction between those in need of assistance and those who provide it systemically.:

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... The problem arises when the subjectivity of those people is reduced to victimhood, when it is posited as completely exposed to overwhelming processes that at the end of the day completely delete the very possibility of agency. Then, the only chance they have is to get help and assistance, to be ‘rescued’ from the outside, by someone else.

—Mezzadra 2020, p. 433

Speaking more specifically to civil society’s responses, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2021) emphasises that these are not sustainable kinds of assistance, and as expressed by many (Gill 2016; INCITE! 2007), that they risk becoming “co-opted by states or institutions” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2021, p. 263). The co-option of civil society movements or other charitable models of inclusion and integration does not explicitly connect the “colonial matrix of power” discussed by Walter Dignolo (2007, p. 156) to the moral obligation (Gill 2016) felt by white ‘privileged’ people in the UK to assist ‘migrants’ in ‘integrating’ into British society. More precisely, this matrix encompasses not only the long history of British imperialism and the ontological distinctions it established between white settlers and the non-white colonised people it aggregated into one homogeneous group, but also the material and environmental resources available in colonised areas.

As addressed earlier, other forms of non-state-centric solidarities operate in the UK and transnationally, such as the previously cited *City of Sanctuary* movement, *No Borders*, and *No One is Illegal*. Darling and Squire engage with the *City of Sanctuary* movement from the perspective of the “Rightful Presence”, that they contrast with a critique of hospitality. While they contend that unravelling the “modes of power and authority” (Squire and Darling 2013, p. 64) that are reproduced in hospitality practice, is important, they warn about the risk of entrenching a ‘statist’ paradigm by which host and guest are indeed the opposing categories at play. The *Rightful Presence* viewpoint offers, they say, a more relational form of justice, oriented toward “gestures”, “enactments of sanctuary that remain open to the politicality of those whose qualification as political beings is often refused, reduced, or questioned” (Squire and Darling 2013). This reading of the *City of Sanctuary* movements recalls Isin’s ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin and Nielsen 2008) and considers that “even in the direst conditions people are never completely victims, are never fully deprived of their capacity to act and resist” (Mezzadra 2020, p. 433). The question of how to “disrupt a statist account of politics and sanctuary” and that doing so necessarily implies *disruption* of the order and the categories of victim and saviour (Squire and Darling 2013, p. 69) lies at the heart of the concept of rightful presence. Similarly, in the urban context of Kelowna, Canada, Delacey Tedesco and Jen Bagelman (2013; 2017) contend that by continuously “unsettling the dominant settler colonial narratives about this particular place and the dominant political geographies that make this place go missing from critical engagements with world politics”, there is potential to make visible and repoliticise “the centrality of colonial legacies” that are responsible for the absence of certain people (Tedesco and Bagelman 2017, p. 25).

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Similarly, I suggest in chapter 7 that unsettling (in the form of ‘transgressions’) cultural norms or patterns of behaviours through a break in the usual setting and set up of Segue activities, offered potential to reflect on the whiteness of the governance.

Solidarities that centre self-determination, care, disruptive tactics and direct actions fall under the category of mutual aid. At its very core, mutual aid is committed to and anchored in anti-capitalism and racial justice, and more broadly social justice (Spade 2020). If academic literature on this form of organising is limited, it is also because their lineage sits outside of the academy and is grounded in the struggles themselves of people who have been subjugated over centuries. In *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the next)*, activist and lawyer Dean Spade (2020) compares the approach of mutual aid and that of charity and illustrates how paternalism and saviorism in the charity shift toward collective responsibility to fight injustice.

Mutual Aid	Charity
Give things away without expectations	Set conditions for getting help-recipients have to fill out onerous paperwork, be sober, have a certain family status, have a certain immigration status, not have outstanding warrants, certain convictions, etc.
People participate voluntarily because of their passion about injustice and care for their community	People come looking for a job, wanting to climb a hierarchy, build a career, or become “important”
Efforts to flatten hierarchies – e.g., flat wage scales if anyone is paid, training so that new people can do work they weren’t professionally trained to do, rotating facilitation roles, language access	Maintaining hierarchies of pay, status, decision-making power, influence that are typical of the mainstream culture (e.g., lawyers are more valuable and important than non-lawyers)
Values self-determination for people impacted or targeted by harmful social conditions	Offers “help” to the “underprivileged”, absent of an awareness or strategy for transforming the conditions that produced injustice; embraces paternalism, rescue fantasies, and saviorism

Table 3: “Characteristics of Mutual Aid vs. Charity” (Spade 2020, p. 62)

Crucially, these forms of solidarity are predicated on the premise that, as INCITE! puts it, ‘the revolution will not be funded’ (2007). In other words, in order for radical social change to occur, organising cannot rely on the very system that creates the situation at the heart of the struggle, because it constantly reinscribes the geometry that enables *him* [the saviour] to be a provider of assistance. As Mezzadra points out, “A unidirectional care as systematic attitude toward the ‘victims’

cannot avoid reproducing a severely unbalanced relationship...” (2020, p. 433). Rethinking charity in terms of collective struggle acknowledges that long-lasting social change must be anchored in the acceptance of the other as a change agent.

### 3.6 Contesting and Regrounding

If a citizenship regime appears to be an unavoidable and unforgiving necessity in the modern era, its implications and ramifications have been and continue to be vigorously contested. Although archives of collective struggles for rights are not always available or are purposefully excluded from mainstream history, as decades-long struggles for racial and social justice demonstrate, these movements are both historical and contemporary (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Zapatista Movement). As Tazzioli (2021) explains, eradicating contestation and resistance is one of the strategies used by international agencies and states to maintain a firm grip on immigration law and, more broadly, on freedom of movement. As such, acknowledging the atrocities of colonialism, discussing everyday borders, or the racialised violence inherent in a capitalist market economy is constructed as a threat to the national project (GOV.UK 2022d). Through contestations, non-state-centric forms of recognition happen all the time, for the interactions take place between individuals themselves, and not the bureaucracy or the institutions on behalf of an intangible ‘state’.

In *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, Ahmed et al. (2003) bring together a collection of writings that question the object behind the idea of *home*. They suggest that as a concept, ‘uprootings/regroundings’ offers a novel viewpoint to understand what being at home means when people migrate and disrupts the common assumption that home is *either* what we left behind, where we are now, or going to. To challenge this, they ask “How are the materialities, affects and politics of diverse uprootings and regroupings simultaneously played out upon bodies, families and nations, within the constraints imposed by violences and disciplines of many kinds?” (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 5). The expression thus foregrounds an understanding of migration and of the process of re-establishing somewhere as fluid, always-already charged with the histories of colonisation that are embodied in the material (such as objects and food, as will be discussed in the chapter 6, Regrounding), the affective (e.g., habits) and politics (e.g., names) (Ahmed et al. 2003). Along similar lines, Abdelmalek Sayad’s (2004) *Suffering of the Immigrant* talks about the tendency in migration studies to abstract and obscure the *emigration* part of the process of migration. In his reading of Sayad (2004), Benjamin Boudou (2021) critiques the “moralization” that arises in philosophical and sociological studies that only focus on the “perspective of the host society” (Boudou 2021, p. 4). As was previously discussed, hospitality and charity serve to reaffirm the double role of protection and moral duties of the white saviour (nation-state and its subjects) (manifesting through humanitarianism) and paternal protector (manifesting through nationalism and border securitisation) (Pallister-Wilkins 2022b). A connection can be drawn between the way

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in which Eurocentric responses to migration are epistemically similar to the way in which ‘migration’ is constructed, which in Scheel and Tazzioli (2022) is expressed as “what this does, is to maintain a state-centred perspective ...for the conception of who a migrant is” (2022, p. 9). This results in the rejection of the autonomy and agency of migrants, as well as their “multi-local ties” histories (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 3). As such, Sayad, according to Boudou (2021), suggests that a greater value must be placed on migration as a continuum of “emigration-immigration”, one that is also, as it were, “the continuation of colonial relationship by other means” (2021, p. 18).

*Uprootings/regroundings* and *emigration-immigration* are concepts that invite nuance and complexity into the discussion of making a home and feeling at home in the face of migration, ‘forced’ or not. Importantly, they invite an individual reflection on how does one feel *within* as they navigate this messy continuum? And how is the assemblage of power – that include the history of colonisation, wars, boat journeys, asylum system, charities, racism, Home Office interviews, printing endless forms, receiving letters, detention, waiting, etc. – that ‘migrants’ face and are im/mobilised by during their journey foreshadowing parts of themselves to the point of alienation? In the final section of this chapter, I return to the discussion of ‘alternatives’ to citizenship to explore how “regrounding” can be enacted.

### **3.6.1 Forging New Attachment(s) to Place**

Circling back to citizenship and alternative frameworks, feminist geographer Kye Askins (2016) developed the notion of “emotional citizenry” (p. 515) to describe the process by which difference is negotiated and recognition is not bound by formal status. This comes out of her investigation in North East England of a “befriending scheme” (p. 519) in which people seeking asylum and “more settled residents” (p. 520) create “emotional geographies of intercultural interaction” (p. 516) to suggest that hyperlocal interactions, in their ability to destabilise dualisms (inclusion/exclusion) through an acknowledgement of complex emotional registers and their everyday negotiations, constitute a form of belonging ‘from below’ that is practiced in the everyday (2016). While Askins’ claim that this type of acknowledgement can foreshadow social change seems optimistic, emotional citizenry does not adequately account for the *necessity* for legal citizenship. Similarly, my anticolonial critique of liberal citizenship and integration/inclusion regimes does not dismiss the continued importance of formal status. This is where the crux of the tension lies. For the struggle to be fought, there is a need for survival and presence, which, for many, depends on legal status. Sharma (2022) eloquently addresses this predicament, saying that the fight against the system that oppresses, can be done *alongside* –and not *instead of*– the struggle for people to remain in the country of their choosing.

As Bloom (2018) writes, “The existing institutional structure means that it is very difficult to live without access to an appropriate citizenship, and this is something that needs to be addressed in

practical ways” (p. 114). This tension is at the core of most critiques of performative models of belonging ‘from below’, and at the core of this thesis. As long as immigration and nationality law reflect a colonial, racialised system of governance and order, recognition and redistribution will be confined to the nation-state, which will neither erase nor prevent the perpetuation of differential inclusion.

### 3.6.2 Material Regrounding as Belonging ‘from Below’

To move away from statist models of belonging and framing such as ‘integration’ and ‘inclusion’, I argue that conceptualising ‘regrounding’ as a dynamic, relational and material process that plays out in migration, can go some way in unsettling the liberal constructs of exclusive and binary framings. Raffaetà and Duff’s (2013) work on place attachment offers a valuable insight into what could be viewed as ‘regrounding’. According to them, space should be viewed as a resource rather than “a stable, objective, and material reality” (in contrast with nationalist constructions) (p. 331). In their study, they show how belonging and place develop relationally and materially through a process of emplacement, or place attachment. Raffaetà and Duff (2013) follow Ecuadorian ‘migrants’ who have settled in Val Rendena, in the Italian Alps, through the process of establishing a home or establishing a foothold in their new town. Speaking of the difficulties of migrating and establishing new roots in an entirely different place, they express that the most difficult part of the process was not being ‘away from the motherland’, as is commonly assumed, but rather the way that space planning did not allow for their “material, social and affective practices” to take place (p. 343). It was a recognition of the lack of public community spaces and material infrastructures (such as benches, squares, and other such features) that made it difficult for the Ecuadorians to feel at home. The study shows that the Ecuadorian traditions of socialising and mutual recognition were identified as the most important factors influencing their sense of home and sense of belonging to a certain area or location. Raffaetà and Duff (2013) conclude by responding to the current effort to move away from the notion of ‘territory’ by arguing that the urgency is in rethinking what is politically induced in the concept: “[T]he political question does not concern the ideological content of the concept of territory, but is rather one of determining the political project that the concept of territory (or territorialisation) in its re-workings might endorse” (p. 343). In other words, Raffaetà and Duff are pointing out that territoriality is the commonplace mode by which place attachment is formed through affective practices of place. As such, while they do not argue against territoriality, they do suggest decoupling territory from the view of the state.

This perspective is productive for the de- or anticolonial understanding of identity formation, insofar as it does move us beyond the statist, “autochthonic *political project of of belonging*” (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018, 2, my emphasis) toward *regrounding* as enacted, felt and materially and relationally developed. It grounds attachment to place as “an assemblage of social, material

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and affective resonances, experiences and practices, revealing something of the place of belonging.” (p. 2). As Sharma (2020) powerfully argues, territorially bounded identity under the name of ‘Nativeness’ can never recognise ‘migrants’ as belonging anywhere under the terms of a nation:

Today, Nationals increasingly claim Nativeness as the grounds upon which to make sovereign claims over national territory and the resources in it. This represents a further limiting of the criteria for national membership. While some Migrants are able to become National Citizens, because of the racialized and territorialized grounds for Native standing, it is impossible for Migrants to become National-Natives.

—Sharma 2020, p. 275

As such, I argue to move toward conceptualising regrounding as an alternative to the deterministic terms of fixed identity and culture emerging from a particular territory, to instead consider fluid socio-material attachments that foreground ‘living with’ social difference, negotiated and navigated relationally and spatially.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I brought together literature that helped me make sense of the tension between the necessity for the VCS and the violence it reproduces as it is inexorably linked with a statist perspective of ‘who should be where’ and ‘who should be welcome’ and on which terms. I began with the concept of citizenship, as it is often the long-term object that ‘migrants’ seeking asylum are attaching their hopes to, and the way in which these discussions of belonging are framed in dominant discourse. By going over the colonial roots of citizenship, I hoped to provide background for my argument to move away from state-centric conceptions of one’s ‘belonging’ to place and to undermine it. I considered anticolonial critiques of the nation-state as the contemporary container in which violent practices are enacted against racialised ‘migrants’, such as ‘differential inclusion’ (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013): a principle that is deployed as a filter, letting in *some* ‘migrants’ on certain terms; ‘hierarchies of belonging’ (Back et al. 2012), which explains how ‘migrants’ are ranked on the basis of how well they can pass as members of the national society without ever challenging the terms; and ‘white governmentality’ (Hesse 1996): a principle of governance that is racially coded and that defines how racialised ‘migrants’ are regarded in white hegemonic societies.

Thinking about practices of white governance, I brought into focus the work of nongovernmental organisations and civil society to shed light on the articulation of whiteness through humanitarianism. This, I argue, is the modality through which some VCS organisations working in the broadly defined ‘migrant charity sector’ operate. As chapter 5, *Harmony*, goes on to explore, white gov-

ernmentality is often unwittingly reproduced. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we should do away with the sector altogether. This chapter thus attempts to deconstruct and reconstruct what we know as charity, by showing how the framework fits within a nationalist understanding of place and identity and suggest that rethinking VCS structures along the lines of solidarity can go some way at challenging that.

This tension is at the heart of this thesis. I identify the way in which the ‘unfreedom’ (Picozza 2021) that ‘migrants’ are trapped in (through constant management, internal borders, policing) and the idea of ‘welcoming’ migrants (sanctuary, protection) contribute to reinforce the idea that racialised ‘migrants’ are ‘unfree’. As such, we could argue that the VCS is in subtle (and not so subtle), uneven and variable ways operating on behalf of the state, typically by doing the work of integrating ‘migrants’ through white structures that are forged on the basis of humanitarian claims. Unfreedom, thus, persists even at the local level through politics of welcome and sanctuary. The result of that is a deprivation of self-determination and ability for ‘migrants’ to define their identity independently.

Examining the VCS through the lens of racist nation-states’ projects of belonging reveals the system’s pervasive nature to prevent racialised migrants from establishing in the country on the same terms as non-racialised counterparts. This does not imply that the VCS does this on purpose or that it is only and always counterproductive, as resistance within this system is always a possibility. Drawing on anticolonial perspectives on belonging, I proposed conceptualising ‘regrounding’ as a term that expresses how identities and feelings of home and belonging are socio-materially formed and are not fixed. As an alternative to statist paradigms of citizenship, that rely on the legal recognition of the paternalistic figure of the state, migrants’ right to move is total and unconditional. While the literature offered in this chapter largely informed and influenced my thinking, I do not view it as distinct from the practical tenets of this work. In the next chapter, I explain how my praxis as a member of Segue and researcher in GSG got shaped through a conversation between readings, volunteering, and collective reflection.



## Chapter 4

# Relational Lived Experience as Methodology

All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance, and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.

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Haraway 1988, p. 583

### 4.1 Introduction

On a late May 2019 evening, I walked into Segue, an organisation on the verge of shutting down due to a lack of financial security that threatened its longevity. I was initially drawn to Segue because of the music and the social aspect. I, too, was a migrant in the city, having arrived less than a year before joining the group. I was struck right away by the fact that those who appeared to be in charge were all White. This was intriguing for a group that facilitates musical encounters specifically designed for people in the asylum system and other migrants. After being invited to attend a meeting a few weeks later, I realised that the organisation held potential for helping newcomers establish a sense of home, as well as that of unpacking its operating structure as a gateway to understanding how the VCS operates. In total, I have spent about 24 months as a member of Segue, simultaneously researching and volunteering, and four months with GSG. This long-term engagement was underpinned by an inductive logic. Such an approach, according to Creswell (2013), is characterised by an “emerging design”, which implies that, as mentioned in

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chapter 1 of the thesis, new research questions arose on the basis of the experience “in the field” (Creswell 2013, p. 21).

Later, I joined two other VCS organisations in order to get a sense of the various types of structures that can be found in the city, and what connections can be made with broader national politics. One of them is completely absent from this thesis (Art Collective (AC)) (although it features on table 4 that summarises my data collection). The absence of direct AC data is due to two factors. Firstly, it took some time for the project to get off the ground and for individuals to express interest in it, which meant that for the first several months, not much was happening. As it began just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the initiative was halted shortly after its launch. In addition, while my interviews with AC’s coordinator, Audrey, provided rich information about the initiative’s nature and place within ‘migrant charity work’, it was a project embedded within a larger local cultural organisation, which would have necessitated a much deeper engagement to do justice to the complexity of these institutional dynamics. Due to the pandemic and the fact that my official submission date was a year away at the time, I chose to withdraw from the programme and not utilise the collected data. While this is not a topic I want to explicitly address in this thesis, I realise that the fundamental set of questions that fuelled my interest was about how to feel at home in the world, and how and by whom this process is facilitated. But as I said, home is not the central theme here. Rather, I began to wonder how the commonplace notions associated with the political *idea* of home in the form of ‘integration’ advance understandings of migration, and the work of the VCS. These discourses, as outlined in Chapter 2, underpinned by an ideological belief in the project of autochthony and national sovereignty, in which home flows through one’s blood as an entitlement to place (Sharma 2021a; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018), permeate through the layers of the social, into the very micro scales of local charities, and (perhaps) without their knowing.

Through my lived experience of working in two charity organisations (which I also refer to as ‘engaged participation’) that provide spaces for people in the asylum system, I came to look critically at non-profits as best fitted to support the process of navigating a difficult asylum system. Centring my experience of the VCS as a way of knowing brought me to bear witness and feel into these layers that I could not have accessed solely through the stories told by my interlocutors. As such, participating in the shaping of these organisations allowed me to *act upon* the knowledge I acquired through my growing understanding of the systemic and structural dynamics of the VCS in the urban setting of a city in North East England. The approach I adopted in this thesis draws on what Billo and Mountz (2016) call ‘institutional Ethnography’ (IE), with the additional element that alongside interviews, participant-observation, and discourse analysis, my active participation in the making of the organisation constituted a central method.

Originating from an interpretive phenomenological tradition, the idea of “capturing the lived experience” (Frechette et al. 2020, p. 1) allows for an unearthing of the “lived reality of others” (Sharma

et al. 2009, p. 1645, cited in Frechette et al. 2020, p. 3) which enriches the descriptions of the object of study. Contrasting with this approach, my inclination to start from lived experience came from the belief that I could only understand the VCS by taking part in it and being in relation with others. There was ‘more than meets the eye’, I thought, and if I wanted to take a chance on seeing what lay behind, I needed to do more than ask people to tell me stories. In addition, my motivation in doing academic work was always inspired by feminist perspectives, through a praxis - the blending of theory and practice aimed at transforming social worlds (Freire 2017). As such, a *relational lived experience* formed my episteme to understand the workings of the VCS and became instrumental in apprehending the processes of racialisation and governmentality which ultimately led me to add my voice to those that call for conceptualising belonging as a non-sovereign form of attachment as discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

By *relational lived experience*, I understand a deep, intimate engagement with the organisations, and the people and things that make them. Relationality is central to this approach insofar as the interpersonal connections forged my lived experience of the VCS and the trajectory of this thesis. My data consist of dozens of pages of field notes and reflections and voice notes, a handful of in-depth interviews, and hours of meeting transcripts, group chat conversations, email threads, photos and videos<sup>1</sup>. This wealth and depth of material helped me shape my understanding of how these organisations operate, and how this operation connects to wider narratives about migration as explained in chapters 2 and 3. In other words, it is an engaged participatory ethnography that gave life to the claims I am making throughout this thesis. Billo and Mountz (2016) elaborate on the concept of IE to describe what captures the philosophical underpinning of my ethnographic approach as “Rooted in Marxist and feminist scholarship”, “integrated”, “embodied”, with “explicit critical or liberatory goals in its exploration of processes of subordinations” (Billo and Mountz 2016, p. 200). Before I develop the concept of IE more, I first start by laying out the structure of this chapter.

After this introduction, I set up the theoretical underpinnings of my methodological approach. I begin by presenting more-than-representational geographies as a generative epistemological approach to grasp and describe the immaterial properties of social interactions and their wider impact on the phenomenon I am studying. I then explain how I came to define the rightful object of this study as the VCS, rather than the lived experiences of racialised migrants, which is often the focus of migration studies (Favell 2022). I unpack the problem associated with the ethnographer’s search for ‘authenticity’ in scholarship that tries to build legitimacy on the voices of ‘othered’ people and their worlds (Nagar and Shirazi 2019). The third section develops what I understand by praxis and its liberatory potential. The fourth section looks more specifically at the way in which I developed IE for the specific cases of Segue and GSG. Here, I lay out the specific methods I used to gather

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<sup>1</sup>Exact numbers are given in chapter 4, section 4.2.4

## Relational Lived Experience as Methodology

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data and how they have enabled my inductive process to emerge and questions to be answered. For ease of access, I outline and summarise the source and form of the data collected for this project in table 4 (p. 92).

In the second part of this chapter, I dive into more detailed descriptions of the tensions I navigated through the process of doing what I called *engaged* ethnography, which has affinities with participatory research<sup>2</sup>. I specifically discuss the benefits and drawbacks of ‘long-term’ participation, the hybridity of my identity, moments of collective reflection, and I also question the distinction between action and participation in research. I then say a few words about the data analysis process. Finally, I address some of the ethical issues that arose from the project, and in particular, with the institutional ethics process which sits within a Euro-American understanding of social research. My institution’s approach is to centre the adequate management of “procedural ethics” and disregards the contingent, emergent, and “relational” nature of ethics that I was confronted with during my study (Ellis 2007, p. 4). While I consider this project inductive, in the sense of it being informed by my engagement, research questions emerged through my engagement and that of my participants. Thus, I came to ask *1. how is the VCS reproducing nation-state ideas of integration, and what is the role of ‘race’ in this equation?, 2. to what extent can the concept of ‘regrounding’ offer a favourable alternative to integrationist, statist understandings of belonging?, and 3. what role could the VCS play here?* The insights throughout this thesis emerged out of an intimate, partial, embodied encounter with a range of people and organisations that are very different from each other. As such, the contributions presented in chapter 8 must be seen from the vantage point of specifically located sites.

## 4.2 Theorising Inductive Research

### 4.2.1 More-than-Representational Geographies

Arun Saldanha aptly describes the “existential embeddedness” (2007, p. 44) that comes with ethnographic work, and is made visible through the researcher’s field notes. As he points out, “research... is embodied practice” (p. 45) and the way subjective experience and ‘neutral’ observation come to be blurred in the process left me in a consistent state of self-doubt about what I was doing and how. Though I was ‘open to the process’, I had to put my trust in the process and the individuals guiding me through the unfamiliar area of the VCS and Segue in particular. This openness did not mean that I came without intent or broad questions, as I have outlined in the introduction.

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<sup>2</sup>Whilst I do use the term ‘participatory’ to talk about my research methods, given that I have drawn extensively on this body of work, I tend to use ‘engaged’ more, as a way to reflect the embodied, spontaneous and messy character of my research design. There has been ‘planned’ actions, such as that of the pub music session described in chapter 7 but given the overlaps between my role as a researcher and that as a volunteer, I consider ‘engaged’ a more appropriate term. In addition, it suggests ‘engagement’ that point toward a commitment to the groups I was involved with, which underlies my praxis.

However, I believed that if I wanted to get as close to an intimate understanding of the factors that influence the constellation of racialised VCS structures, and how they are intermingling with colonial imaginaries, relying on the discursive would not lead me very far.

As such, and since so much of the phenomenon I set out to study was not only political, but also relational, insofar as the crux of the VCS supporting ‘migrants’ ‘integration’ is coded through their relationships with different actors, the psychosocial, embodied and affective expressions of my interlocutors, as well as autoethnographic reflections shaped the trajectory of this thesis. I attended to the “more-than-representational layers and emotional/affective practices” which, as Waterton and Watson (2015) highlight, the expression “[*more-than*’ ...] does not mean abandoning the visual or representational” (2015, p. 116) these remain central to capture “people’s imaginations” (p. 116) and it is through them that our experiences are mediated. Rather, attending to the more-than-representational suggests that we remain “alert to new possibilities” throughout the inquiry (Knudsen and Stage 2016) and consider the “nondiscursive” (Lorimer 2005, p. 90) as a rich empirical site, when not taken in isolation. Inspired on the one hand by affect theory and on the other by Freire’s *conscientização*, or “critical consciousness” (Freire 2017), I drew on and developed methods and tools that enabled me to consider “lively”, open-ended (Waterton and Watson 2015) and dialogical forms of empirics. For example, ‘reflexive interviews’ (Pessoa et al. 2019) were an excellent source of information because of the interviewee’s and my shared sense of criticality, but also because of the abundance of emotional and affective currency the interviews held (see Appendix B for interview questions and model). Segue’s staff members’ roles and old dynamics have become clearer to me thanks to this affective currency.

Paying attention to immaterial cues, as well as inanimate material objects brought into focus what Segue (and the VCS more widely) *does* and how it shapes lived experiences of regroundings rather than fixating on what it *is* or how it is described. Specifically, I want to propose that bringing “more-than-representational dynamics” (Barron 2021, p. 606) into an Institutional *engaged* Ethnography approach “foregrounds the process, change and the constant reshuffling of relations that it comprises” (p. 606). In doing so, it allows for a more nuanced account of the relationships, spaces and temporalities that form the emerging lived experiences that constitute the study, which in turn supports the ontological underpinning of this work, that is grounded in relationality, and “toward an open-ended interpretation characterised by interconnectedness and process” (Barron 2021, p. 607). In an inductive qualitative project of this nature, the importance of immaterial empiricism (Knudsen and Stage 2016) is central to capturing and analysing the emergence, or “unfolding of events” (Saldanha 2007), which in turn allowed me to draw out the arguments presented in this thesis.

### 4.2.2 The 'Rightful' Object-Subject of Study

In my encounters with people in the UK asylum system, few referred to themselves as 'asylum seeker', or 'migrant'. As explained in chapter 1, these are categories that are constructed to manage who is entitled to rights and who is not. In the context of my work in the VCS, these categories were used only by the staff of the various groups I have interacted with, including me – regrettably. The process of defining and fixing someone's identity through their experience of migration or displacement is one that I find extremely uncomfortable. While I do understand the importance of addressing the violence that people in the asylum system experience, and thus, the necessity to "speak practically" (Gilmore 2007, p. xiv), I would agree with a Nietzschean-Deleuzian perspective that understands all objects/subjects as *becoming*, rather than *being* (Cockayne et al. 2017). In other words, the categorisations of 'asylum seeker' and 'migrant' can be limiting in what they can express (e.g., lack of agency, victimhood), insofar as they tend to be "shackled to identity" (2017, p. 587). This view does not preclude a radical resistance to regimes of oppression based on sex, race, class, or any other project of categorising. Rather, I see this as a strategy "to challenge representation without ignoring the continuing violences incited under representational modes of politics" (2017, p. 583). Besides, I take Scheel and Tazzioli's (2022) point that the term 'migrants' can (and should) be reappropriated in a way that centres the struggles against borders that racially produced 'migrants' experience. Moreover, I concur with Favell (2022) that by systematically focusing contemporary migration studies on the 'forced' form, we contribute to the foregrounding of a dichotomous problematisation of migration and, as a result, obscure a real object of inquiry that underpins all contemporary migration: national sovereignty (Favell 2022; Sharma 2021a). Whilst I have addressed this later point (in chapter 2), this section focuses on the question of defining the object(s) and subject(s) of the study in migration studies.

As a central person in my experience with Segue and protagonist in this thesis, Ella, violin tutor, was instrumental in formulating this question. She had been volunteering and working at Segue for about four years at the time of our interview. Besides her role as a violin teacher, she occupied the role of Trustee and generally took on a lot of the administrative work that keeps the charity afloat. When I met her, her passion and dedication to the organisation stood out to me. I learned a lot from and with her about Segue's history and about charity work in general. She always presented as a 'critical friend' in Segue. She expressed concerns about the role distribution in the group more than anyone else, and never seemed to shy away from the complexity to address race, class and migration, and even questioned my approach to interview her, and other 'non-migrants'. At the end of our interview, I asked if she had any questions for me, to which she replied: "I was just wondering if you are interviewing people from Segue who are migrants as well, because me and Calum aren't, so?"

This reply caught me off guard at first, reminding me of the reason for my initial presence in the group: why on earth am I chatting to a white British person when I am interested in migration? I gave it some more thought and brought this question to my supervision meeting. After discussing my uneasiness with the concept of interviewing people in the system, we came to also see Ella's comment as suggestive of a bias that is widely shared in migration research and advocacy: the subject of scrutiny is the figure of the 'migrant', often with good intentions (and reasons), but the lens is rarely turned on those who are *not perceived* as 'migrants'<sup>3</sup>. Is it possible to focus on the workings of white governmentality structures *and* "amplifying the creativity of people crossing borders" (Western 2020, p. 294) as a way of centring their agency and right to self-determine? As I sat with this question for a while, I came across calls to geographers and social scientists for more research into the hierarchies and exclusions on which "communities are built" (Hörschelmann and Refaie 2014, p. 446), and a deeper engagement with institutions "to understand their differential effects... within and beyond institutional spaces and associated productions of subjectivities and material inequalities" (Billo and Mountz 2016, p. 215).

I had been mulling over the best method to convey the stories of people in the system, but I could not come to terms with the idea of an interview, or even with the type of questions I would ask. Many scholars argued for a 're-humbling' of the role of the ethnographer in the production of knowledge in migration scholarship (Cabot 2016; Coddington 2017; Western 2020). In the Western academy, there is a well-established sense of entitlement to the "Othered worlds" and their knowledges (Nagar and Shirazi 2019, p. 241), "as a measure of authenticity" (Coddington 2017, p. 137). She adds, "[t]hrough uneven relationships of power, particular colonized voices become accessible to the researcher. They become valuable, scholars have argued, through demonstrations of their authenticity, which is often measured through their suffering" (p. 317). On a similar note, Heath Cabot (2016) for example, defines "the interview" as a typical "aesthetic type" (p. 652) employed by ethnographers and advocacy workers alike to cover matters of asylum and migration.

Replicating the 'interrogative' setting that many people are continuously subjected to throughout the process of crossing borders was not my only concern. Cabot's (2016) twenty-two month long participant observation at an asylum advocacy NGO made clear to her that the performativity of their "refugeeness" (2016, p. 662) would be as close as the interviewer (or researcher) would get to 'authenticity' I was not there searching for a hypothetical 'truth', but rather interested in piecing together an 'emerging picture' on which the VCS is an evident object and the staff at Segue are all subjects. For that, 'conventional' modes of interviewing of racialised 'migrants' would not have mitigated the reproduction of, and entitlement to, the category of 'forced migrant' and their border crossing stories respectively.

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<sup>3</sup>Which is itself a racialised category, as even White people who are migrants are not described as such (see Favell 2022; Sharma 2021a, for more)

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Therefore, I contend that it is a productive exercise to scrutinise the structures that see themselves as ‘service providers’ – as it has been termed at Segue – toward people who are defined as ‘migrants’, insofar as the power relations embedded in the hierarchical models that structure charities (i.e., charity commissions, registration) are part of the experience of migration. GSG, whilst it does not claim to be offering a service as such, does state that they are ‘empowering’ people in the asylum system through their activities. This different framing piqued my interest too, as a way of contrasting approaches to supporting ‘migrants’. Besides, throughout my volunteering practice in the organisation, I came to the important realisation that the “absent presence” (Nayak 2012, p. 461) of whiteness could point to the problem and avenues of resolution to many obstacles encountered in the organisation. In other words, the question of the ‘rightful subject/object’ should expand beyond politics of identity and representation to encompass the structures (e.g., people, places, organisations) that ‘welcome’, ‘host’ and shape the everyday lives of people in the system. By scrutinising those structures, I am by no means undermining the importance to centre the struggles of Black and Refugee movements, to the contrary, I use my experience of working within a structure that presents with ‘good’ intentions toward migrants, to interrogate and illuminate the ways in which modes of consultation, participation and structuring the ‘service’ contribute to reproduce racialised identities that produce forms of migration that are racially coded. According to Favell (2022), this is a common pitfall in migration scholarship because “forms of forced migration, still framed in these terms,” he claims, call for “humanitarian responses in terms of asylum and open borders” (Favell 2022, p. 7), which, as I argue in chapter 8, is insufficient to achieve liberation. However, explicitly reiterating my commitment to praxis and participation enabled me to attempt the work of reconstructing by establishing an ongoing critical dialogue between Segue and me. This, in turn, blurred the line between subject and object even more.

### 4.2.3 Praxis as Liberation and Partial Knowledge

[...] revolution is neither achieved by verbalism nor activism, but rather with *praxis*, that is, with reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed.

—Freire 2017, pp. 98–99

*A Pedagogy of the Oppressed* presents itself as “a pedagogy of humankind” (Freire 2017, p. 28) that moves away from paternalism, humanitarianism, and charity, which are considered “instruments of dehumanization” (2017, p. 28). Aimed at influencing the trajectory of the Voluntary and Community structures in which I was involved, directing my efforts toward them, all while acting as a volunteer for the charity became an important step that required constant negotiation. In this regard, feminist research approaches based on participation, relationality, and dialogue drew immensely from the work of Paulo Freire (Kindon et al. 2007; McIntyre 2007). Participatory geographies in particular have extensively drawn on Freire’s pedagogy to foreground participatory ethics, collab-

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oration, action-oriented research as meaningful and radical approaches to social change (Kindon et al. 2007). For instance, Manzo and Brightbill (2007) believe that “research should facilitate the development of an informed critical perspective among participants (not just researchers)” (Manzo and Brightbill 2007, p. 37), which, Freire named ‘conscientisation’ as I explore its implications in my practice in the second part of this chapter. This has also set me on a trajectory to speak to the language of *liberation* used in Freire’s (2017) work, and more broadly, conducting research driven by an anticolonial ethos. In fact, my research approach aligns with Freire’s pedagogy approach that foregrounds “doing *with*” rather than “doing *for*” (Freire 2017, p. 22) and believes that undoing the relations of violence and subordination that serve the maintenance (and reification) of racist structures requires dialogue and critical thinking. Freire says “from the investigator’s point of view, the important thing is to detect the starting point at which people visualize the ‘given’ and to verify whether or not during the process of investigation any transformation has occurred in their way of perceiving reality”, or in other words, the role of the teacher (or researcher) is to ‘re-present’ people’s universe as a problem (Freire 2017, p. 80).

To actualise this praxis, reflexive interviews with some of the staff, as mentioned earlier, and as will be discussed in part two of the chapter, were well suited for my project. Beyond the more-or-less formal setting of interviews, I went on walks, exchanged voice notes, and discussed over the phone and via emails with all of my participants, sitting across the ‘oppressor-oppressed’ spectrum, to use another one of Freire’s expressions (2017). A ‘critical dialogue’, thus, constellated differently according to who I was interacting with. Perhaps the originality in this process, was that I did not try to remain neutral, and would offer my thoughts as the basis for the dialogue. This was an affordance granted to me thanks to my position as an active volunteer in Segue. For example, “do you think you [or someone] should maybe take less space in the group so that others can take up more?” or “I don’t think people necessarily relate to the suggestion box, as it does not seem to be used much, what else could we think about?” was generative in the sense that it planted a seed for Segue’s leaders to reflect on aspects they had taken for granted.

As for my interlocutors who experienced the asylum system, critical dialogue was of a different nature. The task of ‘re-presenting their universe’ inevitably implied a superiority that I tried to in some way compensate for by bringing my own experience of migration and racism to the conversation. Mullings (1999) points out that there is a danger in identifying with research interlocutors based on ethnicity or shared experience, because, she says, the researcher’s own subjectivity “and strategies to find shared positional spaces” might affected findings in uncertain ways (Mullings 1999, p. 348). Similarly, I resorted to such ‘strategies’ not as a way of ‘gaining access’ to ‘insider’ knowledge, but because I wanted to establish a relation of proximity between some of my participants and I, as was the case with Abel, one of the central people I have had the chance to meet and who accepted to take part in my research. While Iran was never formally colonised (contrary to

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Algeria), the colonial reach of the British Empire did hit the country, economically predominantly, as Abel told me. As such, the shared biographical fact of migrating to Europe from a country that was severed by war and colonial and/or imperial influence did bring us closer (I believe). My approach with him was typically to lay bare the way in which we are (as racialised ‘migrants’) differentially ‘welcome’, and how we are trapped in certain categories that assign us ‘race’, albeit unevenly (for intersectionality matters here, and I cannot assume that we are perceived in the same way, despite being both ‘migrants’). Evidently, discussing this was not going to radically transform Abel’s position on wanting to get British citizenship, however small his chances were. This is when it became clear to me that critical dialogue, although important, does not happen in lieu of abiding by the existing oppressive structure but can happen alongside. In other words, while it did not change the outcome at this moment, re-presenting social worlds critically to my interlocutors enabled a process of recognition or ‘conscientisation’ that allows for emergence.

As briefly mentioned, seeing my own history of migration through the research process was instrumental in my understanding of the phenomenon of regrounding. It enabled me to capture certain mechanisms and strategies of ‘fitting in’ that I intimately recognised, including the propension to align with liberal views on immigration and distancing the self from other ‘Others’<sup>4</sup>. Situating my role as a researcher, but also disclosing elements of my biography granted me an interesting ‘hybrid’ position in the groups I took part in, which I carry through into the production of this thesis. If all positions are partial and limited (Haraway 1988), the “chameleonic” embodiment of the researcher is difficult to navigate (Saldanha 2007, p. 46). Like Saldanha, I found particularly challenging to identify what was “intuited through my own experiences” (and my own conscientisation of the mechanisms that make or made *me* once suffer) and “what was learned through observing others” (2007, p. 45). I also realised how I “fitted awkwardly” (p. 45) at Segue and GSG; featuring facial traits and hair that betrayed a ‘non-Europeanness’, I spoke English with a French (well, Belgian) accent. This ‘chameleonic’ embodiment afforded me certain freedoms, such as that of speaking with *some* authority of the subtle ways in which racism infiltrates everyday structures of ‘welcome’ and in suggesting alternatives. This *travail de longue haleine*<sup>5</sup> was taxing yet rewarding. Being at the heart of Segue, I argue, allowed me to start drawing a nuanced, rich topography of the VCS that can be greatly generative for critical geographers (Billo and Mountz 2016, p. 213). I now turn to the final section of this first part to outline the way in which I have found the practice of IE useful to combine with a critical praxis.

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<sup>4</sup>Typically, by emphasising the ethnic distinction between Algerian Amazigh people and Arabs, the latter of whom suffer an especially negative image. Or by claiming that, although being Muslim, I was not ‘really practising’. Even though Abel is not Muslim, these are tactics of identity representation that he similarly deployed.

<sup>5</sup>French for ‘long-term work’ that literally translates to ‘long breath work’. The reference to breadth in the French expression reflects the embodied nature of doing a long ethnography that influenced my mental and physical health, hence the choice to keep it in French.

### 4.2.4 The Critical Lens of Institutional Ethnography

The origins of Institutional Ethnography are traced back to the 1970s and more evidently present in Anthropology (Heyman 1995; Nader 1972). In particular, Laura Nader (1972) argues if we are to “study up” the people that the discipline (e.g., anthropology) was built upon, so too the organisations and structures that have a lasting impact on their lives deserved to be looked at (Billo and Mountz 2016, p. 203). Since, IE has been deployed across the social sciences in an effort to address by way of not only describing but also changing the social realities of ‘marginalised’ people, including (immigrant) women (see Smith 2006). This approach to ethnography not only holds potential for anthropologists, but geographers too. Specifically to the later, Billo and Mountz (2016) contend that IE can contribute “more sophisticated socio-spatial understandings of institutions” (Billo and Mountz 2016, p. 215), but also offers an avenue to think Judith Stacey’s famous interrogation “can there be a feminist ethnography?” (Stacey 1988, p. 21). In the forms defined by Billo and Mountz (2016), IE’s set of methods encompass participant-observation, interviews, archival or textual research and analysis of anything and everything that constitutes an institution or organisation. The spatial and geographical implications of these approaches such as “more attention to the rhythms of interior institutions spaces, observing roles and interactions” (Billo and Mountz 2016, p. 208) does indeed offer a vantage point and access to bear witness to different layers, power struggles and quiet forms of resistance that unfold in the organisation (I discuss this in chapter 5).

If without geographical grounding IE can produce “aspatial understandings of institutions” (Billo and Mountz 2016, p. 205) which can be counterproductive, drawing out the particularities of places in ethnographies has proven generative of an understanding of the VCS as polythetic, which means that it is heterogeneously composed. However, as previously mentioned, the reliance on discourse, text and participant-observation alone would not have sufficed to expose exactly how the structures can impact those who inhabit it. As such, I argue that the combined effect of participation, attention to more-than-representational aspects and critical dialogue enables not only a “thick description” (p. 210) of the workings of the VCS, its potential transformation, but also a fine nuance in critique. Over two years, my time commitment, as well as the mental, emotional, and physical energy I placed into the organisations I engaged with allowed me to observe and act upon what constitutes the VCS in the area of migration. This continuous engagement opened possibilities for multiple in-depth discussions that constitute some of the data for this thesis, along with recorded material (meetings, video and photos). Whilst I do not approach the value of my research data from a quantitative lens (and rather see it as a rich, descriptive resource), for the purposes of this chapter, it is helpful to summarise my work in Table 4, below, and to provide more detail about what constitutes my data before going into more details in the second part of the chapter.

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Organisation	Methods	Details
Segue	Participatory and Institutional Ethnography (IE) (Billo and Mountz 2016), including:	Meetings: 27 hours (16 meetings) Sessions: 53 hours (18 sessions) = 80 hours
	Interviews & Focus Group	3 pre-interviews 3 semi-structures/reflexive interviews 2 unstructured interviews 1 discussion 1 focus group 1 structured Q&A = 14 hours
	Informed actions	Session organising at a well-known local pub
	Artefacts	2 x participants written stories 3 x participants song singing/writing
	Photographs and Videos	180 photographs or video recordings
GSG	Ethnography Informed actions	16 hours (8 sessions) Fundraiser organising for GSG and another local environmental initiative
AC	Ethnography Interviews	30 hours (5 sessions) 2 interviews = 2 hours

Table 4: Summary of the content of my data, sorted per organisation

I engaged with three organisations/initiatives in total. Segue, GSG, and the AC. However, due to Covid-19, what was supposed to be a more in-depth analysis of various types of programs targeted at ‘migrants’ had to be re-examined. I reduced my empirical focus because I had been involved with Segue for a year when the pandemic began, and much less with GSG and AC. The information I gleaned from my interactions with the latter two projects was insufficient to conduct a proper comparative analysis. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, excluding AC, in particular, was motivated by the slow start of the project, which meant that the data I could gather was limited to exchanges with one person, the coordinator. This was not sufficient for a meaningful portrait to be drawn. I spent more time with GSG and discovered many differences with Segue. As a result, GSG – albeit marginally – features in this thesis more than AC.

### 4.3 Field Dynamics

[H]olding on to the complexities of voice and colonial power relations within the re-search process without attempting full resolution. —*Coddington 2017, p. 318*

While working on this project, I made it a point to stick to my commitment to social justice. In line with this, I approached my research with the mindset of a student of the constantly expanding various realities of both my participants and myself, while vocalising my concerns when they arose. At the same time, I also knew that, unlike the people who participated in the making of Segue and GSG, I was always free to leave (Stacey 1988) and could develop my own meaning from whatever it was that I witnessed (Mullings 1999), even though I considered some of the analysis presented throughout this thesis as directly emanating from my discussions with the participants (e.g., through reflexive interviews, as will be discussed in section 3). With the freedom to depart and the research authority I carried in the eye of my interlocutors, I sometimes felt a sense of righteousness, as if I knew what was right or what needed to be improved in the organisation or in my interlocutors' comprehension of the larger racist nation-state enterprise from which Abel and others desperately sought recognition. As such, an everyday task consisted in negotiating distance and closeness to the group and people, with criticality and humility. The tension I experienced between the roles of volunteer and researcher speaks to the complexities of navigating fieldwork "close to home" (Steil 2021, p. 60) and in a context that evokes sentiments of familiarity. In her account of conducting ethnography in close geographical and cultural proximity to her home, Caputo (2000) defines the nature of the tension between the necessity of blurring the boundaries between 'the field' and what's outside of it, and the challenge it represents to negotiate different 'personas' as she comes and goes to 'the field', "from home" (Caputo 2000, p. 26; Steil 2021). Besides, as she rightly points out, and as many of my interactions with various interlocutors illustrate, conceptually separating 'the field' from what is outside of it, is additionally challenged by telecommunication technologies. At times when I did not want to engage with Segue at all, I remained aware of what was going on through WhatsApp groups texts, and emails. This made 'leaving the field' almost impossible – especially because of Covid-19 and the shift to online interaction - and forced me to adopt different identities in different contexts. This inability to leave, extended into the writing of this thesis, as I remained a ghost on group chats.

The difficulty to "'come out' as a researcher" (Saldanha 2007, p. 44) conflicted with my mission as a volunteer, which, in turn, also entered in conflict with my own ideological standpoint and commitment to social justice. More than once, retreating was therefore necessary. Typically, this meant that I would skip one or two Monday night sessions, and either take some time to write and reflect on previous sessions, or simply rest. In 'classic' participatory and action-oriented research, the objectives are typically established collectively from the outset hence why it is defined as research *with* rather than *on* people (Ellis 2007). In such a scenario, it is clear what position

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the researcher(s) occupies(s), at all times, although it does not prevent ideological divergences. It also implies that the researcher coming from the academy is not the only driver of the project and the actions. The tasks are shared and there is a “collective commitment to investigate” (Mcintyre 2007, p. 2) and act, which means that the blurred lines between ‘the field’ and ‘home’ are somewhat clearer, insofar as the site of research, in its form, works similarly to ‘going to work’ and teaming up with colleagues. That does not mean that once the researcher leaves, their concerns for the project stop. Rather, while the explicitly collective burden of investigating, planning, implementing and disseminating (Mcintyre 2007) is shared, the position of the academic researcher is less ambiguous.

In this project, however, things were not set out as explicitly. The first time I attended Segue was in May 2019. I joined one of the weekly music sessions at Xenon, at the end of which the Chair, Marie, gathered everyone around the coffee table to explain how financially fragile the organisation was. Segue coordinators were threatening to stop all activities due to a lack of funding as mentioned in the introduction. Marie then circulated a ‘Suggestion Box’ and some pens and encouraged the people present to write down ideas we might have (this is discussed in chapter 6) that could ‘help save Segue’, if only temporarily. I was among a few people to contribute some ideas. Among them, I suggested the creation of a crowdfunding campaign, and enhancing Segue’s visibility. Marie contacted me soon after that day, and a week later I attended my first coordination meeting. From then on, navigating dynamics amounted to tread carefully between *attending*, not merely by being present, but by paying attention to what was happening in the organisation, how and why; *critiquing* in the form of discussions with the members, staff and volunteers; and *feeling with* my participants, which is far messier than what a linear form of writing allows me to express. I unpack what these dynamics entailed in the next three sub-sections.

### 4.3.1 Attending

As laid out in section 4.2.2 of this chapter, setting up the rightful object(s)-subject(s) of research constituted a central concern. While the lived experiences of borders and the asylum system are essential to comprehending how we might collectively struggle for an alternative to these regimes, there is a risk in centring the narratives of those who are being impacted hardest through the extractive practise of seeking ‘authentic voices’ (Coddington 2017). This operates as a shorthand for the performance of dramatic forms of narratives that expose suffering, loss “and even death” that scholars, journalists and humanitarian advocates build their career upon (Cabot 2016, p. 654). Of course, documenting these experiences constitutes history, and must be heard. However, alone, these stories would not allow for the kind of critique of institutions or the VCS that I am offering here, nor can they identify the subtle politics that make regroundings systemically difficult.

This last point became clear to me when I realised the challenge that constituted learning about what my interlocutors who are in the system *really* think about Segue. Simply because I asked specific questions about the dichotomies and role distribution that reigns did not mean I was entitled to ‘honest’ responses. As pointed out by Steil (2021), the ethnographer’s authority largely relies on what she calls “un récit de penetration” (p. 80) often actualised in the discourse of ethnography in the form of ‘access’ or ‘accessing’ (pre-existing) knowledge. That desire to ‘access the unknown’, and the entitlement to stories and *honesty* is what “allies” it, in my view, to “patriarchal colonialism” (Maillet et al. 2017; Saldanha 2007, p. 46). The positivist notion that there is a singular ‘truth’ waiting to be discovered by the researcher also contradicts my inductive style; failing to follow that approach would have resulted in me missing out on valuable clues and subtleties that formed the arguments presented in this thesis. What, then, did I pay attention to? The *visible and audible*: the terminology used to describe the organisation’s mission; some exchanges of text on WhatsApp groups; the interactions between differently constructed ‘migrants’ and ‘non-migrants’; the monthly board meetings; other actors in the VCS; and most importantly, I not only participated in but also contributed to the critical reflections of people in Segue in the form of ‘reflexive interviews’. Then, the *subtle*: the visceral discomfort around certain people, the way in which ‘service users’ and ‘providers’ agencies manifest differently, how border thinking becomes actualised in group dynamics, the way in which sowing seeds and sharing tea can simultaneously evoke and transcend commonplace ideas of ‘home’ as bound to national territory (see chapter 7), the ‘absent presence’ (Meyer, 2021) of migrants in some spaces, the choice of songs in the repertoire, the structuring of the sessions, their location, the silences at the start of meetings.

Analysing all of this is no easy task, and necessitated a “delicate engagement of the inductive with the deductive, of the real with the virtual, of the already-known with the surprising, of verbs with nouns, processes with products, of the phenomenological with the political” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, p. 172). To start drawing some general themes within all the data I gathered, I used the “computer assisted qualitative data analysis software” Nvivo (Welsh 2002). While I found it useful to identify recurring expressions (such as ‘service’, ‘migrant’, or ‘recruitment’), it is through my ongoing exchanges and discussions with my participants and supervisors that I could bring in nuance to my analysis. Miltz et al. (2019) also suggest that a practice of critical collective reflection “is one vital way to push further the analysis of the structures of power and inequalities that continue to bias geographic knowledge production” (p. 6).

### 4.3.2 Critiquing

A defining characteristic of this research, besides its largely inductive nature, is the centrality of reflexivity. The reflection of the researcher and her position through the process of researching has become a defining feature of feminist geographers’ contributions (Huisman 2008), and this thesis

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is no exception. However, the reflexivity that I tried to emulate goes beyond my own. Reflecting became a tool that served Segue, my interlocutors, as well as my research project. As mentioned in section 1.3, adopting this posture came as a result of my belief in the unfixed and constantly becoming nature of the organisation and the phenomenon at the heart of this study. The engagement that all three Segue staff and volunteers who took part in the exercise of reflexive interview constitute a cornerstone of this thesis, insofar as it gave me a unique vantage point to articulate a critique *with and through* their voices, alongside that of my experience of being a volunteer myself. In other words, the relationality of the dialogical process of reflecting and critiquing gives originality to this study.

To actualise that, I used the practice of reflexive interviews (Pessoa et al. 2019) to gain a better understanding of the complexities of (primarily) Segue's paid staff's positioning in relation to Segue's role and general thoughts on wider themes of asylum-related policy. I selected two paid music tutors (Ella and Mark), and one volunteer and trustee (Calum). I chose Ella because she was particularly active as a member of the organisation team. We worked together on the grant application and on a crowdfunding, which we believed would have meant avoiding the administrative burden induced in more traditional grant application, only to find out later that the politics of funding platforms can represent a similar burden (Gillespie 2010; Swords 2020). In return, Ella took an interest in my research project. As for Mark, although he is less involved in the day-to-day running of Segue, he has been part of the organisation since the start and was keen to reflect on his experience. We would start the interview with the questions they had come up with, and it was interesting to witness the overlaps between their questions and mine. It also showed me that in contrast with what I had sometimes been thinking, Segue's paid staff do question their position and the meaning of their work and do not pretend they have all the answers.

I can see that I will probably come up with questions that I really, really, really want to know the answer to, but don't, but maybe that's, I don't know.

—*Reflexive interview with Ella, 30.04.20*

Indeed, some of Ella's questions did not have an answer and some "*so what do we do now?*" were enounced a few times. As a collective, the practice of reflecting *together* was highly generative. We might have not agreed on the ways to achieve changes, I might have not had the theoretical tools to express my views back then, but we were committed to sharing the meanings and subjective realities we experienced at Segue and opened up about the project's limits, our vulnerabilities, and even some internal points of tension and politics. Introducing the practice of reflecting upon our roles and drawing a connection between the charity and wider migration politics was a significant achievement. It also constitutes one central dimension of conducting participatory research (Mcintyre 2007). Individually and collectively reflecting allowed Segue's staff to see their work as part of a wider system that they might not recognise the limits of as they are busy *doing* their

‘thing’. This is in part another issue I have come to realise by being an actor in the charity myself. The urgency of running a ‘business as usual’ with the “challenges around funding, communication, relationships and ultimately, power” is made worse under austerity, in addition to a widespread ‘devaluing’ of supporting people in the asylum system (Clayton, Donovan, et al. 2016, p. 736).

It’s very good as well for me to take time to think about all of these things, just have to find the time to action them now. —*Reflexive interview with Ella, 30.04.20*

It would be great if we could do more meaningful advocacy with them, and, and challenging of the system and making it change, but you know, you kind of rely on the the organisations that are sort of headed up by like, I don’t know, like I just, if we are advocating for the asylum seekers and then we are also a thorn in the side in which something that is, is, you know, it’s sort of like, I don’t want to put that blame upon these people who we are representing, if you know what I mean, but we would also be doing that. —*Reflexive interview with Mark, 11.06.20*

Doing qualitative research taught me that the practice of reflecting upon what we hear, and how we are doing the listening, how we are engaging with the project is something that is also better done collectively, for it allows the nuance, the ambivalence to emerge, as this quote from Mark illustrates. Had I not questioned some of the contradictions that Ella or Mark presented to me, as well as my own, I would have not been able to paint this nuanced picture. The ambiguity in their role, the depoliticisation of migration struggles through charity aid (see chapter 5), the white governmentality that operates through the structure (see chapter 7) are aspects that took root only once we could discuss our respective alienation. That is, after all, what Freire’s (2017) *praxis* and *conscientization* call us to do: dialogue. This, Freire says, is the only way to generate productive critical thinking, which is what I have set out to do during those interviews, through my collective reflections in supervision (Militz et al. 2019), as well as through the analysis and the writing process, as mentioned in the previous section. The emotional investment in the group that this commitment to liberation and solidarity engendered is what I now turn to.

### 4.3.3 Feeling *with*

The emotional investment of the researcher complicates the lines of activity (Askins 2018; Askins and Pain 2011). In a participatory ethnography that centres action and political engagement, it is however unavoidable to *feel with* one’s interlocutors. This capacity is what Rachel Pain called a necessary epistemological shift in scholarship: “the issues of injustice at the present time also demand a place for engaged research which attends more carefully to emotions, and rethinks and recasts our own relationships with others” (Pain 2009, pp. 480–481). In my engagement with Segue and GSG, I have felt the weight of the responsibility, competence, and attentiveness that

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was expected of me, as a researcher. These qualities are what Tronto (2015) outlines as key principles in a caring relationship. This was never explicitly expected of me, and rather came from the emotional investment and the commitment I made to the groups meant that I had to stay, even when things got tough. Feelings of illegitimacy and imposterism (Back 2016; Lumsden 2019) are known tribulations of the PhD process and academic work in general. Affect and emotions in this field come to lay bare the connection between the bodily, singular experience of feelings, here *illegitimacy*, and the transnational dimensions of the injustices that generate that feeling (Pain 2009; Tolia-Kelly 2016). Nonetheless, this experience is often homogenised, ‘naturalised’, because it is true that writing a thesis is an exercise in becoming at ease with one’s own vulnerability. Context, though, matters (Pain, 2009), as my work researching with Segue showed. What could I do with these emotions and affects? Could they be of any use for the work I set out to do? By taking a step back and reading, I came to realise that “creating ties” and being emotionally invested is key to building trust (Ghoddousi & Page, 2020, p. 6), which in turn *affects* the fabric and the trajectory of research. The formulation “emotional geopolitics” (Pain 2009, p. 480) means that our capacity to feel (consciously and unconsciously) is itself an episteme that has important implications for political action and mobilisation, from the subjective to the transnational. More, Freire’s (2017) “conscientization” becomes a tool toward producing knowledge from one’s own emotional vocabulary that restores an important sense of self, as well as agency by centring relationality and critical dialogue with oneself and others.

Acknowledging mine and the feelings of others at Segue was no easy thing. It is even less evident to analyse data that contains strong emotions, as the temptation to ‘go over the fence’ and arbitrarily give it meaning is there. The field notes excerpt below shows how emotions mattered, even when they are not explicitly defined, and how they directed me to shape my thinking around the inaccessibility (or exclusionary) nature of Segue’s meetings:

We then go back to the budget and June says that it should be the role of the treasurer (without mentioning Miray) but Miray says she’s not comfortable doing it (need to check exactly how she said it). The conversation finishes when Ella leaves and Miray asks her to wait for her and gets up and looks at June and tells her something about her not being an accountant and therefore not being the right person for what June was implicitly (it felt for her) asking her to do. June doesn’t understand what’s going on, no one does really. But Miray leaves very angry. June asks us all what that was and what is she supposed to do, no one really knows.

Miray didn’t come to the following Monday night session (I didn’t either). That meeting was very intense and showed a side of the organisation that clearly has flaws. 7 people around the table but it seems like 3 of them were only there to talk and not much to act/do something. Here again, I did feel overly confused about my double

role as researcher/volunteer, but I do have to admit that I found comfort in the idea that I could simply retreat (which would be much harder for Miray).

—*field notes, 03.10.19*

This episode did not overly surprise me, and I have written about the logistics of the meetings as triggering (the noise, the space, the language, the length) in chapter 3. All of these are immaterial and material elements that lead to increased emotional and affective responses and illustrate the frustrations encountered by many, but particularly those who find it difficult to express their opinions by following a certain *form* or model of consultation (see chapter 5). Ultimately, attending to mine and the emotions of others speaks to the need for a study of the mechanisms responsible for these incongruities.

### 4.4 Acting upon Social Worlds

Freire (2017) said that the sacrifice of action is no more than “verbalism”, and the sacrifice of reflection no more than activism (Freire 2017, p. 60). He did not mean that words did not matter to the contrary, the idea of dialogical thinking is to say that “there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world” (p. 60). In ‘classic’ Participatory Action Research (PAR), the “recognisable action outputs” (Kesby and Gwanzura-Ottmoller 2007, p. 71) are part and parcels of the process. These would be defined collectively at the start of the research process and progressively adjusted if need be. It suggests that the research process is mostly (but not exclusively) deductive, as it is often the case that specific issues are what draws the research team in the first place. My project deviates from this approach insofar as it emerged as a result of my presence and the various theoretical and practical tools I deployed which I have discussed in this chapter. Nonetheless, as the praxis word suggests, acts were not ‘sacrificed’ in this undertaking, yet they were not pre-planned, and rather constituted a way of responding to the challenges encountered by my interlocutors, as well as both organisations. As such, there are two moments that can be interpreted as ‘actions’ that, while they complement my volunteering role, also stand apart from it. The first one was the organisation of one of Segue’s weekly sessions at a pub locate nearby the usual venue. I unpack the event in much detail in chapter 7, but here it is useful to explain the rationale for organising this.

One of my observations after attending most weekly music sessions was that despite being open to the public, all attendees were regulars of Segue. The venue in which the sessions were taking place is a famous cultural hub in a slowly gentrifying neighbourhood and Segue’s nights are featured on the public agenda of the venue, which is to say that it is not invisibilised, for example, by taking place in a community centre room, which would only draw in users of the centre. Although I found questionable the ‘marketisation’ of ‘refugeeness’ through community music that was evoked on

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the events calendar, I understood that the choice of vocabulary that centres people's status was for 'safeguarding' reasons. In contrast, once came the need to fundraise, Segue's members 'safety' was no longer in jeopardy. In the meeting excerpt below, we discussed the appropriate location to hold the fundraising event, which would consist in a staged performance by Segue's members. Marie's opinion was that it should take place in a wealthy neighbourhood of the city, and explains why:

Marie: Yes and there's a lot of people around here who you will find are rich.

Ella: Great.

Calum: Ah okay, yeah, I see your point.

Marie: Do you know what I mean.

—*Meeting transcript, 05.02.20*

This 'do you know what I mean' signalled that it was the right location to get money, especially as it seems like the neighbourhood's reputation does not only rest on economic capital but also cultural and social, as Marie's involvement with people in the area suggested. On the back of this discussion and the uncomfortable feeling that the thought of the group performing in front of rich people to ask for charity left me with, I offered to organise an *improvised* session at a local pub. The goal was threefold, as I explain further in chapter 7: to maintain consistency while the usual venue was not free to use; to assert our presence as a group, in public and expand spatial horizons (Hajer and Bröer 2020); to trial improvisation and break with routines. As Figure 3 below shows, the layout of the room allowed for an intimate atmosphere, as the space was quite narrow for the group size. All people present were also turned toward the centre of the room throughout the evening. This contrasts with regular weekly sessions that are split into different moments, and occupy different spaces in the room as Figure 4 taking place in the usual venue shows – here, it is the violin group playing in a corner of the room.



Figure 3: The group sitting in a room of the Queen's Head on 14 January 2020 [Author: Kahina Meziant]

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Figure 4: The violin group plays together in a corner in Xenon, the usual sessions' venue on 27 January 2020. It is highly unusual for anyone from the public to attend, despite it being open to all. [Author: Kahina Meziant]

The second 'action' too happened more or less organically, emerging from casual chats with a group of four young people who newly arrived from Iran. We bonded quickly, most likely due to our similar ages. We would joke around and talk to each other as I would with friends. It was easy to interact with them and did not require the formalities that interactions with Segue's trustees did. Our conversations frequently turned to their lives in Iran (they are two 'pairs' of siblings who arrived in the UK in 2019 after fleeing persecution). We talked about what they had left behind and how difficult it was to start over. They came from a comfortable economic background, lived a 'normal' middle-class life, and were constrained to flee due to political reasons. While the space that Segue provided them was important to their sense of identity, they were longing for normal youth interactions, like going to cafes and bars, but lacked the funds for it as their section 95 support<sup>6</sup> was barely enough to commute to their ESOL classes and provide food. The frustration related to the waiting on their asylum case fuelled contradictions on their desire to go back to Iran

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<sup>6</sup>Asylum applicants who have not obtained a final decision or have an appeal pending and are/or likely to become destitute are eligible for assistance under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. At the time of writing, the weekly allowance given to each person in any given household who is an applicant (or undergoing an appeal, or destitute) receives £40.85 (*Asylum support* 2022).

and was a testimony to the inescapable loss and grief associated with difficult migration. Much of our conversations revolved around their lives in Iran as a result. As a way to channel that and foster ties between us, I came up with the idea of a set of creative activities which, I believe, two of them were enthusiastic about. As part of this, they engaged in reflexive writing, bringing in music and sounds that composed their lived realities navigating immigration and emigration (Sayad 2004). These were all recorded via Zoom, as that is how they were conducted.

While I have not included the ‘data’ that emerged from these activities in the empirically focused chapters of the thesis, they shaped my approach and choice of *refusing* to proceed with their use in this process. According to Coddington (2017), refusal is one important creative direction in the toolbox of the anticolonial scholar. Speaking to the tension of building authority on the back of ‘subjugated’ people, Haraway warned feminists of the risks arising from a desire to “see from the peripheries and the depths” (Haraway 1988, p. 583):

“Subjugated” standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world. But *how* to see from below is a problem requiring at least as much skill with bodies and language, with the mediations of vision, as the “highest” technoscientific visualizations.

—Haraway 1988, p. 584

The refusal to engage in greater depth with the rich content of these creative exercises stemmed from the sensation that I did not have the skills to do it justice in a way that was not harmful, whilst also bringing an added value to the project. In addition, I believed it was a great enough outcome that these activities brought us closer and made for enjoyable weekly sessions. They may be illustrative of what Gibson & Graham (1994) refers to as “direct intervention in power relations” and are typical of “action and participatory research” (p. 215). In light of this what role do these actions play? I would say that the sum of mundane and formal actions, individual and relational contributed to my epistemological posture more than it provided readily analysable data as such. Acting upon social worlds was generative for it has provided texture to my understanding of these worlds, whilst also connecting theoretical and philosophical aspirations to the practice of research.

## 4.5 Pre- and Post-Field Concerns

Before concluding, I address some of the project’s practical concerns in this final part. The unusual conditions of completing a PhD during the Covid-19 pandemic complicated and altered the project’s trajectory. When the first lockdown occurred, the length of my ethnography, the number of interviews, and other activities that had been scheduled had to be altered. While the online setting of my three reflexive interviews seemed to have been a positive consequence of the lockdown,

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for it meant that people had ample time to chat and were in the comfort of their own home, people in less comfortable settings or with no or little access to internet are much less present in this work. Beyond the theoretical concern about the definition of the object-subject of research, it was also out of a relational ethical concern that I chose to depart from the model of centring narratives of ‘integration’ or migration. Questions of ethics are not only emerging during the process of ‘collecting data’, but also arise during the analysis and the writing. While I cover some of the dilemmas I encountered in doing so, I intend this last section to hold a practical repository of the way I have dealt with the imperatives of doing research with people about organisations that contain sensitive information, following a ‘do no harm’, or non-extractive research ethos.

### Ethics

The “ethical and political commitment” that participatory research is built upon foregrounds the validity of co-produced knowledge, and the multiplicity of knowledge forms (Wilson and Darling 2020, p. 130). Defining who or to what these commitments are made is what Carolyn Ellis (2007) (in Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) outlines as three ethical dimensions that must be considered in conducting research with human participants: procedural, situational, and relational. As is often the case, procedural ethics is mandated by the university’s ethics committee, which often clashes with situational and relational ethical commitments. When this occurs, it relies on the ability of the researcher to “deal with the unpredictable” (Ellis 2007, p. 4) and requires a great deal of “care and responsibility” (Wilson and Darling 2020, p. 131). Historically, other researchers have been invited to participate in all three projects in which I have been involved. Academic institutions taking an interest in the work of civil society is not new, nor is it limited to migration. In fact, since Segue’s inception in 2008, it has always included a researcher. The realisation that academics’ authority are built on varying degrees of engagement with these hardworking organisations made me conscious of these relational ethics.

Nevertheless, my project did not constitute ‘classic’ participatory research, insofar as I did not appoint anyone as formal collaborators in my project. While remaining the sole ‘formal’ researcher, I made a point to immerse myself in Segue and GSG, and to consider my interlocutors as co-creators of knowledge. Of course, I remain in position of power, as the sole holder of a large amount of data, and sole author of this thesis (Mullings 1999). However, I have always tried to mutualise the knowledge I acquired by talking to different people in Segue and made a point to be transparent with my theoretical framework and ‘findings’ whenever I was asked. The feminist practice of ‘reciprocity’ (Ellis 2007; Huisman 2008) serves to warn qualitative research scholars of the pitfalls of ethnographic methods that are not conducted intentionally and with care. “Exploitation and misrepresentation” are two serious dangers that can occur if the researcher does not exercise reflection (Huisman 2008, p. 373). To mitigate those risks, not shying away from ‘turning the same scrutiny’

## 4.5 Pre- and Post-Field Concerns

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on oneself (as a researcher) as on participants and interlocutors is a useful exercise to do individually or collectively. The value of good supervision in the process of the PhD stood out to me over the last three years. Hours of discussions with my supervision team have provided me with a space for “critical collective reflection ... [which], is one vital way to push further the analysis of the structures of power and inequalities that continue to bias geographic knowledge production” (Militz et al. 2019, p. 6).

Although transparency was important to uphold for the philosophical underpinning of this project, matters of confidentiality were dealt with care. I do not intend to share the content of the data (i.e., meeting and interview transcripts, clear photos, real names) with anyone, beyond what is being shared publicly in this thesis or in the form of journal articles and conference papers or has been agreed on through my consent forms. I kept my data on a password protected Cloud Drive, and will only provide access to the transcripts of interviews to those I have interviewed. I do intend to provide a summary of this research to Segue and GSG.

Consent forms were distributed and signed to all interlocutors who I interviewed, and the chair of Segue signed a document on behalf of the organisation to grant me the authorisation to draw on internal communication material such as emails and WhatsApp groups messages. Where a paper form was not given, I have received verbal consent for the use of all data featuring in this thesis. At each meeting I ever attended with Segue, I placed my recorder on the table, in plain sight, and would remind people that the purpose of the recording was for my research project. I have offered to make these recordings available to them if they required them, but no one has asked.

The condition under which the use of the data was permitted was that it had to be anonymised. In the context of the reflexive interviews, maintaining privacy is particularly important, as internal politics were discussed, as well as sometimes contentious matters involving people and situations that need to be delicately dealt with. For instance, following on from the WhatsApp exchange of messages featured in chapter 5, some of my interlocutors present in this thesis brought the topic of whether there should be a ‘sanction’ of sorts, or at least, be discussed with the tutor. Although we did not go down that route, this remains a sensitive issue. Of course, for people reading this who are involved in the organisation I talk about, they will certainly recognise who is implicated in the scene, which exposes one major difficulty of anonymising: to “protect participants from the negative effects of disclosure”, whilst centring their “ownership and voice” (Wilson and Darling 2020, p. 43). My epistemological choice here was to side with Abel and Miray, and to treat this as a landmark moment that speaks to the dynamics I am exposing and the ways in which they are challenged. To attempt blurring the lines, though, I kept the name of the city anonymous, and only refer to the wider region. Although I was in charge of taking photos, videos and posting them on social media and have therefore been given consent for images shared within Segue, in this thesis I

am also blurring identifiable people from the photos who have not formally (verbally or in written form) consented to the use of their image.

### 4.6 Conclusion

By observing and actively participating in Segue for over 24 months and GSG for 4 months, I have gained an appreciation for subtle and emerging characteristics of two different charities. Specifically with Segue, being embedded in the space for over two years enabled me to witness and feel into the dynamics that form the charity in ways that other shorter, less embodied, and active approaches would not have. In that sense, I combined an institutional ethnographic approach with a participatory ethos and commitment to social justice to frame this project. Doing no harm, mitigating extractive research, acknowledging power geometries and acting upon social worlds are the guiding principles that led my praxis (Brown and Knopp 2008; Kindon et al. 2007; Wijnendaele 2014). In light of that, this project centres the partiality and situatedness of doing social research and sits counter to supposed neutrality and claims to ‘objectivity’ (Haraway 1988).

In this chapter, I started by setting up the theoretical, philosophical and political underpinnings of the research methodology, which is built upon relationality. Each of these threads informed the field dynamics that formed the process of collecting data. Here, I identified *attending* to visible/audible and more subtle expressions of the structures that I came to focus on as a central object-subject of study; *critiquing* as a necessary practice that served to actualise my commitment to social justice and praxis; and *feeling with* reflects the embodied nature of at once, being an actor and spectator of the realities of charity institutions. Of course, I speak with a distinct privilege that stems not only from my academic position, but also from my own experience of migrations and racialisation. However, as Luntz in Mullings (1999) rightfully points out, it is important not to assume “shared positionalities based upon ethnicity” (p. 341) which I have had to remind myself of.

As such, I can summarise my methodological contributions by saying that there is value in *participating* in the making of organisations to provide a nuanced, constructive critique. Combined with the critical eye of the Institutional Ethnography and the praxis’ commitment to liberation through dialogue, I would argue that scholarship in geography and beyond can benefit from the embeddedness afforded by longitudinal ethnographies that centre some form of co-production and reciprocity. Turning the lens on charity institutions has been enlightening and occupying such an active role in these organisations laid bare some of the state structures and mechanisms that make charity so trapped in models that do not respond to the current (and future) needs of migrants. As a way of not only describing but also transforming worlds, praxis and IE are a great way of making a contribution and do justice to the work of people who are often not given the opportunity to reflect on their own practice.

## Chapter 5

# Harmony

Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope.

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BBC News 2013, Statement by Margaret Thatcher on her appointment as PM in 1979

“[S]ilence” to mean speech that has had no political “voice” or impact; it converts this silence not into polemic but into registers of reflective political feeling

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Berlant 2011, p. 232

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I conceptualise social and sonic harmony by approaching it through the “modalities of politicisation and depoliticisation<sup>1</sup>” (Darling 2014, p. 74). I argue that the pursuit of harmony in the VCS risks distracting from the political questions of resources and power distribution, difference, and ultimately prevents emancipation and self-determination for ‘migrants’. First, I justify the use of the language of music throughout the chapter to conceptualise harmony as a strategy for ordering. In addition to the fact that collective music-making is what Segue offers, the emphasis on harmony became particularly pertinent to my investigation of Segue because, at the time

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<sup>1</sup>Although Darling does not phrase depoliticisation through the concept of harmony, I draw on his idea that ‘post-political contemporary governance’ (Darling 2014, p. 72) and discourses serve to dynamically politicise and depoliticise asylum. In this chapter, I analyse how harmony in Segue is sought after (as a form of ‘post-political governance’) and how the interplay between these modalities materialises sonically and socially.

## Harmony

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of my data collection, the coordinators were drafting a grant proposal for a project titled “Segue Ensemble” and framed it as an initiative to promote community harmony.

Second, to support my argument for the depoliticising effect of seeking social harmony in the context of asylum, I look at the structure and operation of the charity Segue and show how the VCS in this area risk silencing some voices. I go on to illustrate how harmony is orchestrated to give the image of an apolitical, multicultural group, that echoes with an ‘integrationist’ impulse, as explained in chapter 2. However, harmony is not solely a question of cohesion and integration. It is also visible in the project of national citizenship that can also reveal how harmony can be violent and exclusive. I conclude by demonstrating how the paradoxical process of depoliticisation unfolds among Segue’s music tutors and argue for the importance of a creative space in which no culture is set *a priori* to enable people to find their own voice whilst not feeling forced to ‘assimilate’ with the local culture.

This chapter focuses primarily on exposing the kind of mechanisms that are employed in the VCS which (often inadvertently) contribute to reproduce patterns of ‘unfreedom’ (Picozza 2021), underlined by white governmentality. I define silencing as a result of rigid institutions and a manifestation of the racialising mechanisms that hinder people from participating and depoliticise their daily struggle in a racist system. As such, this chapter exemplifies a form of ‘limited regrounding’ inasmuch as the organisation’s structure has an agenda and mode of operation that does not account for the manner in which ‘migrants’ may wish to interact, or the type of structure they would like to be part of, so inhibiting their autonomy. This argument henceforth contributes to the wider proposition of the thesis that white governmentality expresses itself through explicit and subtle, intentional, and non-intentional governing strategies that can be discursive, material and/or affective.

## 5.2 Harmony Beyond Metaphor

In chapters 2 and 3, I outlined how dominant political notions of integration (and their language) are contested (McGhee 2003). Traditional conceptualisations of integration have “a capacity to organise pasts, presents and futures as well as everyday routines” (Clayton and Vickers 2019, p. 1467) along dominant/linear temporalities, binary conceptualisations of in/exclusion, un/successful integration, good/bad migrant and so on. In other words, the traditional notions of integration, do not account for the possibility of co-existence on different space-time scales of trajectories of asylum and migrancy (Chambers 1993)<sup>2</sup>. These delineations are predicated on the existence of nation-states, which presuppose that there is an ontological continuity between one’s ‘native’ country (au-

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<sup>2</sup>The notion of integration is binary, implying that one is either in or out. The fluidity and messiness of more complex trajectories is not captured in this term. This is partially addressed in literature of belonging.

tochthone belonging) and a physical territory, which in turn justifies the legal and social exclusion of ‘allochthones’ (Sharma 2020). In this section, I add to this debate by drawing on musicology and political economy to consider whether sonic harmony offers an alternative to exclusion/inclusion and integration framings. In so doing, I recognise the potential that harmony could offer in shifting “the onus for integration” (Pain et al. 2011, p. 804) from ‘migrants’ to a collective responsibility to shift the terms on which one can belong, before I move on to unpack what ‘harmonisation’ does. According to Chambers (1993), redefining the terms of belonging is a “journey [of] restless interrogation, undoing its very terms of reference as the point of departure is lost along the way” (1993, p. 2). Hence, in an attempt to redefine those terms, I explore the tension between sonic harmony historically as a means of achieving social harmony<sup>3</sup> by a process of cultural, spatial and temporal homogenisation and ordering (Baker 2008) and the potentiality of harmony as desirable way of ‘living together’ in plurality that allows for self-determination. Indeed, I do not condemn the idea of harmony altogether, but rather attempt to explore the multiple ways in which it can be conceptualised in order to reconstruct the triad ‘integration-citizenship-migration’ (Favell 2022) on different terms, as ‘regrounding’ allows for (more on this in chapter 6).

In Jacques Attali’s essay *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985, 1986), sonic harmony is conceptualised as a civilising project. Attali explains how, throughout European history, a prerequisite for a harmonious society implied that noise was sublimated, and sound controlled. In order to understand the purpose of controlling both sound and music (its production, distribution, performance etc) we first need to grasp what the functions of music itself are. Attali argues that music cannot be understood solely through the pleasure we get from listening to it, but as an “equilibrium in exchanges of flows” that incarnated “an idealized humanity”, thus showing that society is indeed possible:

[m]usic became the bourgeoisie’s substitute for religion, the incarnation of an idealized humanity, the image of harmonious, nonconflictual, abstract time that progresses and runs its course, a history that is predictable and controllable.

—Attali 1985, pp. 61–62

In other words, for music to be born, order must be preestablished and noise transformed into something of greater socio-cultural value, or domesticated. Attali adds that it does not suppress difference altogether, for difference is constitutive of harmony and hierarchy (Attali 1985, pp. 61–62). It is, he says, a “subtle order” (p. 61–62) that keeps violence and unrest at bay. In musicology, Geoffrey Baker (2008) also uses the concept of harmony to describe the Spanish colonial ideology in the Andes during the conquest of the New World:

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<sup>3</sup>Through a depoliticised modality that disregards characteristics such as social “deprivation” and “socio-economic inequalities” (McGhee 2003, p. 393) that lead to unrest and trigger tensions across communities.

## Harmony

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At the heart of this mission was the imposition of *policia*, a complex term implying good government, law, order, peace, morality, and religion—all of which were seen as characteristic benefits of urban life. *Policia* had an architectural face, revealed in the many prescriptions about town planning, but it could also, arguably, be expressed in (and implemented through) the sound and concept of harmony, a potent symbol of order and the civilising, Christianising mission of the colonial church.

—Baker 2008, p. 23, italics in the original

In this analysis of the concept of harmony in colonial Cuzco, Baker unpacks the doings of the settler’s tools to impose order. Structuring time, for example, was a task of the Church that relied simultaneously on the Church, sound, and city planning:

The order and precision of the Spanish urban grid plan was mirrored in the organisation of urban space through civic processions, in the structuring of time through the sounding of church bells, even in the perfect intervals of a harmoniously constructed polyphonic work – harmony for both eyes and ears.

—Baker 2008, p. 26

This proposition echoes Attali’s (1986) analysis of music in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe which asserts that controlling time was a sonic matter. In addition, for both Attali and Baker, sonic harmony serves as the point of contact between scientific rational thinking and the divine (Attali 1985), which, in Baker’s terms, would correspond with “*musica instrumentalis*” which imitates “the harmony of the universe and harmonizes the human soul”, thus creating “balance and order” (Baker 2008, p. 26).

Building on these perspectives, I argue that the language of music (harmony, attunement, vibrations, voice, resonance<sup>4</sup>) serves to describe more than the sum of its sonic properties: it is a “signifier” for a wider project of ordering (Revill 2000, p. 559). As such, speaking of harmony evokes social processes that aim at bringing a coherence in a disparate world. This is reminiscent of the community cohesion project set up in the early 2000s which, although it was not aimed at ‘arriving migrants’ going through the asylum process, but at established racialised ‘Others’. This project specifically targeted “disorder, disharmony and discord” in a post-9/11 context, as explained in chapter 2, sections 2.3.4 and 2.3.5 (McGhee 2003, p. 376).

The sonic dimension of social harmony is especially visible when it comes to dominant portrayals of ‘ethnic minorities’, which are frequently perceived as “loud”, as Steil (2019, p. 3) explains in relation to commonplace ideas of racialised working-class populations from the French *banlieues*. In her account, ‘loudness’ (p. 2) signifies more than an auditory characteristic and encompasses bodily, aesthetic, and behavioural traits that conjure an overall stigmatised idea of racialised youth as “less organised” (p. 3). This conceptualisation of the sonic quality that sticks to racialised bodies

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<sup>4</sup>See next chapter for more on that.

### 5.3 Structured Sessions, Silencing and Dis/order

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intersecting with the realm of the social (or socio-economic) too speaks to the way harmony as a political project of ordering is managed through controlling sound (Attali 1985).

This chapter thus explores how seeking social and sonic harmony operates as a depoliticising form manifesting through silencing, ordering, hindering willingly or not, the participation of ‘migrants’ in the running of the charity through the empirical material emerging from my active engagement with the charity Segue. However, I do not mean by that that all forms of harmony are depoliticising. In fact, I do believe that harmony can also operate as a politicised form of living together in pluralism (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018) that continually struggle for the rights to self-determination of all. This is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is implied in the philosophy of ‘regrounding’ that is explored in chapter 6. As such, I understand harmony as both something valued and damaging which can be considered as a way of thinking beyond binaries. In the following section, however, I show how harmony is sometimes (unwittingly) used as an ordering and silencing mechanism within Segue.

### 5.3 Structured Sessions, Silencing and Dis/order

Anchoring this discussion back into Segue, I identified control over the *content* and the *structure* as two strands through which the group pursued sonic and social harmony under the auspice of providing a safe space. In some ways, Segue addresses some of the racism and everyday violence that people face while in the asylum system by creating such a space where “all are welcome”, and coming together does not represent a financial burden (e.g., it is free to attend and travel costs are reimbursed) yet brings about a weekly opportunity to socialise, establish new relationships, engage in an activity that is not ordinarily accessible for free and explore a part of the city and artistic space that would be out of reach for most participants. In light of a policy context that ‘casts away’ (Mayblin and James 2019) and isolates ‘migrants’ from the rest of society, Segue could be viewed as a form of resistance in and of itself. On the other hand, it could be argued that, in line with integrationist policy agendas, Segue responds to a state’s call to integrate ethnic minorities into local communities, on the state’s terms, as a way of mitigating the discontent that arises from social and economic disparities and perceived ‘disorder’ (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013; McGhee 2003) and to ease with the discomfort of the asylum system’s limbo (Bagelman 2013). The ‘safe space’ can thus be seen as a ‘container’ within which sociality is managed and filtered to fit with a ‘British model’. Segue’s sessions are structured into three moments: 6–7 p.m.: group choir, 7–8 p.m.: drumming session, 8–9 p.m.: split group between violin and guitar tuition. The spatial constraints that the group operated in meant that it is challenging to have all three sessions running concomitantly (e.g., we were given one big room that did not have separations, beyond a curtain).



Figure 5: I made this flyer as part of my volunteering role in the charity, 17.11.2019

Below is an excerpt from a WhatsApp exchange between members of the guitar group. This group is tutored by Jack who has been part of Segue for many years. In the exchange, some members are talking about things that are unrelated to the guitar group, which did not seem to make Jack happy, for a reason that was not made explicit.

[12:52, 13/05/2020] Ziyad: [Shares a video of Trump]

[13:19, 13/05/2020] Abel: [Laughing, clapping emojis] I like him!

[14:17, 13/05/2020] Ziyad: [Shares a funny edited image with two giraffes]

[16:22, 13/05/2020] Jack (guitar Tutor): Can we keep this group's posts for guitar only please?

[16:35, 13/05/2020] Miray: What's the problem Jack?

### 5.3 Structured Sessions, Silencing and Dis/order

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[17:10, 13/05/2020] Abel: No.

—*WhatsApp chat, 13.05.2020*

This example illustrates one of the tensions that was so central to ongoing discussions about status, structure and operation at Segue. It speaks to the difficulty of negotiating the need for a ‘safe space’ that is seen to be needed in order to shield migrants from the everyday violence they encounter through and in the process of seeking asylum and making a home in the UK (Picozza 2021). On the other hand, such spaces, through their structure, do not invite the expressions of differences, and ultimately silence expressions of (political) views, or deny the possibility for self-determination and emancipation. Through this reading of ‘safe space’, harmony is made visible too: while what makes the space safe is not spelled out, I wondered whether it could also indicate a ‘smoothing out’ of differences, and shying away from politics that may be seen as leading to ‘unsafety’.

As explained in chapter 2, I agree with Picozza’s (2021) definition of perpetual “unfreedom” (p. 15) that ‘migrants’ are subjected to. “Protection” she argues, is in essence a form of unfreedom that upholds the “interests of the state over those of refugees themselves” (p. 19). Indeed, it is interesting to notice how, even for what could be a spontaneous creative activity such as music-making, ‘migrants’ must comply with a model of music practice and communication that is implicitly set out *for* them. The ways in which governing strategies (i.e., discursive, material or affective) are manifesting must be identified and worked through reflexively in order to overcome them. The WhatsApp interaction is a fruitful starting point for this claim, as it illustrates how the pursuit of (sonic) harmony reinforces hierarchies, whilst at the same time (cl)aiming to deconstruct them. Thus, it is through an interplay between framing safety and disciplining that these strategies become actualised.

The strong tone of Jack, the guitar teacher, reverberated across the chat and into the background. Two members of Segue came to me after viewing his comment and wanted to talk about it. Jack’s attempt to manage the group’s communication by adopting a rule serves to establish himself as the group leader. I assumed that he reacted in this way because he was bothered by more ‘frivolous’ exchanges, and that others would also be bothered by it, but it could very well be about the nature of the content, i.e., the fact that it contained a reference to Trump may have irritated his political sensibilities. Either way, without explanation, he tries to minimise the risk of unwanted noise in the chat room by preventing people from ‘spamming’ the group. To my knowledge, there was never an official appointment of moderation rights in the group, nor did we ever discuss what could or could not be discussed on the chats. In addition, this exchange happened at the beginning of the pandemic, when most Segue members were facing tremendous isolating circumstances (Finlay et al. 2021). The colonial undertones of the distinction made between ‘noise’ (Attali 1986; Duffy 2009) and *harmonious sound* (or music) speak to Jack’s attempt to take control over the group and try to silence its members.

## Harmony

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Two weeks after the WhatsApp event happened, Abel broached the subject with me:

As we are leaving the bench on which we sat while Abel was playing the guitar, he turns around and tells me: “Did you see Jack’s message on the guitar group?”, “yes”, I answer, “It was quite shocking for me to see this”. Abel laughs. “Did you see my answer? I said ‘no’! It’s not his group, it’s our group!” We keep walking and I give my full endorsement for his and Miray’s reactions to Jack’s comment. Abel goes on to tell me that several people stopped coming because of him.

—*Field notes, 28.05.2020*

For a moment, Abel and Miray disrupted the order. It must be said that both had been attending Segue regularly for more than three years and have therefore earned legitimacy among the group, including among the staff. Both have also taken part (at least transiently) in the organising and running of the sessions in varying ways (e.g., in previous iterations of the project, Abel attended meetings, as I will go on to explain, while Miray operated as the charity’s treasurer for a long time), and both have also come to cease being involved in these ways. These resignations, I argue, are important consequences of the complex dynamics of practices of harmonising and controlling.

Isin’s (2021) understanding of citizenship as performative, is useful to approach the ‘disruptive’ character of Miray and Abel’s responses, and more generally, the idea that citizenship is not merely a status or membership, but a performance of “games of domination and emancipation” (2021, p. 94) that brings to the fore the multiple struggles over the right to belong. Following Isin’s definition of the performance of ‘acts of citizenship’, I want to suggest here that in this interaction, Abel and Miray are engaging in a “social struggle over not only the content of rights but also who are or are not entitled to them” (p. 94). They are indeed contesting the dominating order and asserting their right to communicate freely about whatever they feel like. If I am critical of the usefulness of ‘citizenship’ in the context of this work (more detail in chapter 3), I value Isin’s focus on the *enactment* of rights claims as indicative of emancipatory effort that unsettle the statist construction of citizenship to relocate the entitlement to rights into the ‘act’. The ‘unwanted noise’ of the light-hearted communication exchange evoked the ‘disorder’ and rupture in harmony articulated sonically and socially.

During our walk, I shared my opinion that the group would benefit from being ‘messier’. Abel said that it used to be that way but that it wasn’t always positive for the group. Across my discussions with members of staff, this is an insight that came up many times. Similarly, previous work involving Segue tells a similar story. Messy doesn’t mean that no one is silenced, or that it is simply better because it allows people to express themselves freely, or that there is no hierarchy.

—*Field notes, 28.05.2020*

### 5.3 Structured Sessions, Silencing and Dis/order

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Reflecting on my presumption that ‘messier is better’, Attali’s (1985) following enunciation echoes:

Noise saw the birth of disorder and its opposite: music. Music saw the birth of power and its opposite: subversion. In noise can be read the codes of life, the relations between men. Clamor, Melody, Dissonance, Harmony; when it is fashioned by man [sic] with specific tools, when it invades man’s time, when it becomes sound, noise is the source of purpose and power, of the dream-Music.

—Attali 1986, p. 15, my translation

If ‘disorder’ as a product of noise corresponds to ‘messy’, we maintain the existence of binary opposites (Revill 2000) in which ‘mess’ is constituted as a dis-ordering, counter-hegemonic practice and is opposed to music which gives birth to power, and sublimated noise. Power is threatened by disorder (and noise) insofar as it frees those that are subjugated by it. Further to this point, Attali talks about “*order by noise*” (1985, p. 34, italics in the original), which captures another important nuance in processes of harmonising that reveals a productive capacity to create the conditions for emergence even in stifling situations (this will be explored in greater detail in the chapter 6). Following Plato’s comments that “the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions” (Plato, in Attali 1985, p. 34), Attali argues that noise *too* “carries order within itself” (p. 34) as strange as it may seem:

first, because the interruption of a message signifies the interdiction of the transmitted meaning, signifies censorship and rarity; and second, because the very absence of meaning in pure noise or in the meaningless repetition of a message, by unchanneling auditory sensations, frees the listener’s imagination.

—Attali 1985, p. 34

In other words, the silencing caused by the interdiction to transmit a message (Jack’s attempt to keep the chat for guitar-related communications) led to a crisis in which Abel and Miray added to the existing noise to contest the interdiction, resulting in a reshuffling of the order that had tacitly reigned until then. Noise and music or disorder and harmony are co-constitutive, and always *in flux*. In this case, I would not argue that this crisis led to the constitution of a new order, but I would contend that Isin’s reading of the “rupture as the grounds of the act” (Isin and Nielsen 2008, p. 5) reflects the scene insofar as Abel and Miray’s vocal contestation gave way to resistance, but maybe not quite emancipation. Indeed, while they expressed their right to use the group chat in their own way, this has not led to a redefinition of the roles in the group, or of its function. Brown and Knopp’s (2008) point on resistance makes sense here: “there are wide arrays of both institutional and individual resistances in the city that are both intellectually and politically important for geographers to appreciate, but they are never completely emancipatory” (Brown and Knopp 2008, p. 42). In Attali’s words, a crisis must be reached in order to “transcend the old violence”

## Harmony

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(1985, p. 35) paradigm and create a new system, which, in my experience with Segue has yet to be seen.

In addition, I would expand Revill's (2000) point that the "properties of sound" "are not fixed and universal but temporally and spatially specific, actively produced in the material/imaginal networks created by musical performance" (2000, p. 610) to the conditions for harmony or dis-order. This means, for example, that, as Abel mentioned in our conversation, a lack of structure in the sessions did not suit many previous participants, who felt more secure knowing that there would be leadership overseeing the activities. If Abel did not expand on this point, it was echoed by different participants that, in the past, a level of structure worked to prevent certain voices to dominate the space over others (some men, particularly, would take a lot of space). Indeed, I perceived that members who experienced the asylum system would not necessarily complain about what I found to be a rigid way of structuring time during the sessions. This, I argue, connects to the wider discussion on citizenship and colonisation that not only sees the imposition of Imperial (European) structuring of time as Baker (2008) explains, but with it, its associated normative behaviours and cultural practices (Hall 1997).

What is more, some people I talked to even expressed understanding for the racism they experienced on their bus journey to Segue's Monday night sessions. In particular, Azam, one young Iranian man I frequently talked with expressed "I understand that this is not our home, Iran is my home, and we can see that people don't like us here" (field note, 09.03.20). While there is a well-known culture of 'gratefulness' among people who migrate to Euro-American countries from other parts of the world (Nayeri 2017), upon hearing the comment made by this young man, I thought of the way in which nation-states and borders inhabit our imaginary as a given, even if it is at our own expense. Speaking to that, the words of Haitian militant René Desprestre in his interview of Aimé Césaire (1999) come to mind:

R.D.: [...] the relationships between consciousness and reality are extremely complex.  
That's why it is equally necessary to decolonize our minds, our inner life, at the same  
time that we decolonize society

—Césaire 1999, p. 94

While the psychological implications of colonialism and alienation associated with the process of asylum are not the primary focus of my thesis, I believe it is valuable to note that the conditions for ordering and silencing are integral to the realisation of the national belonging agenda. To build a case for reconsidering the terms of belonging beyond the nation-state, it is useful to illustrate how my participants who were going through the asylum system, experienced a complicated range of emotions in regard to national belonging as Azam expressed. If this seems to take the discussion away from harmony, it weaves national belonging into conceptualisations of order by illustrating

how perceptions of dis/harmony and dis/order are contingent on ideological beliefs about nation-states.

### 5.4 The ‘Suggestion Box’ Complex

In chapter 2, I introduced the complex interwovenness between the state and the charity sector. I also situated Segue within the sector and explained how heterogeneous charities are. In doing so, I set up the backdrop for the empirical analysis in this chapter and the following two. Contextualising Segue is especially important as it enables an understanding of the charity as not matters of just individual decision-making, detached from the wider policy landscape of the UK. ‘Policy’, as explained in that earlier chapter, is to be understood as a set of practices that encompass discourses, legal frameworks and affects. The history of the VCS exposes how the state is heavily present within the exercise of charitable activity (e.g., Charity Commission, VAT relief, strict rules in terms of apoliticality). I introduced the concept of ‘white governmentality’ (Hesse 1996) (which will be developed further in the next chapter) to provide a theoretical underpinning to the ways in which the imperial order metabolises into modes of governance of the nation-state through a process of racialising ‘migrants’ (Sharma 2020). At Segue, I identified similar processes as part of my role in running the organisation. In particular, in this section I centre the charity’s effort to ‘include’ ‘migrants’ in the consultation to highlight the disconnect that is exposed through the failure of white governance: the setting up of a ‘Suggestion Box’. I analysed this as an other form of harmonising practice, insofar as, wittingly or not, this mode of consultation is not conducive to substantial engagement (e.g., for a question of language or for the lack of opportunity to collectively discuss, as most suggestions remain in the hands of the group leaders and are not shared with the group) and thus leaves the structure unchallenged.

In the interview excerpt below, I discuss with Ella, one of the music tutors, about the ways in which Segue operates.

Kahina: What kind of role is Segue playing in facilitating other forms of belonging?

Ella: Well, it’s a group that people, you know, join in with and belong to and come back to again and again, so I suppose it creates kind of a sense of belonging, and it creates a part of your identity as a member of this group. I think, I’m not sure for everybody who comes to Segue, but for me it’s nice to be a citizen of Segue I suppose. It’s like a little mini state which has nice values [and] that you can escape to.

—*Reflexive interview with Ella, 30.04.2020*

Ella’s point that a sense of belonging emerges from members’ regularly partaking in the group echoes what Abel repeatedly told me: “Segue is like a home to me” (field notes, 28.05.20). He had attended the weekly sessions on a regular basis for several years, and found great comfort

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in the company of people that he does not have the leisure to see outside of the weekly drop-in. He certainly identifies with the group in ways that others do not, which also stems from his extrovertedness. For him, organisations like this are but a brief ‘soothing’ space, but if he ‘really needs something’, he is more likely to ask someone from the same origin, he said to me. As such, he does not see taking a more active role in shaping Segue as of interest to him, although he tried in the past. What seemed at once frustrating and laughable to him, is the way in which the presence of ‘migrants’ around the meeting table was but a mere token, which he expressed to me laughing: “all we get is free coffee”, and he explains: “This is why I stopped going. I used to come, but then I sit there for an hour or two, we have a coffee and then I go and wonder what am I doing here?” (field notes, 01.12.20).

As such, Ella’s vision of Segue as a “mini state which has nice values” is fitting. The top-down model is the normative governing structure, and it provides a sense of identity, just like the nation-state does. Curious to reflect further on this statement and the way in which Segue operates like a state, I answered:

Kahina: Yeah, we just need to make sure that people participate more in the Segue democracy, right?

Ella: Yeah, exactly.

Kahina: It’s not just about the voting.

Ella: No. Yeah, exactly.

Kahina: I see the ‘suggestion box’ that we have, I see it a bit like that, like voting, you put your vote in the box.

Ella: Yeah, yeah, I suppose, again that’s another idea with really good intentions, but maybe it’s not the best thing. —*Reflexive interview with Ella, 30.04.20*

While my relationship with the suggestion box was ambiguous, insofar it was virtually never used by members during my time in the organisation, it was through a suggestion inserted in the box that I came to be involved with Segue, at a time during which the sustainability of the group was under threat. While at an open meeting, Marie, Segue’s Chair, put the box in the middle of the table and asked everyone to think about what could be done to preserve the regular drop-ins, I jotted down some ideas to secure finances (e.g., a crowdfunding campaign) as well as suggesting other creative activities that could be offered. Marie contacted me after that, and I joined my first ever ‘admin’ meeting a couple of weeks later. Since then, the suggestion box made a regular appearance on the central table during weekly sessions, and suggestions were encouraged verbally by Marie and others, but these calls were rarely (if at all) successful, as Ella’s comment makes clear.

## 5.4 The 'Suggestion Box' Complex

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Reading this exchange alongside Nayak's (2012, p. 461) qualitative analysis of Black and Minority Ethnic and faith-based VCS organisations' responses to multiculturalism and cohesion policy, is particularly insightful. According to him, the *form* of consultation crucially matters for any "meaningful engagement" to be effective (p. 461). While the central topic of his study diverges from what I am discussing here, insofar as the organisations he sought to enter into conversation with are labelled "Black and Minority Ethnic" (BME) or "faith based", which Segue does not, there is a strong correlation between the stifling system of governance whereby "whiteness is ascribed to power, authority and forms of state governmentality" (p. 460). Even closer to the 'suggestion box' mechanism, some of his informants are adamant of a "grass roots" approach to consultation, which is explicitly opposed to "ticking boxes" and prioritising "leaving things on paper first" (p. 461). Further, Nayak addresses criticisms of consultation methods characterised by "disembodiment", a term that reflects the paper trail that recommendations in the box can be deemed to leave behind.

I suggest that the 'suggestion box' constitutes another layer of bureaucracy that further distances participant-members from the lead organisers and justifies inaction on certain topics. Speaking to border controls specifically, Gill (2016, p. 45) argues that "by increasing the literal distance between decision makers and bureaucrats, increasing the layers of middlemen or technologies that separate the two" serves to '(dis)incentivise' action and ultimately leaves the hierarchical order unchallenged. My contention is that it is not the idea of the suggestion box itself that was necessarily bad, but how it was implemented, and importantly, the fact that the group did not reflect on the inefficacy of this mode of consultation, to replace it with one that centres "proximity" and care (p. 29). Nayak's (2012) point that in such detached approaches to consultation, "the geographical rendering of time and space tends to follow white bourgeois ideas of citizenship designed around 'nine-to-five' working hours and paper-based written responses" (Nayak 2012, p. 461) also resonates with Ella's depiction of Segue as a 'mini state'.

To this, I would add, it is a 'mini state' that is inscribed within a white model of governance (I explore 'white governmentality' further in chapter 7), which in turn, could provide some explanation as to why 'migrants' who attend meetings feel like it is a waste of their time. While I do not believe that the suggestion box or the lengthy meetings were intended to discourage individuals from engaging with Segue's structure, I have identified such modalities of consultation as part of the arsenal used to maintain social harmony. In turn, social harmony, exceeds the control of unwanted noise insofar as the *intention* is not to silence, but ends up doing so, thus operating as a quiet, depoliticising force.

### 5.5 Sonic Harmony

While Segue's lead organisers have not always identified the specificities of the problems linked with consultation and decision-making, it is important to point at the other actors in the constellation that influenced the way in which harmony was practiced. Specifically, the funding body that Segue received a £31,000 grant from. Each Trust or Foundation will have its own policy as to the requirements to access funding. The first thing that the Trust that funded Segue's project 'Segue Ensemble' required, was that it was registered as a charity. In addition, this particular Trust granted money to projects that address health inequalities. The Trust's conception of health spans physical, emotional, and financial concerns; as a result, the Trust encourages bids for initiatives that promise to help any component that falls within these broad categories. Consequently, Ella's proposal for Segue offered a project that would promote social and communal harmony via the practise of music. This is the reason why the project is called 'Segue Ensemble'. George, one of the Trustees, comments on the group's interpretation of harmony by pointing at the picture on figure 6:

George: We could actually meet the requirement of the new funding if we encourage, at least a good number of Monday nights, for the last half hour of the music tuition, that tutors get together to encourage playing, which is, which is exactly that picture and that picture is the Ensemble, that's what's on the picture.

—*Meeting recording, 22.08.19*

In his comment, three points capture the tension between the trustee's vision for a social harmony that is more or less spontaneous: the expression of "requirements" for "the new funding", the possibility of a fourth moment in the structure of the weekly session dedicated to improvisation (as it was the case in a previous iteration of Segue), and the 'picture' of the 'Ensemble'. The funding aspect is evocative of a reflection made in chapter 2, regarding the accountability of non-profits to funders rather than those for whom the non-profit is purposefully designed (Roy 2016). At the time of this meeting, we had just been awarded approximately £31,000 from that Trust, after Ella (for the most part) spent several months working on this application. This sum was supposed to support the charity for the next two years, and because the application was mostly written by Ella, one of the music tutors, many of us did not know exactly what was funded at the time.

The second aspect, a suggestion to set aside some time for improvised jamming, arose from simply observing how the end of the weekly sessions was frequently synonymous with a more laid-back moment, in which members who stayed would either try out instruments they did not normally pick up, or would spontaneously begin playing tunes they knew how to play. I always found the energy in the room to be more thrilling as the sessions came to a close since it seemed that many

people would ‘come out of their shell’ and deviate from the predetermined order, sometimes even singing. As a result of this ‘dis-order’, a liberating joy emerged.

Lastly, George’s point about reflecting a picture as part of an ‘Ensemble’ ties in the accountability to the funders – as ‘*Segue Ensemble*’ was the name attributed to the project that was successfully funded by the Trust<sup>5</sup> – with the politics of cohesion and a harmonious multicultural group expressed earlier. As he stated this, George pointed at the picture in figure 6 that was likely going to feature on a promotion flyer for distribution. Interestingly, though, people are not playing music at all on the said picture.

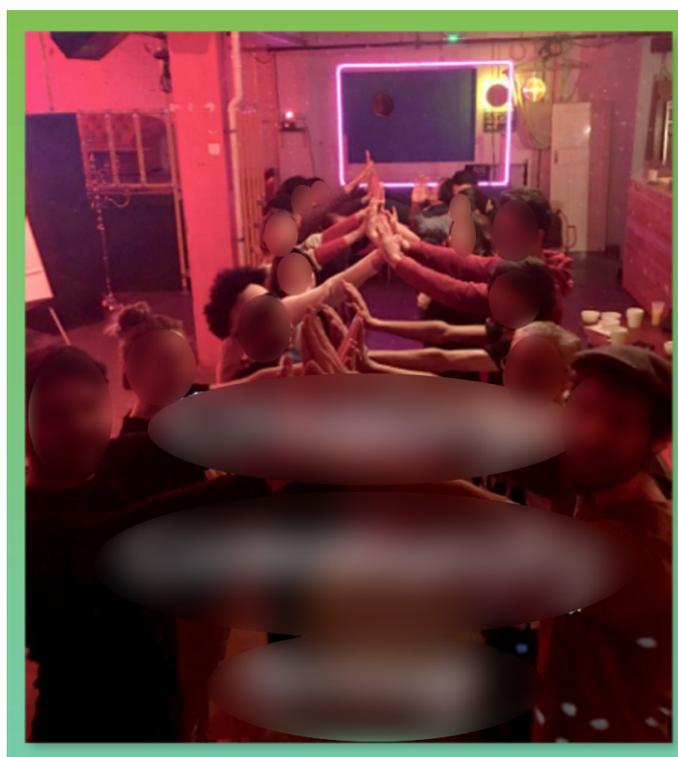


Figure 6: This photo was taken in 2018, by an unknown author. It is a period that Ella and George expressed some nostalgia about. The photo features most of Segue regular members and even some people who took an active role in running the organisation.

In the photograph, people are smiling as they stand in pairs, hands clasped together. Ethnic differences are strikingly visible, but people are close to one another, holding hands, and seem to get along, which reflects the objectives of integrationist discourses, and appeal to funders.

<sup>5</sup>For which, as stated previously, Segue received £31,000. The *Ensemble* project was funded for a duration of two years, and the commitments (set out by Ella) were to organise two public performances a year, on top of the weekly Monday evening sessions.

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Such schemes that strive to engineer harmony ‘across cultural barriers’ are not new. However, diversity and inclusion programmes seem to thrive on creative activities that can be publicly showcased. Music in particular lends itself well to this objective, since it is often seen as ‘universal’ (Tagg 1993)<sup>6</sup>. Musical practices that aspire to at once, represent and transcend difference through the creation of an Ensemble, as evoked George, resonates with what Robinson (2020) calls “inclusionary performance”, here, in the context of indigeneity to express how

[...] performers and artists have been structurally accommodated in ways that “fit” them into classical composition and performance systems. [...] Such inclusionary efforts bolster an intransigent system of representation guided by an interest in – and often fixation upon – Indigenous content, but not Indigenous structure.

—Robinson 2020, p. 6

While Robinson’s work is anchored in Indigenous participation in classical, and popular music, there is an argument to be made here about the *universalising* character of ‘sonic encounters’ between whiteness and racialised migrants that I have addressed in this section. Like Robinson (2020), I observed the asymmetry in the form of public display of diversity and inclusion, that presupposes, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, that “the onus for integration” (Askins and Pain 2011, p. 804) rests on racialised ‘migrants’, or in other words, that it is on them to accommodate to white norms and models of collaboration (see McGhee 2003, “Moving to ‘Our’ Common Ground”). If successfully enacted, the display – like the very choice of the word *Ensemble* – suggests that the project is a ‘socially progressive’ act that responds to a logic of “multicultural enrichment” (Robinson 2020, p. 8) whereby, in the case of Segue, racialised migrants operate as at once “a resource” (p. 8) and ‘the recipients’ of the efforts of Segue’s organisers, whilst the later did not see their music performance norms, “or ontologies of music-making” disrupted (p. 8). This, I argue, is how sonic harmony is actualised: by preventing disruptive sounds that fall in different musical ontologies. Going back to Darling (2014), this kind of performance and displaying of progressive music depoliticises the struggles for indigenous’ and, in this case, racialised ‘migrants’ rights to assert their legitimacy to be where they are, as well as *their* music.

### Orchestrating Harmony

Navigating confusion over my multiple roles during my time at Segue, I came to hear that there was a concern with and desire to critically reflect on white British structures (Nayak 2012) or on the mere representation of inclusion particularly around the time of the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Paired with the first Covid-19 lockdown, this pe-

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<sup>6</sup>Which, as Tagg (1993) argues in the introduction of *‘Universal’ music and the case of death*, is itself a “questionable viewpoint. To different people, music means different things. Possibly only people within a tight social and cultural context could denote something comparable.” (p. 1)

riod ironically (and uncomfortably), became an ideal moment for the staff to exchange with me on Zoom, for several hours about this issue (see chapter 4). Engaging with questions of racial ordering and reflexivity seemed to have come at the right time, insofar as people were mostly staying at home, and free to talk to me. Although the pandemic triggered a premature end to my ‘data collection’ given the limiting circumstances of multiple lockdowns. This means that many of the consequences of these reflexive exchanges between us remained largely unknown to me at this point. Staff members (who are paid) seemed to position themselves differently to trustees (GOV.UK 2022e), even though some of the paid staff are also trustees, who were decidedly more vocal about their opinions<sup>7</sup>. For those who occupied both a seat at the Board table and paid staff (e.g., some of the music tutors), they retained much of the power. The importance to create a ‘welcoming’ atmosphere for members was discussed frequently, as soon as they push the door of the weekly sessions. At the one meeting where Ziyad, a regular member who also was in the asylum system showed up, an interesting exchange took place as we were drafting the text for the promotional flyers:

Ziyad: Instead of printing more paper, it’s not good for the environment and also a waste of money, why in the class or in the beginning of the class, explain what is class, why we can’t we explain what it is? Why we come for and we pass it on to each other. Because more people coming to the classes and they don’t know what is.

Marie: Well, the reason they want the leaflets...

Ziyad: Because more people not read them, and then just throw it away, so you know, this waste.

Marie: It’s not, it’s not being passed around us, it’s to put in other places, where, where refugees and asylum seekers go, because one of the things that Calum said to us, was that he had never heard of Segue and he, and so many people have never heard of it. So we are, this isn’t to give to *customers* who are already coming, this is put into other places for people who have never heard of us. And maybe the language, the conversation group, the Refugee Service, and then drop in.

Ziyad: I mean you are right, but first of all we have to find our own members because they don’t know what this is, most members don’t know what the classes are for, like most people they come in here, they don’t know what they have come into from the beginning.

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<sup>7</sup>An interesting point to note, which I am not going to develop in this thesis, is the socio-economic and age of some of the members of Segue’s coordination team. The particular context of the North East and its history with anti-racism influences the composition of charity boards greatly. See chapter 2 for a little background.

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George: They have got to pick up themselves a little bit what they think it's about, which is good and bad at the same time, because people can ease their way in.

Marie: If you, so if I see somebody new coming you know, I go to greet them and say, you know, welcome, help them settle in. So this isn't, this isn't for that, it's, it's that sometimes you know, not many people come, and there are people who might like to come, but they don't know about us.

—*Meeting transcription, 22.08.2019, my emphasis*

Ziyad did not speak for the rest of the meeting, and his proposition nor his perspective were even discussed. Interestingly, this exchange shows how central the performance of welcoming a new person to the group is, and how it should be performed. Marie and George who are the two oldest persons on the Board, upheld that there is an individual responsibility to one's first encounter with the group. It is an individual's responsibility to make up what the group is about. What I heard from Ziyad's perspective is the confusion people experience when they first arrive, which goes beyond 'being welcome'. Another interesting point is the vocabulary of "customers" used by Marie as she explains how we should target specific places with flyers and leaflets in order to *recruit*. Evocative of a consumer-centred culture, this language, I argue, is part of the process of neoliberalising the VCS (see chapter 2). This was the final meeting Ziyad attended, which led me to question how the structuring mechanisms that hinder participation and the expression of voices that question the established order were connected to questions of cultural norms and 'race'. This is further unpacked in chapter 7, under a section that looks at white governmentality. This was not the last time that conflicting opinions were expressed and swept away as a result, and it would be incorrect to state that they only affected those perceived as 'migrants'. In fact, it is in the expression of diverging or challenging opinions that the striving for harmony manifested the most. Often, it seemed like vocalising views that would alter the structure of the organisation would be deliberately ignored by the lead organisers to avoid downstream, open conflicts. Even though I agree that meetings should not be an open forum for political discussion (because of time limits the need to prioritise other charity-related responsibilities), I found it peculiar that some of us were reluctant to bring up certain thoughts. One day, before we had formally accepted the grant, June who was an active member and volunteer for many years, raised an important question:

June: Are we gonna accept the grant?

Marie: Yes, hopefully, I brought the letter to sign.

[Silence]

Ella: So, can we make any decisions on the AGM now?

—*Meeting transcription, 03.10.19*

In the silence, there was a palpable sense that the question was not welcome. As June explicitly questioned the implications of the funding opportunity we were given, the discussion was shut instantly by Marie's assured response that the deal is pretty much sealed: 'she brought the letter to sign'. Addressing June's reticence to accept the grant could have been an opportunity to discuss Marie's work overload<sup>8</sup>, and redistribute it equally across members. Instead, June's question was quickly brushed aside, and we moved on to talk about the practicalities of the AGM. This moment is another illustration of what how I envisage harmony as practice of ordering. This way of avoiding overt challenging may not be done consciously, but what appeared paradoxical to observe through my interviews with staff members, and general ongoing discussions, was that alongside this avoidance of politics, there was the expression of a 'cluelessness' (innocence?) about how to facilitate engagement. As a result, part of the work of volunteering that I was doing focused on figuring out how to mobilise more people in taking part more actively in running the charity. However, when somebody expressed an opinion that would imply an important disruption to the way things are ran, the response was not necessarily encouraging.

This is a paradox that I observed in the VCS in general, but particularly at Segue. The willingness to present as a decentralised, open to suggestions kind of group, sometimes hides a hierarchical order that does not say its name. Georgie Wemyss (2009) talks about "tolerance" as a discursively enacted form of 'white liberal dominance' (2009, p. 117) that implies a 'flexibility' to maintain the upper hand in conflictual situations with "subordinate groups" (2009, p. 117). I draw specifically on her idea that tolerance operates (unwittingly or not) as a way of containing the expressions of diverging opinions on the structure of Segue while *discursively* presenting the group as open to all (suggestions). This resonates with Wemyss' phrasing: "tolerance is a strategy of domination presented as a form of egalitarianism in the dominant liberal discourse" (2009, p. 123). Again, I do not hold any one person accountable for 'ordering'; rather, I wish to draw attention to the multiple paradoxes that occur within the organisation, as they constitute simultaneously what those in charge discursively construct as problematic (representation deficit in the administration) while simultaneously reproducing the very mechanisms that lead to these problems. This is highlighted not just by June's query about whether we should take the funding (knowing that it required incorporating as a charity), but also by Ziyad's earlier remark. Addressing tensions and *différends*<sup>9</sup>, although they can be generative, are avoided. Berlant's conceptualisation of affective attunement

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<sup>8</sup>It is important to contextualise here that Marie's work on this grant and just generally as the chair of the group, means that she has carried the weight of the project moving forward for about two years. She often spoke about her labour and subsequent exhaustion to justify the need to hire a project coordinator. In this grant being accepted, she did see an opportunity for her load to decrease and more time to take care of her own health.

<sup>9</sup>In French, the noun « différend » is a variant of the adjective « différent » which means different. In English, it can be translated into "dispute" or "disagreement" although these two words have their own translation in French as well and fail to convey the idea of "difference" as a positive/affirmative thing, which is what I am trying to do here. In French « dispute » (spelled exactly the same) suggests a conflict and is used in a negative way (for example to express "I had a fallout with my sister", « J'ai eu une dispute avec ma soeur ») Whereas using "disagreement" evokes the lack of consensus (« désaccord »; which, interestingly, is also used in music to refer to an instrument that is out of tune).

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(2011) is useful to grasp the importance to learn, restore and preserve the capacity to welcome and face these *différends* as they arise:

The atrophy of these skills is at risk when politics is reduced to the demand for affective attunement, insofar as the sense of belonging is threatened by the inconvenience of antagonistic aims. —Berlant 2011, p. 228

In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant addresses the risky need to preserve a sense of ‘togetherness’, that comes with “politically orchestrated emotions” (Berlant 2011, p. 227). Alongside their “affective environments” (p. 227) these orchestrated emotions precipitate groups into the risk of losing the skill to accept (the political nature of) antagonisms that remind us of the different ways of being in the world. ‘Attunement’ can therefore be problematic insofar as it implies an ignorance of seemingly ‘conflicting’ ways of belonging. This is not because space and togetherness are not political matters, rather it means that the kind of politics that is ascribed to them are at risk of being depoliticised, such as that of waiting or belonging (Bagelman 2013; Squire and Darling 2013). What it means for Segue in this particular context is that a refusal to engage with these antagonisms represents a missed opportunity to transform a set of norms and principles in the organisation, that ultimately constrain its capacity to facilitate ‘regrounding’. Indeed, ‘regrounding’ is forged through emergence, dialogue, and without pre-assigned culture. When facilitated by VCS actors, ‘regrounding’ does not reproduce racialised binaries of who belongs where, as I develop in chapters 7 and 8.

### 5.6 Harmony, Decompression, Depoliticisation?

During the Monday night sessions, I found that generally, ‘sensitive’ topics (e.g., politics, asylum, racism) were not talked about by Segue attendees. The mood was set for people to unwind, have a good time, distract themselves from the difficulties that most are encountering in their everyday lives. Stifling tensions and a rigid structure may, in fact, represent a reprieve for people in the system who are regularly subjected to racism and other forms of violence. This prompted me to reconsider and nuance my stance on Segue several times, especially after speaking with Abel, who mentioned that a lack of structure did not improve the quality of the sessions in previous iterations. What if harmony enabled a necessary type of decompression. While I was shooting a promotional video in my early days at Segue, Andrea and others spoke on camera and repeatedly alluded to the importance of decompression:

“When I come to Segue, I forget everything. I can relax, and have a good time with different people from different countries as well.”

—Andrea, regular Segue member

## 5.6 Harmony, Decompression, Depoliticisation?

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Abel, who considers Segue his ‘home’, evokes the need for a space where it is possible to be *oneself*. Allowing people to ‘come as they are’ seems to be a benefit of not discussing politics openly:

“It’s not just about the music, it’s about the community. Because I found lots of friends here, they are very kind to me. Here, helps me to find myself, keep calm, be myself.”

—*Abel*

Where then, is the line between decompression and depoliticisation? As mentioned previously, Abel is one of the oldest active members of the group and has no issue asserting himself in the group, as the interaction with Jack showed. His critical eye on the doings and workings of Segue has been highly valuable to my understanding of the complexity of the question raised in this section. Drawing the line between distraction from important politics and necessary decompression was and remain difficult, as, in my view, it is very much entangled with one’s own political stance. In one of my interviews with Mark, the choir lead and drum tutor, I discussed Bagelman’s (2013) ‘politics of ease’ and the work required of people intimately involved in migrants’ lives:

Mark: It’s hard for me to go and have one to one chats with people, but if there was people who wanted to do that... Because I know places like the Discussion Meetup and stuff there’s, it’s like a lot of the people who go to that like, [...] go and volunteer there or [...] those kind of more analytical... Wanting to get, you know, getting in with the asylum rights and this sort of thing. The legal stuff, you know what I mean, and that’s great [...]. I think it is really, really important that at these groups there is people like that. [...] And I have always thought that the Discussion Meetup was more like that than Segue [...] but yeah, I did have that thought of, they didn’t want to push that side of it, it’s just [...] to make sure that everyone felt at ease and if people wanted to approach anyone about that, you know. But maybe we can, in a soft way, go and ask people if they want to talk about that kind of stuff, and how we can help, you know what I mean.

—*Pre-interview with Mark, 04.06.20*

Mark, just like the other two volunteers/tutors I interviewed recognise the importance of being aware of the political implications of asylum. They are also conscious that Segue represents one form of distraction which means that Segue is by no means comparable to other charities offering legal advice. Although Segue is not seen as political, questions of power are central to the organisation’s structure and purpose, and they determine the way that the organisation is experienced. Music is not an apolitical field, and all of them expressed this during our interviews. Taking this argument further, the very nature of Segue’s existence could be perceived as a form of resistance to the hostile environment (Goodfellow 2019), in other words, or a ‘quiet’ form of politics (Askins 2015; Pottinger 2017). That is until one examines the micropolitics of the structure that runs it. As

Shapiro (cited in Bagelman 2013) suggests, there is great political potential in arts that “refashion force relations, oppose a politics that is mired in the official language of macropolitical institutions and thereby provide an opening to the micropolitics of everyday life” (Bagelman 2013, p. 53). As such, Mark, Ella and Calum who engaged in critical questioning through our discussions opened an opportunity for a refashioning of power relations that are commonly disregarded by the group. In Foucauldian terms, the conditions for resistance exist within power structures (Hoy 2004; Hughes 2018), and take the form of ‘critical conversations’ as a first step (this will be further unpacked in the next chapter).

### 5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored Segue’s practices and structure through the lens of social and sonic harmony. Drawing on Darling’s (2014) concept of the ‘post-politics’, I argue that social and acoustic harmony function as depoliticising modalities in the context of asylum. I connected the centring of social harmony with the colonial practise of cultural homogenisation that is actualised in current times through national projects of belonging by drawing on Attali’s (1985) political economy of music and Baker’s (2008) historical reading of colonial sonic and social management. As Attali (1985) argues, there is an intimate connection between the realm of the sonic and that of the social, and the way in which ‘harmony’ is used to qualify both realms illustrates that. My contention in this chapter and in the thesis as a whole, is that the tendency to seek harmony works to ‘atrophy’ (Berlant 2011) our skills in hearing and negotiating conflicts, which are essential for the development of a pluralist society.

Shying away from conflicts is something that arose on several occasions at Segue. At times, it would lead to silencing some voices, and at other times, the people who felt like their views were not *actually* solicited, due to the way in which they would be ignored or dismissed, stopped engaging with the leadership of the charity. The point of tension often seemed to be felt where the existing order could be challenged in ways that the current leadership did not feel comfortable (or knowledgeable) to navigate. This does not mean that they would have been strictly opposed to changes, but rather shows how certain structures are not designed to welcome ‘critical dialogue’ (Freire 2017) as explained in chapter 4.

This difficulty to accommodate demands that do not fit in the frame of the white governing structure of the charity cannot be reduced to a lack of intention, as this whole thesis argues, but is evocative of the way in which whiteness often fails to engage critically with what it assumes being the ‘norm’ (Hesse 1996), resulting in the silencing of other ways of organising (e.g., meetings, consultation, music-making, performing). This whiteness is not merely enacted by individuals themselves, but by the whole apparatus that dictates the posture and conduct of these charity projects. I have illus-

trated in this chapter how Segue's accountability to the funding body that supported the Ensemble project added pressure on the group that limited the scope for spontaneity and implied that the funded project fitted with White British values of community harmony. In chapter 7, I bring in GSG, the other charity I have mostly engaged with, to show how the VCS could facilitate people's 'regrounding' on the basis of terms that foster critical dialogue and mutual trust.

Finally, I show how beyond the constraining mechanisms for people to engage with the charity, by offering an opportunity to socialise and decompress, Segue does fulfil a need evoked by people in the asylum system as crucial. As such, this chapter, by unpacking harmony as a depoliticising practice that works to order difference, also recognises the value of Segue as a charity that provides a vital platform to cope with isolation and im/mobility for people limited by the system. It does however question whether this decompression is helped by the suppression of antagonisms (Berlant 2011). Thus, the argument is not to abandon Segue entirely, as they play an important part in many people's lives in the city. Rather, I feel it is crucial to continue attempting to establish a place for critical reflection on the organisation's structure and internal politics (e.g., power distribution, consultation, decision-making), which different sorts of organisations might inspire, as the next chapter suggest.



## Chapter 6

# Regrounding

### 6.1 First Encounter

At 11:17 a.m., I arrived at the allotment on Blossom Street. I was 17 minutes late because I could not find the location, which was far up in an area of the city where I very rarely go. This part of town was not only hardly hit by deindustrialisation and the unrest that resulted, but seemed to always rhyme with social and economic hardship. I cycled around for a while and saw nothing but endless rows of flats and houses in the typical red brick, and on one main street, a plethora of food establishments, independent grocery shops with a vast offer of fresh foods, as well as restaurants primarily serving Persian, Kurdish, Lebanese or broadly South Asian cuisine. It does not appear to feature the bar and café offerings found in other parts of the city, giving the sense that socialising habits may be different. In some ways, it reminds me of the neighbourhood where I grew up in Brussels, a popular area of the city that increasingly repelled middle-class residents who fled to establish in more affluent districts, due to the growing immigrant population. In the west, the number of immigration raids conducted in the last years illustrates well how people seeking asylum are unevenly distributed across the city. An Freedom of Information (FOI) request providing the number of immigration raids/visits conducted in each postcode of the region North East England for the years 2014-2021 shows that out of 340 ICE visits<sup>1</sup> in the whole of the North East for the year 2019, the second most visited postcode was the area where GSG's allotment is located.

The area is famous for some of its food outlets, restaurants and grocery shops. Wesley's, for example, a place where you can get cheap vegetables and fruits, was recommended to me by friends. When I arrived there, I was struck by how familiar the atmosphere felt. I got off my bike and started walking around. It reminded me of the old Slaughterhouse's market, which was very close

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<sup>1</sup>The Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) is the team preceded by the UK Border Agency that enforces immigration laws by carrying out checks.

## Regrounding

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to my family's first home in Brussels. Around Wesley's too, at 11 a.m., it appears that the best of the market has been depleted; there are cardboard boxes and fruits scattered on the ground, and I think to myself that if you want the good stuff, you should come here early. I used to go to Slaughterhouse's market with my mother, but I despised it. I did not want to be part of the people that bought their food there instead of in supermarkets. The market inherited a bad reputation among the *Bruxellois* middle and upper classes, but it is now attracting an increasing number of young academics (to live and work, but mostly work) and entrepreneurs due to the low sale market cost, and the growing debate in academic and institutional circles on how to stir 'productive activities' in the area (for more, see Orban et al. 2021; Syncity 2020). These thoughts are useful material for reflection on my presence in the western area of the city as a researcher, to question my own motivations for being there and taking part in the activity that I am about to describe, and importantly, to capture the generative capacity of attending to the socio-material aspects of migration. This, in turn, foregrounds regroundings as a way of reworking the borderscapes that inhabit experiences of migration and unsettles the commonplace idea of belonging as a result of the 'integration, citizenship and national belonging' trinity (Favell 2022). As discussed at length in chapter 4, my experience of migration informs the sensitivity I developed to the socio-materiality of place and enactments of regroundings (Ahmed et al. 2003).

Spending time in that part of the city was originally supposed to represent a significant part of my fieldwork<sup>2</sup> made me realise how contingent on the materiality of space one's sense of home is, and how, equally, previous depictions of home can be evoked by the materiality of a new place (Sharp 2020), as such,

Making home is about the (re)creation of what Eva Hoffman would call 'soils of significance' (1989, 278), in which the affective qualities of home, and the work of memory in their making cannot be divorced from the more concrete materialities of rooms, objects, rituals, borders and forms of transport that are bound up in so many processes of uprooting and regrounding

—Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 9

The material elements that conjured that emotional connection to Brussels for me, which would in turn bring the affective experience and images attached to being an Algerian migrant in Belgium, were those cited above: the fresh fruits and veg market that one needs to get up early for, the empty cardboard boxes lying on the ground, the smell of fresh herbs and spices, people hanging out around the food outlets, the absence of coffee shops and bars. This reflection naturally drew me to explore GSG's allotment through a careful interplay of identities; at times, 'insider' to *some* emotional implications of the experiences related to uprooting, other times I was a European researcher, "perceived as an 'outsider'", which, as Mullings (1999) rightfully points out, "limited the amount of information shared with me" (although, she says, this can only be speculated) (1999,

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<sup>2</sup>Which was halted due to Covid-19.

p. 344). This is what ‘regrounding’ is about: first, it is not detached from ‘uprooting’. As Ahmed et al. (2003) suggest, it is to be seen as a fluid interplay that foregrounds “a plurality of experiences, histories and constituencies, and of the workings of institutional structures” (2003, p. 2). Importantly, ‘regrounding’ is about cultivating an attachment to the commons that Earth should be seen as (Sharma 2020). It is a process which is not about stasis or fixing into place through homogenising (or harmonising, see chapter 5). In contrast, it suggests that the structures of the VCS can play an important role in facilitating one’s encounter with the materiality of belonging, as I go on to argue with the case of GSG.

When I first meet Tonderai, he is cheerful and welcoming. He gives me a quick tour of the allotment, explaining how it works and how he came to establish it. It was once his personal property, but recently, it has been occupied by GSG<sup>3</sup>, initially, he tells me, his community project aimed at creating collective resilience to environmental breakdown. We enter the allotment, and he explains that Wednesday mornings from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. are dedicated to this group called Fempowerment (FMPT), a charity based on the coastline that works to promote racial equality and supports ethnic minority people through activities, programmes, and trainings. This is their gardening activity. Tonderai tells me that I am attending the second session that has taken place since this collaboration started, and it is going very well. The lead organiser from FMPT, Shireen, was particularly pleased after the first week to see that some women who do not normally speak much had suddenly opened up a lot during the gardening session, which was already a significant accomplishment from their perspective. Even though at the time of writing (2022), the project ended, Tonderai always placed the empowerment of what he called “hard to reach communities” (after the funders’ terminology, see below) at the heart of his endeavour.

When it was founded in 2011, GSG was also a registered charity supported by an NHS initiative to harness the power of local organisations to assist “hard to reach” groups in implementing ‘behaviour changes’ with the aim to effect positive change on their health (NHS 2022). On public documents, though, GSG’s organisational format is defined as “voluntarily managed” and “guided by Trustees who are professionals in different areas of expertise including International Development, Health and Safety, Local Community Projects and Research” (Redacted 2019). Except for Tonderai’s friend and co-founder Will, I have not met anyone else that was associated with the management. I was particularly intrigued to see how Segue would compare to GSG in light of similar grassroots aspirations, funding accountability, and mission to accompany newcomers into making a home in the area. From my first exchanges with Tonderai, it became clear that there was no comparable structure. He was running the charity mostly on his own. This, alongside other references Tonderai made about the allotment, his aspiration to make it a space where eventually, he could simply hand the keys to other people who want to come to the garden, as well as my own

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<sup>3</sup>For ethical reasons, I am not allowed to disclose why, as Tonderai did not agree for this to be on record.

## Regrounding

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ease in talking to everyone without the sensation that I was crossing a ‘provider vs. user’ boundary, indicated to me that an important value of this project was some sense of collective ‘ownership’, which already stood in contrast with Segue. What motivated Tonderai was rather the idea of it serving as a place for collective learning and experimenting. However, the more time I spent there, the more I realised that the ‘heydays’ of GSG were gone, and Tonderai shared his anxieties about limited funding and the reduced interest there was in the garden compared to previous years.

As such, on the surface, it seemed like GSG could be an example of what Berlant (2016) termed “infrastructures for troubling times” (2016, p. 393), or a (temporary) common infrastructure that operates “as a tool for breaking postcolonial imaginaries of a better sovereignty” (2016, p. 396) or better still, an “unlearning the expectation of sovereignty as self-possession” (2016, p. 409). The short time span I have spent in the allotment due to Covid-19 does not allow me to make sweeping statements about what it could have been, however, I can make judgements about what it was, even though ephemerally. From our first interaction, it sounded like the aspiration for the allotment to let people come on their own terms, assumed a shared concern for it. Tonderai acknowledged the broken system that confines people in the asylum system to ill-health and isolation. He wanted the allotment to be a platform for transformation and emancipation that eventually would become an oasis where organic growing, permaculture and collective learning experiments could foster a renewed attachment to the place, without losing sight or abandoning one’s old roots. We cultivated three different types of maize, using seeds from Spain, Zimbabwe and South Africa. We also sowed onion, courgettes, lettuce, and mustard leaves.

I wondered how much of this aspiration reflected the difficulty for Tonderai, at that moment in time, to take care of the allotment on his own, with a decreasing budget. Nevertheless, the few sessions I was able to attend before Covid-19 hit, allowed me to witness a way of unsettling the problematisation of migration through the prism of integration, citizenship and national belonging, but also, and to connect to the wider claims of the thesis, another way for the VCS of supporting what I call here ‘regroundings’. GSG is quite literally ‘grass-roots’ although it is administered and governed by charity (and beyond) policies. Thirdly, it showed how this facilitation is socio-materially mediated, as I talk about in section 6.3. As such, spending time with GSG, and in particular, with the group of women from FMPT encouraged me to consider how connecting to the soil and foods as a material form of attachment that transcends the ‘integration, citizenship, national sovereignty’ trinity can offer avenues to think beyond inclusion-exclusion dualisms, and more broadly, beyond a “liberal democratic immigration politics” that argues for the expansion of rights and opening of borders (Favell 2022, p. 3). This is a type of attachment that is forged through ‘enactments’ or ‘acts’<sup>4</sup>, embodied relationships, material social relations, in a way that is

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<sup>4</sup>Thus, more akin to Isin and Nielsen’s (2008) conception of citizenship as a ‘performance’ as explained in chapter 3 or to De Genova’s ‘autonomy of migration’ (De Genova 2019; Mezzadra 2020; Picozza 2021).

not pre-assigned, or determined, or in Sharma's (2021b) terms, what could be seen as a 'decolonised commons', that is "able to meet liberatory demands" (p. 268).

I base my discussion of the socio-materiality of 'regroundings', on the observation that addressing and conceptualising 'acts' cannot be done "without looking at the relations required to actualise it" (2017, p. 678). As a result, the allotment as a site of attachment and entry into a 'planetary attachment' (Sharma 2022) comes to life through and only with the presence of the women, Tonderai, and the allotment as socio-material actors, or following Hughes and Forman (2017), "both the material and the human, in their complex interactions, condition what forms of political claims can be made in a given moment, and these relations are constantly undergoing transformation and change" (p. 678). In this context, this type of attachment emerges from the ground up, but more broadly through interpersonal connections, and allows individuals to flourish on their own terms, without assigning them a position through racialised, hierarchical, social practises of harmonisation (see chapters 5). I only caught a glimpse of that during my involvement with GSG, and while it is not a perfect organisational framework, it does provide an alternative way of organising with migrants, something akin to a reprieve from the "glitch" that "reveals an infrastructural failure" (that of the VCS) (Berlant 2016, p. 393). This was a way of organising that proposes terms and modalities that differ from what I had observed in the VCS up to that point and that recast the dualism of 'provider' versus 'user' or 'giver' versus 'recipient' (Cowden and Singh 2014) and the omnipotent borders that limit ability to think beyond nation-states and territorially bounded sovereignty.

In this second empirical chapter, I recount four stories of field work moments across Segue (1) and GSG (3) that stood out for their capacity to locate and materialise the violence of border thinking (see section 6.2). In story two (section 6.3), the border is inhabited and re-written (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006) through the materiality of vital objects and everyday feminist solidarities which show how mutual recognition goes beyond discourse. Section 6.4's story illustrates the importance of conceptualising Earth as planetary commons and our relation to it as "nonsovereign" (Berlant 2016, p. 394), which in turn, calls into question belonging as a political project. Finally, the fourth story in section 6.5 recounts Tonderai's exploration of 'non-native' seed planting experiment. I build on the works cited throughout for a decolonised attachment to place where "freedom/mobility" is not only about the ability to enjoy the right to live on land without recourse to sovereignty, but also, in Sharma's (2020) terms, "the ability to change or shift one's identity" (p. 282). This is critical in my development of the concept of 'regrounding'. The material I draw on in this chapter mainly constitutes field notes, written from an autoethnographic standpoint, partly for practical reasons (e.g., lack of time to engage in-depth), partly intentionally, as the embodied dimension of witnessing and taking part in these scenes is one of the point of departures for thinking materially about 'regroundings'.

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In doing so, I hope to respond to Berlant's (2016) call for critical theorists to offer propositions about practices as well as judgements. As a result, this chapter provides a set of guiding insights, or as Berlant puts it, "*terms of transition* that alter the harder and softer, tighter and looser infrastructures of sociality" (2016, p. 394, my emphasis) into alternative and productive practises of organising, forging attachments and regrounding—practices that, in my opinion, have the potential to transform how we think about, and thus act on, the VCS in the context of migration. It is with the hope that we can rethink the relationships between the VCS and people in the asylum system that I am writing this chapter. Thinking through this, I was also inspired by Donna Haraway's (2016) call to 'stay with the trouble', foregrounding the need to think in and for the present moment to work through the troubling times in "thick co-presence", she adds: "we become – with each other or not at all" (Haraway 2016, p. 4). This, then, does what Les Back's (2021) calls to do 'Hope's work': "a worldly attentiveness to what is emerging in the conditions of the present as they are carried into the future" (Back 2021, p. 5), which in my view, is fundamental to the work of theorising about the becoming of the world.

## 6.2 Mutual Trust: Bar

Borders in this precise sense, are not a natural outcome of a natural or divine historical processes in human history, but were created in the very constitution of the modern/colonial world (i.e. in the imaginary of Western and Atlantic capitalist empires formed in the past five hundred years). —*Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, p. 208*

Layla appeared to be more at ease at Segue that night. The woman strolled in and exuded self-assurance; she knew who and how to greet; she took a songbook and joined the rest of the group. Across my weekly observations, I had noticed that for many individuals, entering the venue seemed like they were entering someone's home. When they arrived, they would have a little uneasy and occasionally apologetic demeanour, especially if the choir had already begun, because it is the only activity that has its own time slot in the schedule, and therefore one becomes clearly visible if they arrive late. The disparities in attitudes between individuals who are actively involved in leading the organisation and those who are not are striking. The so-called 'service providers' would be in possession of the keys, understand how to turn on the lights, assemble a bar with snacks and drinks, and set up the literal atmosphere, whilst the 'service users', as they are sometimes called by Trustees, arrive as guests. Transformed into an artefact, the bar became a material border that distinguished the two groups by assigning them different entitlements, rights and duties, organised spatially.

I began to consider the bar as a border between two zones after witnessing Layla being prevented from helping herself to a cup of tea by walking behind the counter. She simply went around because

everyone else was busy and she thought it would be easier to just get one for herself. As soon as Marie saw her, she blocked the path, politely requesting that she remained on the other side of the bar and place her order. Layla had broken a rule she was completely unaware of, and she was jolted back into her social identity as a visitor on the receiving end of the service spectrum as a result of her action. This may not be striking to anyone coming into Segue for the first time, but it marked me. While the landlords established a rule that stated that no one who had not had formal training at the venue was permitted to work behind the counter for insurance and health and safety reasons, I did, however, observe that I had been allowed behind the bar prior to receiving formal training. What struck me then, is the way in which the process that was not designed by Marie, was nevertheless enacted by her, and disregarded that Layla could be trusted.

By conceiving of the bar as a border, I am reminded of the concept of ‘border thinking’ and “borderzones” which were first proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa and further developed by Walter D. Mignolo (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 5; Mignolo 2007; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006). This idea was established by decolonial philosophers to define not only the process through which subaltern, non-dominant theoretical and epistemological attitudes (i.e., those not acquired from an imperial power), are excluded from the production of knowledge, but also to describe the *form* that these knowledges take outside of that border. The practise of border thinking is inherently geographical in that it provides an invitation to think outside the territories, languages and confines of imperial epistemologies and philosophies, and reaffirms the importance of non-Eurocentric ways of knowing and thinking. Locating border thinking in the body, as Mignolo (2007) does with the concept of body-geopolitics, is helpful in understanding how this interaction between Layla, Marie, and the bar becomes illustrative of the way in which ‘regrounding’ can be conceptualised socio-materially and facilitated by the VCS. Coloniality, according to Mignolo (2007), is felt in the body as a sensorial experience that is part of a web of human and non-human factors. The experience includes a power disparity that serves as the site of border thinking. The bar materialises border thinking into a borderzone, which reconfigures space and power geometries. As Ahmed et al. (2003) argue, “uprootings and regroundings are constituted through the reconfiguration of space, just as the redrawing of boundaries can generate new processes of uprooting and regrounding” (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 5).

The request that Layla remain on the other side of the bar made me feel uneasy. With a knot in my stomach, I recalled the occasions when I had broken the rule before my formal Fire and Safety and general venue induction, by going behind the bar without realising that I was doing so in violation of the policy. Of course, nothing had happened, and it dawned on me that this looked like another tool for control and governmentality. The sense of territorial entitlement that organisations founded on colonial models of governmentality (knowingly or unknowingly) deploy is important to their survival, as well (and because) it denies the possibility of a “better structural imaginary” for organising in common (Berlant 2016, p. 398). Breaching the rule evokes a threat and trust is

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only given if you have proven that you can comply. In this scenario, it seemed like the protocol applied to Layla was dissonant with the ethos of a project like Segue. While it is not Marie herself who has defined the rule, she is responsible for ensuring that it is implemented and enforced in order to avoid liability on the part of the organisation. I do not hold Marie responsible for what happened because I do not think border thinking is an individual affair. This event is only one visible, material way to identify the borderzone.

If border thinking may provide a paradigm for understanding the power differential and as a chance to undermine it, it may be valuable in this case. For example, if Marie is required to enforce the power under the contract, she may be in a position to challenge parts of it by focusing on how important mutual trust is for a group like Segue. What is more, she could invite Layla and others who show up regularly and demonstrate an interest in the organisation to be ‘formally inducted’, if the terms of the contract are too rigid on the part of the landlords. While it is important to figuratively ‘allow everyone behind the bar’, it is also important to cultivate trust via honesty and transparency in order to achieve it. In other words, mutual trust can only emerge when a risk is taken by granting the trust in the first place. Layla was perplexed as to why she had been asked to stay out, given that this rule had never been explained to her or the other participants. She had also noticed me behind the bar and had not anticipated that there would be a distinction established between our social statuses in the group.

As a result, the artefact of the bar in this vignette exposes the borderzone as a site for unsettling territorial and hierarchical dynamics (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 5). It is at once revealing of the ‘border thinking’ that inhabits Segue’s governance via a complex web of national policy mandating the VCS, rather than the sole responsibility of Segue’s staff. At the same time, the very fact that geometries of power were disrupted by Layla’s act, although she could not complete it, also exposes the unfixed nature of borders and suggests that by their mobility they invite new spatial and power configurations. In the pursuit of regrounding and its facilitation by the VCS as a first-hand actor in migrants’ lives, mutual trust can become instrumental in “the empowerment and liberation ... from oppression” (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, p. 208) as it is largely enacted by charity structures.

### 6.3 Feminist Material Solidarities: Tea

... There is no communication point between us and the pterodactyl. We belong to two worlds and there is no communication point. There was a message in the pterodactyl, whether it was fact or not, and we couldn’t grasp it. We missed it. We suffered a great loss, yet we couldn’t know it. —*Devi 1995: 195 cited in Jazeel 2019, p. 15*

### 6.3 Feminist Material Solidarities: Tea

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If the women always seemed excited to arrive at the allotment, I noticed that their enthusiasm peaked when Shireen, FMPT's coordinator, called them into the garden shed for teatime after a little more than an hour. The routine is the same every time. One of the two coordinators present prepares the cups, while the other pulls the biscuits out of the plastic bag, Bangladeshi biscuits, along with sugar, and Dano milk powder. Tonderai never enters the shed when we are having tea, despite the fact that he, too, is invited to join us. He stays outside and continues to work on the compost. He confessed to me that after their first session at the allotment, Shireen told him that she noticed some of the participants began to open up and express themselves freely in the group, even in the presence of the only man, Tonderai. For him, this is a huge achievement, because GSG is primarily about *empowering* people in the system. I appreciate his reserved demeanour during our teatime in the shed. It felt like a special moment for the women, when they could laugh and breathe a sigh of relief after kneeling for a long time to sow seeds or dig holes in the soil. On the second week, I went to their gardening session, and as usual, teatime requires sugar, biscuits, and milk powder. I was told that a tub of Dano was a rare commodity in this part of the world. The group coordinator explained that it is a traditional Bangladeshi teatime ingredient and serves it to me without question asked. I learnt that this is how they drink it at home, and that this one milk can be difficult to find. There was a sense of pride surrounding this tea ceremony, which is centred on the powder milk, sugar, and biscuits.

Every week, for a brief moment, the atmosphere of this shed allowed us to test multiple boundaries. That of the language, the thought, and the transnational geographies of the food commodities we consume. As summarised by Cook et al. (2013) as “medium” for “praxis-based geography” food “can help to vividly animate tensions between the small and intimate realms of embodiment, domesticity and ‘ordinary affect’ . . . , and the more sweeping terrain of global political economy, sustainability, and the vitality of ‘nature’ (Cook et al. 2013, pp. 1–2). Specifically, to discuss migration, food geographies offer a materialist vantage point that can speak to past histories and current struggles as I argue through the narration of this story. In the shed and on the allotment in general, we communicate using our hands, gestures, and facial expressions, as well as the assistance of Shireen, the coordinator who also speaks Bengali. We have to think beyond our immediate surroundings, to imagine the vast world that each of us brings into the shed, but something particularly *sticky* (Laketa 2018) surrounds the food. In this context, the milk powder, biscuits, and sugar spoons seem to come to life, as if they have stories to tell that are invariably imbued with colonialism, amongst other things.

For scholars at the intersection of feminist thinking, postcolonial geographies and new materialisms, objects are considered to be charged with affect. Tolia-Kelly and Crang (2010) argue that artefacts produce ‘a purified *domus* and foreignness through regimes of truth that reworked the aesthetics, grammars, and meanings [...] and histories through systems of classification and categorisation’

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in the museum space (Tolia-Kelly and Crang 2010, p. 2320). The narrative that is told through the placement of these objects, the way they are positioned, speaks to the power that is putting the artefacts on display, over those who are exposed. Objects, according to new materialist Jane Bennett, are not inanimate forms, but dynamic, vital matter. Food, or ‘Edible Matter’, she adds, is an ‘obvious...example of a nonhuman agency at work’ (Bennett 2010, p. 41). Sharp (2020) views the disciplinary turn to materiality through the lens of feminist geopolitics, which she explains and illustrates with forensics work. Sharp’s argument that things only have ‘limited agency’ that is never divorced from the discursive and always entwined with the multiple scales of our political lives can take shape thanks to the emphasis on ‘material witness’ (Sharp 2020, p. 10).

Food, as a form of ‘(im)material witness’, provides an insightful perspective into subaltern historiographies (Spivak 1988). Any food stuff, as an object, carries histories that exist on the periphery of dominant history formation. The emphasis placed on food while in the shed brought to the fore culinary and socialisation traditions that later enabled me to ask question about the (lost) histories of imperial exploitation in Bengali tea gardens. While I cannot presume that the women had been directly involved in those plantations, I valued the opportunity to indirectly learn about the East India Company and how they used tea as cash crop (Kamruzzaman et al. 2015). If language was a barrier that I could not overcome and thus missed out on insightful moments, teatime in the shed became a moment of exchange and learning through the material. Untranslatability (and translatability) is one of Tariq Jazeel’s five tactics for ‘decolonizing geographical knowledge’ by ensuring that the ‘poetics of planetary difference’ (or ‘Singularity’) is respected in the knowledge production process (Jazeel 2019, p. 1). Drawing particular attention to moments where translating did not succeed, because words in the recipient’s language did not exist, Jazeel demonstrates the value and productivity (particularly in an anti- or de-colonial effort) of not translating, as well as the importance of seeing ‘*uncommunication*’ (p. 15) as an expression of difference. The fact that some things (words, but also cultural practices) are not translatable (as was the case in my interactions with the women) is generative in the sense that it drew my attention to the biscuits, Dano powdered milk, tea, and sugar, which served as material witnesses to the joy that was shared, the lost histories of tea plantations but it also exposed the value of forging ‘belonging’ through the everyday solidarities of transnational feminism.

This last point is important for the conceptualisation of regroundings, insofar as it holds ‘an affirmative dimension in the desire to create ethical forms of solidarity with others. Such solidarities must involve respect for differences that cannot be translated, and for situated attachments to land and place’ (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 6). This form of ‘belonging’ is one that seeks no homogenisation or harmonisation, it demands no interpretations, or territorialisation. Building on the mobile borderzone, the idea of ‘situated attachments to land and place’ or how (inspired by Sharma (2022)) I termed it, ‘planetary attachments’, is enacted, and vibrant and cannot be owned. Those moments

in the shed deterritorialised belonging, and in that sense builds on anticolonial struggles for attachments that are situated ‘outside the temporal and spatial boundaries of the nation-state’, and ‘put into question any normative idea of culture, identity, and citizenship’ (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 7).

### 6.4 Common Infrastructures: Grounds

The commons is an action concept that acknowledges a broken world and the survival ethics of a transformational infrastructure. —Berlant 2016, p. 399

Every week, Tonderai asks us if there is anything we would like to do, or if we want him to tell us what needs doing. We are in October at the time, so most of the work consists in cleaning the patch and preparing raised beds. He offered to teach us how to prepare a compost, but that is for another day. That morning I ask him if he ever felt like it was a problem that he is a man, given that most of the women taking part are Muslims and in my experience, this may have discouraged some from opening up. He tells me how aware he is of this, and I overhear a brief conversation between him and Shireen about it. His presence, she claims, is not a problem. Nonetheless, he later informs me that the plan is for him to eventually let them come there on their own, and that he is only there right now to facilitate their familiarisation with the space and to teach them some skills. The sessions were very loosely structured, just enough to provide a framework, a learning platform<sup>5</sup>, and a sense of accomplishment at the end of each session, but, more importantly, the design of these sessions allowed for a ritual to emerge ‘on the women’s’ own terms’. Week after week, I noticed them becoming more confident in what they were doing, becoming more familiar with their surroundings, and deciding when to take a break. There was a sense that the purpose of this gathering was not to become pro-gardeners, but rather to provide a space of shared concern, a common as it were, and it is likely that Tonderai’s idea of ‘empowerment’ was thus enacted.

Slowly, they began cultivating the garden on their own terms, without needing much guidance. I was struck by the way in which they took more space with each passing week on the allotment. One day, one of the women who I had paired with to work laughed at my clumsy way of sowing onion seeds. I laughed at myself as well, because it was true that the time it took me to sow a single row of seeds was roughly the same as the time it took her to finish the rest of the bed. She not only knew her way around the soil much better than I did, but she also seemed more in tune with it. Her zeal and unapologetic, yet skilful method of digging small holes, grabbing the earth, and tossing it back in at a steady speed evoked a connection to the land that I certainly did not present at the time. Although I do not know if the lady had previous experience that shaped

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<sup>5</sup>Although some of the women confided to me that they knew exactly how to grow food because it was a practice they had in their home country.

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her skills or if she simply learned quickly, this particular scene alongside the caring and reserved presence of Tonderai conjured an image of ‘earth stewardship’, that transcends the constructed idea of a legitimate continuity between land, bloodline, and rightful national belonging (Sharma 2020). Here, again, the value of conceptualising ‘regrounding’ is meaningful as it sheds light on the *quiet* way in which nationalist projects of turning land “into state territory” (Sharma 2020, p. 281) can be subverted. In doing so, regrounding highlights the “importance of the felt, affective, experiential and interpersonal” (Pottinger 2017, p. 220), a form of “nonsovereign relationality” cultivated (Berlant 2016, p. 394), and an understanding of grounding *anew*, in which “quietness ... and rootedness are not merely negative oppositions of mobile” and audible, but signals of a larger attachment to a shared planet (Pottinger 2017, p. 220). This form of being in common that does not seek territory, “but *land* and the ability to enjoy a livelihood on it *without exclusion*” (Sharma 2020, p. 282).

Of course, this is an extrapolation from the particular lived experience of taking part in these gardening sessions. As developed in the methodology (see chapter 4), and mentioned here, the combined effects of Covid-19 and the language barrier impeded on my ability to draw on dialogical forms of empirics here. However, as I explained at the start of chapter 4, the more-than-representational is also a rich empirical form that fits the imperatives of relational ontologies (Knudsen and Stage 2016). It is in the process of transforming this allotment into a common ground that I find value and meaning for imagining nonsovereign land connections and deterritorialised expressions of belonging, and their potential to be facilitated by VCS actors (in contrast with the idea of ‘supporting migrants’ integration’). It is not an enacted form of ‘citizenship’ as such (Isin and Nielsen 2008), insofar as it distances itself from statist perspectives on belonging. However, regrounding is also *practiced*, and implies a form of mutual and self-recognition premised on being present (Squire and Darling 2013) on a shared ground, as will be unpacked in chapter 8.

Drawing on Berlant (2011, 2016) again is useful to describe what the allotment can represent. In particular, the commons as an infrastructure for the “glitch” (Berlant 2016, p. 396) or the “impasse” (Berlant 2011, p. 199) of the present<sup>6</sup> brings about opportunities to unlearn, rethink and recasts “constant transitions” between the old “Euro-white”, “malfunctioning” traditions of sovereignty, or “the breaking of postcolonial imaginaries of sovereignty” (Berlant 2016, p. 396) and what is to come next. This definition also echoes Linz and Secor’s (2021) description of “politics of the impasse”, which offers a set for tools to navigate the “uncomfortable dissonance” (p. 201) brought about by the impasse, or ‘glitch’. That is because I observed that the garden is not a fully realised project of ideal solidarity, nor does it aim to achieve a resolution of the tensions by providing a

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<sup>6</sup>In Linz and Secor’s (2021) reading of Berlant (2011), the impasse can be seen as a “legible present crisis ... provoked by the collapse of assurances of futurity, the dissolution of our hopes and fantasies”, they add “we find ourselves in such a crisis when ... the object to which we are attached (upward mobility, democracy, freedom, humanitarianism, etc.) no longer sustains us but instead causes us harm and holds us immobile” (Linz and Secor 2021, p. 199).

project to foster ‘belonging’. Instead, the garden offers a framework that makes it easier for members of the community to negotiate their identities and solidarities with one another (Meeus 2017). The allotment is an infrastructure that enables this ‘grappling with’ notions of nonsovereign belonging through the materiality of the activities, spaces and opportunities it offers, as expressed by Berlant (2011, p. 48) in Linz and Secor (2021, p. 201): “The hole we dig out is ‘a space of internal displacement that shatters the normal hierarchies, clarities, tyrannies, and confusions of compliance with autonomous individuality’”. That is what GSG enables in these examples: the women, not reduced to racial or national categories, are at once supported, trusted and let free to be on their own terms<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, GSG remains openly devoted to particular sorts of racialised communities, indicating that while these experiences surpass such classifications, systemic violence is never far away. In my view the allotment facilitated the women’s dipping into the “permeable membranes” (p. 206) that represent these holes they dig and prefigure a world in which the terms under which their lives are dictated in the actual, are no more. To conceptualise ‘regroundings’ as the capacity to ground oneself ethically, *anywhere*, understanding the Earth as common infrastructure that all lives have a right to is central.

## 6.5 Decolonised Attachments: Seeds

When I initially arrive at the allotment, Tonderai takes me on a tour of the gardens. He shows me over to a first corner, which is divided into two sections by a fence. Here, two of his plots are dedicated to raised beds, while the other, further aside is a permaculture experimental garden. He is quite enthusiastic about doing more of this, teaching it and he is particularly pleased that everything he is growing is organic-or almost. Following the path past the permaculture area, we are back at the location where the raised beds are set up. “I started cultivating some maize from South Africa, as well as some from Spain, after I was able to bring some seeds back with me from my last trip”, he explains. This is how he introduces his ‘international garden’ experiment, which he hopes will inspire some reflection. He collects seeds from all over the world, either some that he brought himself or other people coming to the allotment, and attempts to grow them in this corner of the planet, North East England. Although the South African maize is not doing great, he says, it could still be fine if the weather conditions continue to be on the warmer side for the following several weeks<sup>8</sup>, and he might be able to harvest a little crop. If they do not grow, he will experiment with a small amount of fertiliser.

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<sup>7</sup>Here, I think it is important to highlight that Tonderai did not understand them either. There was some things translated, but mostly, the women spoke freely among themselves in Bengali.

<sup>8</sup>As previously stated, it is October in the story.

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After a quick online search, once I go home, I come across a fascinating report by Garden Organic UK that talks about the benefits of so-called “non-traditional crops”, grown in the Midlands (Kell et al. n.d.):

These crops show local adaptations, which increases the gene diversity. But they are more than just genes: these crops teach of people’s heritage. By seed saving and sowing, by swapping and sharing they help to strengthen a community bond. That many of these crops are grown on allotments with hugely diverse communities shows how a simple seed can be a bond necessary for good relations. It is vitally important that the seeds, their custodians and the land that they are grown are all recorded, preserved, shared, and celebrated.

—Kell et al. n.d., p. 2

I notice in this quote the connections between the language of organic growing and human migrations: ‘local adaptation’, ‘diversity’, ‘heritage’ (Bagelman et al. 2017). Although I am critical of terminologies that are allied to integrationist discourses, I see the use of ‘adaptation’ and ‘diversity’, as an attempt to move away from the idea that the onus is on the seed alone. In fact, what growing food taught me is that it requires a delicate balance between human intervention and letting go, and importantly, a favourable environment for a successful crop. I am not trying to reframe integrationist discourses based on the framework of seed growing though, although the vocabulary of ‘regrounding’ glaringly evokes a botanical imaginary. What Tonderai’s seed experiment, and ‘non-traditional crop’ growing exposed is that another form of attachment to place than national belonging can be realised, and that it is necessary. It links to the epigraph at the start of the thesis which I write again here:

Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached.

—Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 1

The conditions under which one’s regrounding is possible will determine the kind of attachment they will be able to develop to their new home. With Lund and Benediktsson (2012), I believe that space is co-constituted relationally and materially, and that it includes both subjective, embodied practises and affects, as well as objective material realities of the built, non- and more-than-human environment (Lund and Benediktsson 2012; Raffaetà and Duff 2013). It is, thus, not the imperial and colonial boundary marking that naturally determines what culture emerges, but the attachments forged in space, materially and mediated socially and structurally (Hughes and Forman 2017). As such, ‘regrounding’ is an act that performs a decolonised attachment to place, and “makes it possible to consider home and migration in terms of a plurality of experiences, histories and constituencies, and of the workings of institutional structures” (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 2), thus making space for the emergence of new cultures. To think this through, signposting that Ahmed et al.’s expression in the main reference for this chapter is “uprootings/regroundings” is important.

Indeed, the interconnection of temporalities and spaces is often ignored in migration studies that focus on the forced “forms” (Favell 2022, p. 7). Sayad (2004) refers to it as ‘the Double Absence’ (Boudou 2021; Saada 2000). Stemming from Sayad’s lived experience with emigration and immigration, he shows how the two phenomena are inextricably linked, despite the fact that emigration, in particular, is rarely theorised in migration studies in the North. The double absence reflects how migrants stop being present in the place from which they left, and are always denied political, legal, and moral legitimacy in the place where they establish themselves, becoming absent there too (Boudou 2021).

The denial of freedom under the guise of protection or criminalisation of racialised ‘migrants’ (Picozza 2021) forces to question the legitimacy of territorialised, culturalised forms of belonging. As explained in chapter 2, in their current form they (e.g., nation-states) respond to an epistemic logic inherited from Empires and more specifically from their demise throughout the twentieth century (Sharma 2020). If the Ottoman, Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian Empires’ hegemony were at stake, one way of ensuring the continuity of their rule was through the formation of national territories through the ‘carving out’ of former Empires, which, says Sharma (2020), precipitated WWII. “The existence of people meeting their criteria of nation-ness but who lived elsewhere became grounds for much nationalist agitation to ‘reunify’ the ‘nation’ and, initially, the expansion of their newfound national territories (2020, p. 99)”, she adds, specifically in reference to what is now known as Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia. Tonderai’s seeds experiment along with my observations and participation in the garden, have demonstrated to me that one’s ‘regrounding’ in a new place is a process that should not be contingent on nationalist demarcations of space or status. This is not to undermine the importance of the conditions experienced by people in the asylum system, but to attempt at shifting the value system that our desires for recognition and community are attached to, for it is continuously negotiated materially and relationally and mediated by the structure in place (e.g., the VCS).

## 6.6 Openings

With this chapter, I hoped to do two things. First, to sketch the contours of how we might rethink the relationships between the VCS in the context of migration and their ‘users’. Second, to contribute to the growing body of work that offers alternatives to citizenship as the object of desire of people in the system. To do that, I provided a series of insights based on practises I observed in my field work across two types of organisations based on moments depicted in the four stories that allowed me to think differently about borders, belonging and solidarity. Being attentive to the dynamics at work taught me that, ultimately, in solidarity and organising projects, the notion of power and the ways in which it manifests must be addressed, not only in the form of a critique that deconstructs (although this is a highly valuable exercise), but also in a critique that rebuilds. As such, I build on

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Ahmed et al.'s (2003) concept of 'regrounding' as relational process that inheres migratory flows, by proposing that we think of the VCS as facilitator of socio-material dynamics involved in that process. The notion of 'regrounding' implies that the nature of one's attachment to a place is an affirmative enactment that "must involve respect for differences that cannot be translated, and for situated attachments to land and place" (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 6). This, I argue, constitutes the ultimate challenge to a power that still centrally lies in the hands of the nation-state, of which a neatly controlled proportion is handed down to the non-profit sector (INCITE! 2007).

In turn, actors in the sector unwittingly think along and reproduce bordered lines, as the first story in this chapter illustrates. While I do not suggest we do away with the sector as a whole, I do see the value for power in the VCS to be decentralised, or put in common, as an important starting point to facilitate regrounding for people in the system. Indeed, if Tonderai was still operating as the sole leading voice, during my time there, his model of 'governance' was in no way comparable to that of Segue. Of course, the two organisations are not comparable in size, which also explains why Segue increasingly required more centralised control, which goes to show again how heterogeneous the VCS is (Gill 2016), but importantly, I argue, how precarity in the sector prevents more critical engagements about the way of operating within structures.

The idea of 'regrounding' suggest an ongoing process and thus contrasts with integrationist approaches that envisage inclusion and cohesion as ways of 'fostering integration' and sees 'integrated' as the 'right' way of being an Other (Shukla 2017). The distinction lies at once in the terms upon which the idea of 'inclusion' is built, and against which it pushes back, and in the object of attachment or desire: national citizenship. By arguing here for a decolonised attachment, I want to highlight that the form of "epistemic and political superiority" (Boudou 2021, p. 15) that *includes* is always the same that excludes. Hence the importance to shift away from these framings. Throughout my ethnographic work, I have observed that being included or excluded is primarily dependent on the ability of those who arrive to fit in on the terms of those who welcome. This is obviously racialised.

The teatime in the shed with the women illustrated how

ethnographies of 'transnational migrant circuits' and of "the conjunctural and situated character of globalization" (Inda and Rosaldo, 2002, p. 27) ... reveal the fluidity and diversity of these exchanges, and complicate the unilateral relationship between belonging and location by investigating the ways in which new forms of political and cultural belonging are anchored in multi-local ties ... and in deterritorialized notions of a person's rights and responsibilities

—Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 3

As a result, regrounding is about ‘multi-local ties’ forged through the vital materiality of the land, the built environment, objects, songs, and social relationships (Askins 2016; Hörschelmann and Refaie 2014) built through it, rather than ‘fitting in’ a presumed homogeneous culture.

Some participants evoked concerns about not having anything to hold onto if their identification with a national project faded. The *connections* to their ‘homeland’ gave them meaning, and sometimes even a purpose (i.e., going ‘back’ for a visit one day, when they can move freely again thanks to a British passport). However, I join Berlant (2011) in arguing that it is precisely that desire for the object of national citizenship as the promise of a good life that prevents the ultimate detachment from an ongoing collective crisis of belonging (Berlant 2011), and ultimately, the realisation of a truly “decolonized commons” (Sharma 2020, p. 268). That is seen through migrant resistance and *No Borders* struggles have been going on for decades (Alldred 2003), demanding an end to nation-states (Scheel and Tazzioli 2022).

This chapter’s argument for a focus on the socio-materiality of the process of migrating constitutes an attempt to do “hope’s work” (Back 2021) and offers avenues to use the present moment of the “impasse” (Berlant 2011; Linz and Secor 2021) as one that resists the temptation to resort to easy “resolutions” (Coddington 2017, p. 318). By grappling with the tensions of how ‘border thinking’ *can* come to manifest in the VCS, by way of exposing a form of inner conflict (e.g., within structures but also people who’s identities are put into question), I hope to make space for a generative dialogue within organisations that envision their work along humanitarian lines. The four ‘terms of transition’ (e.g., mutual trust, common interest, decolonised attachment, and feminist material solidarity) (Berlant 2016, p. 393) that structured this chapter are not fixed, and they emerge from specific interactions at a specific moment in time, and are recounted from a partial perspective. Nevertheless, I argue that they can offer resources for structural and infrastructural transformations in the VCS, especially where socio-legal status and race determine the framework in operation.

I critiqued Segue in the previous chapter and at the outset of this chapter on the grounds of a tendency for the charity to depoliticise questions of asylum, in parts due to the constraints imposed on it by the charity framework<sup>9</sup>, but also because of a stifling hierarchy and bureaucracy. Importantly, I have identified that despite the charity’s intention toward migrants, nation-state ideas about asylum seep through to inhabit charity structures which materialise in concrete ways. For example, the bar, in the first story presented in this chapter, operates as a physical border that produces people attending Segue differently. In the previous chapter, it was the modes of communication, performance, consultation and decision-making that left very little (if any) room for Segue members to express their wishes for their activities. Nevertheless, bringing into focus the experiences of FMPT’s participation at GSG and the concepts of regrounding demonstrated that it is possible to

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<sup>9</sup>That prohibits registered charities from pursuing political purposes, as illustrated in Appendix A.1.

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define other terms, within the VCS that break with the paternalistic patterns of charity. Is it possible to identify any glimpse or potential of similar practices of regrounding in the case of Segue? And if so, might that allow us to apply this idea of regrounding across different kinds of experiences and in different VCS contexts? This is the task of this next, and final, empirical chapter.

## Chapter 7

# Transgressions

For me that's what blues and this Sri raga are, that's unleashing the beast and it's about letting out the pain, so the joy can fill the space [...]

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Pre-interview with Mark, 04.06.2020

### 7.1 Introduction

In chapter 5, I explored some of the practices in Segue that contribute to depoliticise asylum by positioning its work as distanced from national politics, and envisioning the musical project it offers as a space for relaxation, away from the tumult of people's individual struggles. The charity also tends to seek harmony, which I identified as both a reference to social relationships and to sonic qualities. This tendency toward harmonising is reflected in an impulse to avoid conflicts, sometimes by silencing people (inadvertently or not), but also by failing to account for migrants' artistic desires due, in part, to inadequate consultation and decision-making mechanisms. By drawing on the musical register, I aimed to go beyond the metaphor and argue that harmonising practices are contributing to a form of ordering of difference that aligns with an integrationist impulse engineered by a racist nation-state (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013; McGhee 2003), which bleeds into the VCS. This perspective on Segue is only partial, and more generally, through this PhD, I have found that the VCS' work in the area of migration cannot be reduced to strict isomorphism (Milbourne and Cushman 2015, see chapter 2 for details on this concept). As such, *harmony*, as a lens to understand how migrants attending Segue are grounding themselves anew in the city, also exposes the necessity of a joyful activity. What I have noticed, however, is that decompression seems to be facilitated by the stifling of antagonisms (Berlant 2011), despite not being devoid of uneven power relations, which should be challenged.

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In chapter 6, I recounted stories that illustrate how borders inhabit our imaginary and come to be reinscribed relationally, in interactions between members of Segue’ leadership and ‘migrants’ who attend the weekly sessions. With that, I aimed to show what other terms could underpin the VCS to move beyond bordered ways of framing what is currently known as ‘integration’. The alternative set of terms I have proposed in the chapter 6, which are – mutual trust, common interest, decolonised attachment, and feminist material solidarity – is grounded within an anticolonial and anti-sovereignty understanding of land (Berlant 2016; Sharma 2020; 2021a). While these claims that form the basis of my framing of ‘regrounding’ are located in a garden, it is important to specify that ‘regrounding’ transcends the mere relation to the ground. Regrounding is not materially grounded in the land itself; it is about the relationship with *any* form of material. The reflection on land is a gateway to reclaiming the planet as our commons, and to oppose nativist, autochthonic claims and entitlements (McNevin 2019; Sharma 2022; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2019). As such, in this chapter, I show how regrounding is possible through music, when the structures and conditions set out by white charity governance structures are challenged. Indeed, as I illustrated in chapter 5, by their willingness to engage critically with issues of power relations within the group, Segue’ music tutors have taken a first important step toward resistance against these structures, as they are set out by (state) charity policy. As such, this chapter is dedicated to exposing the conditions through which transgressive practices emerge as resistance in Segue, and contends that even within such a group that is riven with racialised power relations such transgressions are possible.

To make sense of these relationships, I identify a set of socio-spatial practices that are normative or institutionalised in UK asylum politics, including im/mobility (Mayblin and James 2019; Picozza 2021), and ‘white governmentality’ (Hesse 1996; Nayak 2012; Wemyss 2009). I demonstrate how subtle, material, and transgressive practices enacted by Segue’s tutors and members can contribute to the emergence of resistance by analysing some of the ways in which they respond to multiple forces (e.g., hostile environment, racial capitalism, neoliberalisation, austerity as explained by Cassidy 2020) that strive to prevent them from ‘regrounding’ (Ahmed et al. 2003) and making a home in the city. I draw special attention to how sonic practices can contribute to rework organisations’ power structures thanks to their material properties (partly developed in chapter 6, but further in this chapter), such as vibrations that are “physically pushing and pulling ... material fabric” (Gallagher 2016, p. 43), and in so doing shifting dynamics. This, in Kanngieser’s (2015) terms, is explained by the fact that “sound does not just connect things; it changes them... [it] brings into the world novel relations, it shifts paradigms and builds new formations” (p. 81).

To make the point for ‘quiet’ forms of resistance, Merriman (2018) talks about Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of politics as “attuned to wholes, bodies [...] concerned with processual masses that are *perpetually becoming*” (2018, p. 8, my emphasis). This suggests viewing resistance prac-

tices as always unfinished, in the process of becoming, and enacted without pre-determined intention. The focus of this chapter is on how resistance, as a form of “political response” (Katz 2001, p. 1219) constellates for different actors subjected to varying constraints and racialised political regimes in which outspoken resistance is often synonymous with increased repression (Scott 1985) or, for organisations, limits opportunities to access funding. As such, the chapter demonstrates how looking at seemingly non-political transgressive practices through the lens of emergence helps to broaden imaginaries of and ultimately strengthen acts of resistance to bring some nuance to the idea that Segue only perpetuates models of governance that align with the state.

## 7.2 Im/mobility and Mundanity

The UK’s hostile political climate on the matter of immigration has been characterised by the *im/mobilisation* of people seeking asylum (Picozza 2021). *Mobilisation* manifests, for instance, through the UK’s dispersal scheme, a policy that distributes asylum seekers unevenly across the country (Darling 2016; Phillips 2006). This practice splits family bonds, community ties, and disregards individuals’ desires to establish somewhere on their own terms (El-Enany 2020). Dispersal accommodation is managed by private companies contracted by the Home Office through the setting up of NASS, an administrative body that determines and assigns support for people seeking asylum<sup>1</sup>, who have no knowledge or “experience of this type of provision” (Cassidy 2020, p. 96). Accounts of people in the asylum system forced out of their accommodation, for various reasons, are numerous (see Darling 2010; Gill 2009; Phillips 2006). As for *immobilisation*, it shows in the limited formal rights, services, infrastructures and access to work (Clayton and Vickers 2019), granted to people in the system and migrants in general. The restrictions limiting access to the labour market that they are subjected to hinders their social and spatial mobility, resulting for many in enhanced feelings of being ‘cast away’ and ‘contained’ within one’s accommodation or neighbourhood (Mayblin, Wake, et al. 2019), which in turn prevents emancipation from the reliance on services and the generosity of the nation-state and the VCS (Picozza 2021). What is more, formal status (e.g., British citizenship) does not guarantee freedom either for people who are perceived as ‘migrants’, as Picozza argues (2021). She refers to this state of “unfreedom” as one in which migrants are contained, either by “humanitarian logics” (p. 12) of protection (which are also immobilising), or by the “colonial administrative practices” that disqualify one’s “admission” to the country (and its extension; “humanity”) (p. 15), by justifying their expulsion (e.g., deportation or destitution).

I already explained how Segue responds to this im/mobilisation by challenging some of the constraints and creating a ‘safe space’ where coming together does not imply a financial burden<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>This is explained in chapter 1

<sup>2</sup>See chapter 5, sessions are free to attend, and travel costs are covered.

## Transgressions

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Given a policy context that excludes and isolates migrants from the rest of society, providing such a space could be viewed as a form of resistance in and of itself. On the other hand, it could be argued that, in line with integrationist policy agendas, Segue responds to the state's call to integrate ethnic minorities into local communities as a way of mitigating the discontent that arise from social and economic disparities and perceived 'disorder' (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013; McGhee 2003). In fact, in previous iterations of Segue, their mission statement was as follow:

Segue is a community education and integration project. We build bridges across racial and cultural divides through music. Our project creates a welcoming space where asylum seekers and refugees come together with local and international musicians, to collaborate on the development and performance of our music. —*Segue 2014*

While the founder of the organisation who occupied a central role in the definition of the organisation's goal has died, her legacy lingers on in the iteration of the organisation that I joined. As Bloch, Neal, et al. (2013) explain, "community bridging and the facilitation of 'contact, awareness and inter-community activities' defined cohesion interventions" (2013, p. 36). In other words, while this particular incarnation of integration policies was directed toward established 'ethnic minorities' and not necessarily asylum seekers, as explained in chapters 2 and 3, Helen drew on the vocabulary of the community cohesion and integration policy narrative to establish the charity in 2009. Hence, I argue that these constructed forms of migration, while they are not legally perceived evenly (e.g., different systems of support, different legal frameworks for those in the asylum system), do share a similar rhetoric around the question of how to approach difference. This shows how the state's narrative 'bleeds over' to the VCS, who in this constellation, reproduces and reinscribes commonplace ideas of migration and belonging in their structures. The vocabulary of 'bridging across cultural and racial divides' continued to come up during my time spent with Segue. While I recognised the resistant nature of offering free music classes and opportunities to socialise for people who the system is 'casting away' (Mayblin and James 2019), I wondered how much resistance can adequately describe the type of intervention that the group provides, as it seemed like the sector was riddled with the humanitarian narrative (explained in chapter 2) (Fassin 2012; Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013; Pallister-Wilkins 2022b) which maintains migrants in perpetual 'unfreedom' (explained in chapter 1) (Picozza 2021).

By focusing entirely on music-making and "developing a sense of community", as the charity's mission outlines (Segue 2020), publicly, the group takes a depoliticised position in migrant charity work that can be perceived to overlook the "structural constraints, racialised inequalities and exclusions and racism" (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013, p. 39) that make it impossible for racialised newcomers to establish on their own terms, access music lessons or other cultural and artistic activities without having to rely on the colonial humanitarian narrative embodied by White charity (Favell 2022). By contrast, other groups in the region engage with these structural and material conditions

and channel their capacity into direct actions, advocacy, and mutual aid<sup>3</sup>. Segue, however, does not take part in asylum rights campaigns and does not engage in advocacy, or – to my surprise – even discuss and position themselves in relation to it. As such, it does not align with the trajectory of accounts that frame resistance as a set of practices determined *a priori* that are linear and that are expressed openly (Hughes, 2020).

If I agree that a focus on this form of “quiet politics and practices”, risks excluding “‘louder’ or more visible forms of migrant politicality” (Cassidy 2020, p. 99), I would like to propose here that such minor politics as seen through emergence and a longer or different temporal trajectory (rather than a linear one), induces changes and transformations, simply by starting the process of critical questioning or “critical dialogue” in Freire’s (2017, p. 39) terms of one’s apoliticality as I will go on to explore. As such, I draw attention to visible or otherwise sensorial socio-spatial practices that I interpret as transgressive in the context of local cultural norms, that ultimately constitute resistance for different actors (e.g., members of the charity, organisation, music tutors, researcher) in subtle ways, and the effects that such an exercise can have on the organisation for a re-shuffling of power geometries that tend to stifle self-expression. I provide here an account in support of the argument for a broader understanding of resistance within Geography in order to account for these cumulative, ‘mundane’, and less antagonistic practices as those through which some histories of resistance and liberation are written. In addition, accounts that critically engage with whiteness in the VCS that provides spaces and services for people in the asylum system are lacking. As such, since facilitating regrouping, as an alternative to supporting migrants’ integration, implies a rupture with the rigidity of white governmentality in the organisations in place, this account builds on Hesse (1996), Wemyss (2009), Saldanha (2007) and more, that addressed the intractable power of whiteness in society.

Whiteness and white governmentality in the writings of Barnor Hesse (1996), Anoop Nayak (2006), 2012, Divya Tolia-Kelly (2006), 2016, and Arun Saldanha (2007) provide tools for identifying the processes of racialisation through structural but also ‘mundane’ practices of a social, cultural and material nature that became normative (e.g., not going to the pub or avoiding certain public spaces (Amin 2002), leaving the party at dawn when White ravers are dominating the space (Saldanha 2007), observing the artefacts of one’s “life-worlds” displayed as trophies in museums (Tolia-Kelly 2016, p. 907). These conceptual lenses allow me to look at the experiences of migrants in their encounters with charity, and with Segue in particular, in a way that is generative of a more nuanced account of resistant forms. First, by exposing how the mundane practices that normalise racial segregation also enable their very transgressions (e.g., by way of doing something or being somewhere unexpectedly). Second, as argued by Favell, the ‘mundanity’ or ‘banality’ of “mobili-

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<sup>3</sup>In order to make sure that the anonymity of the organisations I talk about in this thesis, I cannot name such groups, for they would give too much information about the location and could lead to identifying specific people.

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ties may continue to provide modes of conceiving an alternate de-nationalised governance” (Favell 2022, p. 7), or in other words, the ‘quiet everyday’ politics of migration is the site that allows for a (re)making of “society beyond normalised productions and practices of citizenship” (Askins 2016, p. 515). And finally, identifying and recognising Whiteness and white governmentality as a set of practices embedded in the charity model (Nayak 2012) that are political in nature is the only way to deconstruct them, as this chapter goes on to develop. These avenues, in my view, conspire to constellate resistant ‘assemblages’ (Kinkaïd 2020) that have the potential to unsettle the “meaning and value that produce socio-material orders” (Kinkaïd 2020, p. 468). This, in turn, serves to highlight the ‘unintentional’ character of transgressive practices and their cumulative nature as fertile ground for the emergence of a political response upon which resistance *can* come to lay (Katz 2001), and for the possibility to reground.

I demonstrate this with an account written from an autoethnographic perspective, of an ‘exceptional’ session I co-organised as part of my volunteer work at Segue. The sessions revealed how ‘regrounding’ can indeed be facilitated by the VCS through transgressions of cultural norms and unsettling of power dynamics. This session, which took place in a local pub in January 2020, illustrates how emergence coalesced through a) the spatial b) the material and c) the sonic and auditory qualities of the space and event. By analysing the account through the conceptual views cited above, I look at how intimate relationships between socio-material orders that dictate where migrants should or should not be, how they should behave, as well as the ways in which power plays internally to Segue are resisted and reshuffled through ‘quiet’ transgressions of norms. These did not take the shape of outward resistance, but constellated another order, which emerges as a political response (Katz 2001). This aligns with the wider argument of the thesis for conceptualising regrounding as a generative alternative to the trinity ‘integration, national belonging, citizenship’ which I have touched upon throughout the thesis (Favell 2022). Before I introduce the event of the pub, I explore the concept of white governmentality in relation to the VCS in order to set out the meaningfulness of the transgressions that I identified for this chapter’s claim.

## 7.3 Locating the Event

### 7.3.1 Segue’s White Governmentality

In this chapter, the term “whiteness” refers to a system of governmentality (Hesse 1996; Miller and Rose 1990; Nayak 2012) in the sense of a “matrix within which are articulated all those dreams, schemes, strategies, and manoeuvres of authorities that seek to shape the beliefs and conduct of others in desired directions by acting upon their will, circumstances, or environment” (Miller and Rose 1990, p. 273). Hesse describes how the “disciplinary logic of ‘whiteness’” (1996, p. 97) evolved since the decline of the British Empire (and the inception of the UK as a sovereign nation-state) to

show how disseminating whiteness as a structure was made possible, not only through discourse (and imaginary), but also pragmatically. In light of such historical accounts (see Sharma 2020 for more details of the fall of Empires and the births of nation-states), the whiteness of the VCS is also documented and critiqued (**charity\_so\_white\_charity\_nodate**; Ainsworth 2018; Nayak 2012). However, intimate accounts of everyday strategies of, and against white governance in the context of asylum are lacking. Charities across the UK provide a variety of services to assist those seeking asylum in the process of ‘integrating’ after often traumatic experiences of displacement, persecution, and ongoing political and economic insecurity, motivated by a desire to support ‘integration’, ‘social cohesion’, or ‘conviviality’.

While some charities explicitly “fill the gaps” in absence of welfare support (i.e., due to being destitute) (Mayblin and James 2019, pp. 382–383), others, such as Segue, focus on social and cultural aspects of newcomers’ life in the city. A more thorough explanation of the heterogeneity of the VCS can be found in chapter 2 of this thesis and in Gill’s (2016) work. However, it is important to take stock here of the way in which that diversity runs the risk of becoming instrumental in deresponsibilising some groups over the politics of asylum, as this excerpt from my pre-interview with Mark indicates:

Mark: Yeah, I mean, I should do probably more of that... or maybe we can have people there who are going around just having these chats, coz I guess I’m, it’s hard for me to go and have one to one chats with people, but if there was people who wanted to do that [erm], because I know like places like the, the like, [erm] the Conversation Group and stuff, a lot of the people who go to that like and volunteer there or, those kind of more analytical, getting in with the asylum rights and the legal stuff, you know what I mean, and that’s great like, I think it is really important that at these groups there is people like that. I have always thought that the Conversation Group was more like that than Segue was. But yeah, I did have that thought of, they didn’t want to push that side of it, it’s just to make sure that everyone felt at ease and if people wanted to approach anyone about that, you know, but maybe we can in a soft way go and ask people if they want to talk about that kind of stuff, and how we can help, you know what I mean.

*—Pre-interview with Mark, 04.06.20*

Contrasting with the point above about a deresponsibilisation for questions of asylum, Mark’s reflection also shows how diversifying approaches to migrant solidarity can reinforce a network of collective struggle that is undertaken by differentially situated people with varying capacities and abilities to make space for more or less overtly political, or contentious conversations.

However, tensions and discriminatory behaviour continue to occur in the charity sector, though not always explicitly. For example, Charity So White is a campaign that sparked a Twitter

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conversation in 2019 after the discovery of racist and prejudicial training content produced and used by Citizens Advice for a course on working with so-called “BAME<sup>4</sup> communities” (**charity\_so\_white\_charity\_nodate**). The campaign’s leadership team addresses institutional racism in the charity sector, primarily through advocacy, with the goal of shifting power structures. According to Nayak (2012), whiteness in the VCS manifests itself through governance structures, decision-making, or consultation mechanisms (see chapter 5). At Segue, this is demonstrated by music tutor Mark in the following quote:

[...] at that time, it did have, like, on the Board of Trustees all, you know, middle class White British citizens, and well, ones with, with good jobs and they were all doing that kind of thing. —*Pre-interview with Mark, 04.06.20*

He refers here to the composition of Segue’s Board of Trustees some years ago. Mark’s uneasiness regarding their racial and socio-economic makeup reflects his general opinion on charity policy, as often dominated by people in these positions. When I first joined Segue, he explained to me how, in his view, registering as a charity contradicted the ethos of the project. Since its inception in 2009, he witnessed several iterations of the project and always advocated for a grassroots and collective ownership approach to organising. Mark was not only very aware of the problems that the bureaucracy and rigid organisation created for people who attended the sessions but was also very critical of it. However, day-to-day administrative tasks to keep the sessions going, the need to seize funding opportunities, coupled with the unstable lives of people in the asylum system, always seems to override with this aspiration. Maintaining an informal status was and remains unsustainable, insofar as given the resources that were required to keep the organisation afloat, Segue needed to access funding, which, in most cases, requires the organisation to be officially registered as a charity.

As explained in the chapter 5, Segue’s weekly music sessions are structured into three ‘moments’ (choir/percussion, guitar, and violin classes) run by three tutors and two substitute teachers, who are all White and sit on the Board of Trustees. A recently appointed project coordinator oversees decision-making alongside the governing Board members and she also identifies as White, British. The whiteness in Segue’s administration not only conforms to the Government’s position on the matter of asylum (e.g., paid staff must be legally permitted to work in the UK), but also justifies the subsequent charitable impulse toward the people oppressed by this asylum regime. Thus, the power relations contrasting ‘service provider’ with ‘service user’<sup>5</sup> perpetuates and remains unchallenged, as Ella, one of the three tutors, expresses:

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<sup>4</sup>Black Asian and Minority Ethnic.

<sup>5</sup>The terminology of ‘service’ is used by some of the trustees to describe the charity’s function, and within that, a distinction between ‘users’ and ‘providers’ is drawn.

[I]t may be that just a lot of the people who come to Segue don't want to take part in the organisation of it, that's fine, I wouldn't want to say to somebody you know, you must be the Secretary because you are a migrant and you have to be one, but again, it's maybe not being so proactive about finding that out.

—*Reflexive interview with Ella, music tutor, 30.04.20*

Although Ella is right, in that it is not fair to assume that their ethnicity or status should determine whether or not people should take on an administrative or teaching roles, she also points at the lack of proactivity in finding out – thus demonstrating a willingness to critically examine hers and the groups' action. Indeed, by establishing structures, consultation and decision-making mechanisms that do not account for the temporalities (Clayton and Vickers 2019) and concerns of migrants, VCS organisations sometimes fail to create a space that fosters self-expression and agentic propositions. Importantly, they build and maintain structures that depoliticise asylum (Darling 2014), which (unwittingly) reinscribes the supposed legitimacy of processes of racialisation and categorisations associated to them (Favell 2022). Additionally, often, people in the asylum system I met through my research did not see how inequality operates and how the expression of their agency was managed in the charity; it is made 'invisible', not by Segue's administrators, but by the legal and social policy framework it operates through. This explains why the order of things is not often explicitly challenged. When asked, White people in charge of administering the charity seem to be conscious of the expression of their own whiteness as limiting in this particular context (Hesse 1996). During my interview with her, Ella demonstrated a keen awareness of issues surrounding race in the group, and eagerness to work through them, although she seemed unsure how to:

[T]his is something that I think all of the Segue organisation people at the minute are aware of, and we know that Segue would work best if the people who Segue is mainly for were organising and taking the lead, because like I was saying earlier, I don't know how it is to be a migrant, I don't know how it is to be an asylum seeker, so I don't know kind of, what's most appropriate and what's most needed really.

—*Reflexive interview with Ella, music tutor, 30.04.20*

Ella's reflection revealed to me how it was not so much a question of awareness of the uneven dynamics at play in Segue that posed a problem, but how to understand and address it. According to Hoy's (2004) reading of Foucauldian understanding of power, resistance is always-already embedded into power; otherwise, the relationship would be one of domination. Thus, one of the prerequisites for shifting these power relations is a readiness to engage in a critical dialogue (Freire 2017). Only through this dialogue the possibility of resistance becomes apparent (Hughes 2018). Ella and Mark, conscious of these dynamics, were enthusiastic about participating in a reflexive exercise as part of my interviews with them. The difficulty lay in how to challenge the multiple

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ways in which they were directly or indirectly contributing to reinscribing racialising structures, and what that meant for them:

[...] looking at me being a white middle class male and representing and being the voice of this thing [Segue] and [...] essentially having that power, it doesn't sit right. I understand that it's an issue. [...] of exactly what you are talking about, these sort of "ease" sides of the asylum process. And I can see how you could totally come at it from an angle like that and tear it apart. I'm sure everyone's coming at it with the best intentions, *but that's the way that the system ends up being you know*. [B]ut yeah, I should certainly, [but] I guess I don't think of it on that macro kind of [level], I'm just thinking about what am I going to do in today's session.

—*Pre-interview with Mark, 04.06.2020, my emphasis*

Mark's recognition that one could come at it and "tear it apart" and that "the system ends up being" responsible for this power imbalance made me reconsider white governmentality as a set of principles that not only seek to shape the conduct of racialised migrants, but also one that obstructs the very possibility for thinking and organising otherwise. I heard from a few people on different occasions that Segue used to operate very differently. Some mentioned much looser structures, and spoke of them as inadequate. Some of them 'too messy' led to louder voices taking over, whilst for others, the hierarchy was a reason to stop coming. What I understood as white governmentality in the charity was reflected in the organising principles that differently categorise Mark (and the other music tutors and Board members) from racialised migrants, and more broadly, "nationals and foreigners, citizens and aliens, majorities and minorities" (Favell 2022, p. 6). This makes the unequal access to freedom that differentiates people in these categories "invisible and unproblematic" (2022, p. 6), and consequently, renders the solutions to these injustices 'superficial' like a music drop-in for migrants taught by White, middle-class, music tutors, in contrast with, for instance, facilitating access to music practice and education to all regardless of formal status, or facilitate a space for group-led music projects. In contrast, a charity like GSG seemed to operate on a much less vertical model, and used the benefits afforded by the charity framework to provide a much looser platform, more broadly defined by mutual trust than charity commissions.

As a result, I argue that engaging critically with the work of charities (and the VCS more broadly) involved in supporting migration is essential if geographers are to speak to the socio-spatial elements that enable or impede processes of establishing a home while going through the UK asylum system. For the VCS can create spaces that allow for regroupings, and challenge integrationist narratives of belonging and their impossible horizon. Collective music production may appear innocent, but this does not mean that it is devoid of opportunities for transgression. These can manifest as improvisation, presence in unusual places, and generally, ruptures with habits or patterns of behaviours adopted as cultural norms. Several transgressions of these types took place in

## 7.4 Autoethnographic Account of a Music Session at the Pub

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the account below, and led me to consider their role in the creation of spaces where migrants can draw a sense of regrounding.

### 7.4 Autoethnographic Account of a Music Session at the Pub

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, Segue gathered in a local pub, less than half a mile away from the usual location. Our agreement with the usual venue's landlords calls for a five-week Winter break to allow for general upgrades to the space as well as potential private hiring. Because interrupting gatherings for extended amounts of time had historically been shown to contribute to a reduction in participation, leaving many individuals feeling isolated, we seized this chance to explore new locations and interact with some of the numerous cultural landmarks nearby. I decided to act as a 'connector' and organise the first music session in a pub renowned in the local community for its folk scene. The pub owner was delighted with my request and even provided us complimentary tea and coffee. This gesture was welcome, as it was typical for the group to socialise around a drink and some snacks in between music classes. Besides, some members previously expressed discomfort with alcohol being offered in the room where the sessions are held, so offering alcohol-free options indicated a form of respect.

Public houses are quintessentially British socialisation spaces, historically aptly defined by Brian Harrison as "a 'masculine republic' on every street" (Harrison, 1973, p. 172 in Kneale 2021, p. 5). In addition to gender, race is another site of normative behaviour for pubs, with racialised people attending less frequently than White people (this will be discussed further in section 7.5). However, it is not coincidental that I picked this particular pub among all those in the area. The Queen's Head<sup>6</sup> stands out from other pubs by presenting as an openly political place with a generally left-leaning philosophy that is sympathetic to the realities of racialised migrants and marginalised genders. They regularly host fundraising events for non-profits such as Freedom from Torture and "all-female" concerts. We were offered one room, which is located on the right side after passing through a narrow entrance corridor. Another area, opposite ours, acted as the main pub space where regular customers would normally sit when coming for a drink, and houses the bar. It did not seem awkward to anyone that alcohol was served on one side of the pub, whilst the other sipped on tea and coffee.

We arrived at the pub in three groups of 4-5 people around six o'clock. I noticed that the atmosphere was different to the usual sessions. Many of us were unsure how to behave in this new space and what might happen. Besides, the space was small, and the layout invited the group to turn towards the centre of the room where chairs and a table were positioned to invite people to sit, not as an

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<sup>6</sup>The real name of the pub was changed.

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audience, but as active creators of the scene. Our presence filled the room with a mix of excitement and nervousness, as none of us could predict what was going to happen next; the rest of the evening was still a blank slate at that point. A liberating sense of possibility arose from the unpredictability of this session, which contrasted dramatically with the way normal sessions affected me. Mark took out Boomwhackers<sup>7</sup>, which rapidly took on a central material significance in an ice-breaking exercise. Each ‘tube’ had a distinct musical pitch and provided the person holding it with a distinct sense of sonic agency. He suggested that we each grabbed one and introduced ourselves in turn by singing our names and describing something we liked or disliked, followed by a sequence of Boomwhackers strikes that the rest of the group repeated afterwards to encourage deeper listening. We laughed and the atmosphere felt warm.

The evening progressed, punctuated by tea and coffee breaks and chats. We moved on to perform songs from our repertoire, including one of the most popular Ukrainian folk songs, *Ніч яка місячна*<sup>8</sup>, accompanied by the violin-taught group, a few guitars, and a piano. We sang this song countless times, and every time, it brought a smile to our faces, as we all wondered how we managed to sing in Ukrainian without understanding a word of it<sup>9</sup>. I noticed that our voices drew the attention of customers sat on the other side of the wall. Occasionally, the doors separated by a narrow corridor connecting both rooms open, let the group be partly visible and audible to the ‘normal’ customers in the other room.

A small group gathered around Mark, who in his usual way, kickstarted the collective writing of the lyrics of a song that began to emerge. The acoustic of the room, as is often the case in pubs, was such that no distinct sound emerged above the others, no dominant voices “colonize[d] [the] space” (Kangieser 2012, p. 8), and even the sounds of instruments seemed to blend into a comforting ambient soundscape. Massood and Layla, two regular members, actively participated in the production of the song, while Silvia, occasional choir lead, took out a piece of paper and began scribbling the words that come out from those sitting around the table. “How do you say peace in Farsi?” asked Mark, “صلح” (“Solh”) answers Layla, as Silvia struggled to keep up with the spelling of words in a variety of languages.

Reza, another active member, joined the group in the centre and began playing a few chords on his guitar, which became the song’s riff. Azam, his brother, came next; he sat at the piano, and before we know it, the violins and even the Boomwhackers entered the (metaphorical) stage, each with their own gift to the scene without any direction other than what the emergent song demanded for. The chorus of the music being written evolved and altered as vibrations touch each and every ear, every body as we all sang. At some point, it appeared that a consensus was reached; the riff set

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<sup>7</sup>Boomwhackers are plastic tubes coming in different sizes and colours that are tuned to a particular pitch (thanks to their length). They are used as percussion instruments.

<sup>8</sup>“What a Moonlit Night” in English.

<sup>9</sup>This took place and was written before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

## 7.4 Autoethnographic Account of a Music Session at the Pub

the tone, we had lyrics, and anyone who was holding an instrument or tapping their foot on the hardwood floor conspired to create a new set of dynamics, upsetting the traditional ‘service user’ – ‘service provider’ dichotomy. Some of the regular folk artists made an appearance. Their usual folk music session began 30 minutes later, in the room in which we were set up. One was surprised, possibly uneasy, while the other appeared fascinated by what was happening. They were probably not expecting to see us – a bunch of predominantly racialised people who did not frequently (if at all) visit this pub. One of them pulled out his guitar and began playing along with the rest of the group, while the other simply stared, perplexed by the situation. The atmosphere shifted once more as we repeated the chorus, as if it were an incantation (see figure 7).



Figure 7: Song written on the night 13.01.20

### Debriefing

The general mood and responses were positive. I noted people were generally all engaged in what was happening, as opposed to regular Monday nights. Members of Segue who were in the asylum system and expressed a desire to visit that area of town felt at ease in the pub and did not hesitate

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to use the piano or take up space in the room. Those who were shyer in general did not grow less shy, but they showed more active engagement because there was less of a linear structure in the evening's progress to rely on and less room than usual behind which they could make themselves less visible. As previously described, the normal order of weekly evening sessions ran as follows: 6-7p.m.: group choir, 7-8p.m.: drumming session, 8-9p.m.: split group between violin and guitar tuition. The usual space was far larger (it served as a club on weekends), and therefore enabled for a spatial demarcation of each of these activities. However, a consistent issue had been the lack of acoustic demarcation, which meant that the guitar and the violin groups could hear one another as they played, despite being separated by a thick curtain. In this scene, members of the public participated in the session, either partially or entirely, with their own instruments if they brought them, or simply by singing, which never happens during the normal session that take place in isolation, behind the closed doors of a venue that is lent to us. Following my description of the event, I explain why and how to pay attention to socio-spatial as well as sonic transgression in order to better grasp what constitutes resistance in the formation of non pre-assigned forms of culture. This, I argue is a condition that suggests that regrounding is possible.

### 7.5 Emergent Resistance

Although the lyrics of the song suggest a type of resistance that is overt and oppositional, despite Segue's more apolitical stance, as mentioned earlier, I would like to draw attention to the more subtle ways in which resistance constellated, collectively, unintentionally and sonically. Following Foucault, Hughes argues that "[t]racing the trajectory of resistance cannot be separated from power and yet crucially, the shape of such resistant forms remains [predominantly] delineated *a priori*" (2020, p. 1142). Not presenting itself as an activist organisation and explicitly positioning itself as apolitical does not preclude the emergence of resistance in the organisation. An attention to the sonic practice of collective music-making in a place where racialised migrants are not used to being seen lends itself well to identifying emergence. Importantly, this is not the only context in which resistance emerged, as alluded on at the start of this section. The song's lyrics, meanwhile, evoke political themes such as police, climate breakdown, and America's desire to exert control over the planet. When Mark asks participants to contribute a single word, I believe it demonstrates the depth of his collective song writing abilities, because it creates the conditions for people to express whatever they feel resonate with them most, all the while fostering 'deep listening' of one another's expressions. When I saw the political themes emerging in this scene, I was reminded of the fact that it is impossible for Segue to avoid politics because they are a part of the lives of those who create it – in this case, in a very concrete, written, sense.

As argued by Kanngieser (2012), space and sound "co-create" one another, "cultural geographies show that] the social, the oral and the aural are intertwined (Wood et al. 2007) and ... the dialogic

processes of utterances may enact different collective and public spaces” (Kanngieser 2012, p. 2). In other words, sound allows space to come into being through its interaction with social, and sonic agents in a way that cannot be pre-determined. Inside the pub, this refashioning of space was made possible by the material qualities of sound: vibrations on the floors, walls, seats and table, resonance in the body, physical sensations and tone inflections all enabled the emergence of a different order that supplants the structure of the white governance of Segue (see Ella’s quote in section 7.5.2, and see also chapter 6 on the importance of attachments forged materially and relationally for regrounding to emerge).

For Saldanha, racial difference is the *result of processes* that unfold “at different levels of organisation” (2007, p. 10), which suggests that the way in which certain factors (space, bodies, location) constellate shapes power and resistance. Just like with sound, attending to these factors invite us to look beyond discourse and representations (without undermining their influence on shaping lived realities). Similarly, emergence is processual and constellates in ways that are unpredictable through, in this case, a series of transgressive practices of social and spatial norms at different levels. That is to say that there is no single *form* of resistance, and that resistance is, as in Cindi Katz’s (2001) topography (e.g., resistance, reworking, resilience), only one form of political response that can drive change but should not be romanticised. The unpredictability, however, does not preclude the reproduction of a similar event in nature (e.g., improvised, non-hierarchically structured, open-ended), and in fact, the event served as a basis for a rethinking of the delivery of weekly sessions as I explain later.

Here, emergent resistance is the result of cumulative, non-predetermined, transgressive practices that ultimately break with the status quo. Transgressive practices in the case of Segue took different forms: by encouraging the mobility of im/mobilised migrants’ bodies beyond their confined area (spatial), by breaking with social norms/normative behaviours about whose bodies are seen as legitimate to occupy the space of the pub (normative), and with the improvisation of a riff and tacit invitation to sonically reshape group dynamics (sonic). The transgressive practices are geographical, insofar as they relate to a sense of claiming a right to the city (Harvey 2008) and urban spaces of socialisation for bodies that are not given these rights due to their immigration status, which can ultimately lead to refashioning power geometries.

### 7.5.1 Socio-Spatial Transgressive Practices

Even if so-called ‘parallel lives’ and ‘self-segregation’ could not be demonstrated in the North East of England, Nayak’s (2012) study showed that the absence of people of colour in everyday social spaces (e.g., the pub) should not be dismissed as solely a matter of cultural difference (p. 458). Rather, these absences reflect structural obstacles. That is because these processes of racialisation are fundamentally about the material conditions of people who are in the asylum system. Their

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im/mobilisation is infused with silencing; since they are cast away spatially and cannot afford regular public transport, their absence is also sonic. As their material conditions (Katz 2001) do not enable them to take part in and shape the urban sound/landscapes on their own terms, their political response may not be outwardly one of contestation. In the pub, their very presence operates a shift in the routines of regulars, as in their own, a “rupture in the given” (Isin and Nielsen 2008). The presence of “strangers” or “otherness”, as Mark expresses in the quote below, evokes the process of “cultural destabilisation” defined by Amin (2002) as a moment where people are “encouraged to step out of their routine environment, into other everyday spaces” (p. 969):

[...] they might have been a little bit like, “oh!” because it’s just out of their norm, this is their one little thing of a week that they do, it’s just like they know who goes and it’s all quite a part of a comfortable routine. So, there might have been some reactions someone perhaps acting a little awkward. I would say that that’s probably more to do with just anyone being in the space and time that they are used to, in their routine place. Obviously, *the element of otherness about it will have an effect as well*, but the kind of people who go [there] would not intellectually be put off [...].

—*Reflexive interview with Mark, 11.06.20, my emphasis*

If they are finally seen in that space as racialised people, people in the asylum system are also heard, through their voices, their bodies, their music and rhythmic taps. These are “imprinted with, and can intervene in, the circuits and flows of power in these public spaces. These dynamics of domination and cooperation [...] populate the space that ‘manifest sound’” (Kanngieser 2012, p. 10). As such, sonic transgressions occur on the backdrop of a normalised/normative model (e.g., sonic/material, social, spatial) that excludes the presence of racialised bodies and sounds in the urban space, and particularly that of the pub, and momentarily transform the space. The transgression of these norms must occur in an account of emergent resistance, but it is not pre-determined as explicit opposition, because the material and structural norms upon which the events occur are not always known or conscious, hence why emergence can only be identified *a posteriori*. In sum, we can identify three moments of socio-spatial transgressions in this vignette: the rupture between tutors/students and the white governmentality of the charity system, the disrupted routines of the regulars and migrants, and finally, the fact of occupying the pub as a racialised space.

### 7.5.2 Identifying Emergence

Through this reading of the event, I align with Hughes (2020) and Griffiths and Yeo’s (2021) call to consider resistance beyond intention and identify resistance on a spectrum/longer temporal trajectory. While I do not wish to undermine the value of ‘macropolitics’ and overt political activism, nor do I “romanticise molecular movements as inherently transgressive or liberatory actions” Merriam’s (2018, p. 8), I do see them as related. For if regrounding offers to move away from statist

perspectives of politics, it does so by re-valuing the material and relational as fields where political claims can be made. Instead, I would like to draw attention to *emergent resistance* as an organic, unpredictable, improvised process that involves multiple space-times, that can emerge in multiple directions and that is composed of relational, material, and infrastructural arrangements as the three moments of transgression described in this chapter express. Furthermore, I see mundane politics as an important site of ‘macropolitics’ expression, and thus an appropriate field for transgression, which in turn exposes the generative value of nuanced, ‘more generous’ understandings of resistance. In the quote below, the organic nature of resistance in emergence comes out as the result of barely noticeable relational and spatial transgressions, and encourages us to look beyond the lyrics of the song that was written:

[W]hat happened last night, was just really organic. We did some work with the Boomwhackers, we did some of the choir songs with the Boomwhackers and then said, *oh well* we will have a jam, and then there was this new kind of riff going on and I didn’t know what it was, and Mark was like singing and stuff, and then they, I think they had been discussing some words on peace and they had written some lyrics, and then there was this vamping kind of riff, and then I just thought oh well, and then Mark said that they were writing a new song, so I just wrote a little violin part and the violins joined in, and it was a song just like that.

—Ella, meeting recording 14.01.20, my emphasis

Ella’s vocal inflection reflected her surrender to a collective creative energy (“oh well”) and a slight destabilisation. However, this allowed her to improvise the writing of a violin part for the emerging song. The power geometry, in which she is normally visible as the leader, had to shift in tandem with the usual structure of the music session. Critically, destabilisation, surrender, disorder<sup>10</sup> represented opportunities for Segue’s reorganisation. This, however, was not known at the time. Talking about outcomes is an impossible exercise when emerging possibilities of becoming are unfolding. This reality of the expectation of predictability and order also runs counter to the prescriptive models of funding grants that pressures voluntary and community organisations into ‘making up’ outputs that cannot always be fulfilled for material and circumstantial reasons. Specifically, with the Trust’s grant that Segue was awarded, the group was expected to perform publicly twice over the course of the two years that the funding covered. These performances were to be attended by a Trust’s representative who would travel from London to ‘make sure’ we delivered what we promised. However, Covid-19 hit, and we were unable to hold the public performance. Importantly, this concert became a focal point and source of stress for the group, as it required a sizeable number of members to perform songs that many of them had only been studying for a few

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<sup>10</sup>As explored through the work of Attali (1985) in the chapter 5, there is a ‘reordering’ power that can come out of disorder, and with it a power to “transcend the old violence” of the governing structure (Attali 1985, p. 35) which is what I am alluding to here.

## Transgressions

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weeks or months, using instruments that many had touched for the first time as part of their participation in Segue. Additionally, if participants were free to refuse performing, they were not *asked* if this was something they would like to do at all as part of their involvement with Segue. These conditions were deplored by some of the tutors, despite it being set out on the grant application by one of them.

According to Hughes, the trajectory of resistance in emergence is what makes it an important object of study. It is for all those whose resistance does not or cannot be expressed outwardly and explicitly, as well as for all those acts we undertake when affect and emotion, rather than intentional or deliberate thought, drive our actions. As a result of their interconnectedness, these cumulative acts allow for a reshaping of the terms for im/mobilised bodies and their relationships with civil society. Although the policies are not necessarily changing as a result, these forms of seemingly non-political mobilities (e.g., leaving one's neighbourhood, entering a space from which one is excluded) do constitute resisting precarious conditions set up in the hostile environment (e.g., the dispersal scheme, asylum hotels). In the trajectory of Segue, this event has not only offered a rupture with the constraints of the dispersal scheme, but also opened possibilities for future music sessions to be more open-ended, thus challenging the white governance of weekly drop-ins. It opened a space for critical questioning of the ordering practices of the organisation, which is itself a political response that can lay foundations for resistance in-becoming.

Today, Segue is rethinking its charity status in light of the bureaucratic barriers that the formal status implies and is considering trading off financial 'security' in order to reclaim its ethical commitment to non-hierarchical forms of governance. In terms of the musical project itself, the coming months will see the birth of weekly 'open sessions', with no pre-assigned agenda, which will take place on a different day than the music lessons.

## 7.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has demonstrated how understanding transgressions as fertile ground for emergence of radical refashioning of power structures in the VCS. The bodies of migrants in the UK are im/mobilised, racialised, and particularly vulnerable to violent sanctions – and pain. This prevents many from participating in society, let alone engaging in outward forms of active resistance (even though many do so). This does not, however, imply that they are passively enduring the conditions imposed on them by a hostile asylum regime. Since resistance and power are mutually enabling (Hoy 2004; Hughes 2018, p. 4), there is always the possibility for another order with another set of principles to reconceive of what is known as 'integration' (see chapter 6). Given that charities find themselves constrained to adhere to a state-sanctioned model of racialised governance, precluding the expression of political stance, I argue that it is essential for geographers to

scrutinise these structures to find out how this manifests and what it gives way to. Within Segue, some of the leadership members agreed to engage in critical questioning of these taken-for-granted ways of doing things, its underpinnings, and their position within it as white Britons, which supports the Foucauldian argument for “resistance as always-already embedded within the exercise of power” (Hughes 2018, p. 4).

In this chapter, I argued that (un)intended transgressions of normative expectations (e.g., where racialised migrants are to be seen, how music is played, how to structure the activity, as well as the discourse on charity for that context) offer a point of focus that allows for to identify resistance in emergence but also signal that the VCS can facilitate regrounding (as relational, materially grounded), in lieu of fostering ‘integration’ that centres a relationship to the nation-state. I recount an event that I co-organised with Segue, a charity that struggles to evolve into the grassroots organisation that some people in the organisation aspire for it to be. A comparison of the qualities of Segue’s ordinary music sessions with those of an exceptional session held at a local pub demonstrates the importance of focusing on subtle, socio-spatial transgressive practices to openly address how racial difference underpins the experience of racialised bodies in much of the charity sector. Indeed, this event metaphorically enabled the group to let out some of the pain endured through the system and “fill the space with joy”, as Mark eloquently expressed in the excerpt at the start of the chapter. This is particularly productive for regrounding. Like with GSG in chapter 6, in this event, the object of attachment resided in the socio-materiality of the event, the music played, the Boomwhackers, the more horizontal mutual connections, and the fact of being present in a place where other people were enjoying a similar moment of socialising (i.e., regulars having a drink). People found comfort in being there, in a smaller space, but one that is not keeping them hidden away from the rest of society. They appeared more present and confident as the dynamics shifted and the strict boundary between students (migrants) and tutors (non-migrants) gave way to looser roles in a relationship that felt more even.

In the final chapter, I bring together the arguments made throughout the thesis in favour of an alternative to the commonplace idea of ‘belonging’: ‘regrounding’. I unpack the concept in light of the three empirical chapters and develop three main contributions of this thesis, accordingly. Reflecting on the object/subject relationship throughout this work, I have come to see observe three central dynamics in my work which shaped my understanding of migration in this particular context: 1) the relationship between the VCS and the state (practice/application); (2) between integration and asylum (conceptual); (3) and between participation and the researcher (methodological). As such, chapter 8 shares these findings, the limits of this research and suggests further avenues for future work.



## Chapter 8

# Le Mot de la Fin

It is this rattling I believe that affects the second point: our uneasiness with our own feelings of foreignness, our own rapidly fraying sense of belonging. To what do we pay greatest allegiance? Family, language group, culture, country, gender? Religion, race? And if none of these matter, are we urbane, cosmopolitan, or simply lonely? In other words, how do we decide where we belong? What convinces us that we do? Or put another way, what is the matter with foreignness?

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Morrison 2019, p. 8

In turbulent times, writing a thesis was not an easy task. Throughout the duration of my doctoral studies, wars in every region of the world, have prompted major movements. A global disease has rendered people im/mobile, and the Russian war has rekindled the possibility of a nuclear assault. All of these events have ongoing ramifications for the themes explored in this thesis that I was unable to foresee or meaningfully engage with due to the situation's rapid evolution. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that people's freedom to move all around the world is an intersectional matter, engulfed within global capitalism (Roy 2020). The UK's latest immigration policy change that became law on April 28th, 2022 the Nationality and Borders Act (also named 'Anti-Refugee Bill' in the VCS, see Refugee Council 2022) was described as the most significant 'overhaul' of the system of our times (GOV.UK 2022a). Under Conservative Home Secretary Priti Patel, the legacy of a long-standing scaffolding of an immigration system that not only restricts entry to racialised people, but also criminalises them is perpetuated and taken even further with the creation of two-tier system of asylum, with the processing of claims through an offshore site in Rwanda (GOV.UK 2022a).

While I chose not to speak to this more recent policy change, for the process of its passing was underway at the time of writing my thesis, it seems important here to take note of the continuing

patterns exposed throughout the thesis of *differential inclusion* (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) (e.g., through the creation of a discriminatory system based on people's modes of arrival into the UK); *white governmentality* (Hesse 1996) (e.g., by constructing some migrants as non-genuine, reminiscent of previous Government's distinction between 'bogus asylum seeker' and 'genuine' claims (Bloch and Schuster 2002, p. 398), along racial lines and thereafter justifying their excommunication); and *hierarchies of belonging* (Back et al. 2012) (e.g., with the introduction of a point-based immigration system for more 'privileged' migrants, see GOV.UK 2022c for details). What this shows is that law is a site of reproduction of racially ordered bodies that uses nationality, borders, and asylum as rationales for the abjection, rejection and conditional inclusion of some people (El-Enany 2020). These rationales are premised on the belief that some people – white, Britons – legally belong in Britain (El-Enany 2020), and others, differently positioned, do not belong, thus upholding the nativist idea of an ontological continuity between people, territory and law.

The more blatantly racist underpinnings of the UK's legal system were also recently exposed through the the Government's position to create a scheme for Ukrainians to resettle in the UK (see 'Homes for Ukraine' government programme) which was not implemented in any way for people fleeing ongoing wars in Syria or Afghanistan. El-Enany (2020) would agree that this is a case where law inscribes "a link between Britishness and whiteness" (p. 220). In addition, it also demonstrates that the Government's efforts to continually rely on individuals' charity and free labour, which is, once again, the sole means by which support is structured.

Regarding migration, the position of the UK Government on this issue emphasises the significance of seeing the law through the lens of race for two additional reasons: On public documents, those fleeing Ukraine are referred to as 'Ukrainians' and not as 'migrants', and their migration falls under the category of 'moving' and not 'migrating' (see GOV.UK 2022b). This substantiates the definition given of the 'migrant' by Scheel and Tazzioli's (2022), who conceptualised it specifically as people not only crossing borders, but also struggling against them. Secondly, unlike racially constructed migrants, Ukrainians who enter the country through the programme are permitted to work, study, and access the welfare system. This topic merits its own PhD dissertation. Nevertheless, these events and policy changes give relevance to the arguments made in this thesis as more generally applicable, beyond the context of the North East of England, such as the importance to consider migration and the VCS through the lens of race and "ongoing processes of colonial dispossession" (p. 221).

As exemplified by the Windrush, the 'protective' attitude of the UK toward some (generations) of migrants was always a part of this process. According to El-Enany's (2020), the temporary recognition they received in the form of citizenship perpetuated "the lie that the Windrush generation were welcomed in post-war Britain" (p. 222). This suggests that every time paternalistic protection is given e.g., in the form of citizenship or humanitarianism and charity for integrative purposes, the

## 8.1 Regrounding as a Dis-Integrative Practice of Belonging

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sovereign power of the nation-state and its subjects is reinforced, legitimised and expanded. The role of the VCS here is thus crucial as much as it is hardly separable from the discourse, assumptions and paradigm of the state. As such, the three main contributions that emerge from this thesis all speak of a specific relationship that shaped my understanding of the process of integration of migrants: the relationship between the VCS and the state; the relationship between integration and asylum; and the relationship between participation and the researcher.

Before unpacking these contributions, this chapter first returns to the original question that guided this PhD project: *to what extent can the VCS create spaces that foster 'dis-integrative' (Favell 2022) approaches to migrants' establishing in the UK?* This initial interrogation prompted subsequent questions which led to the three contributions all developed in section 8.2 that address theory, methodology and practice. In section 3, I discuss the research constraints that I encountered, notably with regard to Covid-19, as well as the adaptations I made as a result of the limits. Section 4 highlights prospective future work and the scholarship on which this study builds and aims to further contribute. Finally, I close this thesis with some broader personal reflection about the implications of a long-term, intimate engagement with an organisation that facilitated this dance of the PhD (Back 2002).

Through a sustained engagement with Segue for over twenty months, and with GSG for four months, I sought to understand how integration discourses in migration policy come to bleed into the VCS, and how to interpret its role in a nation-state that produces refugees (Bloch, Neal, et al. 2013) whilst positioning itself as humanitarian. This long-term commitment allowed me to contribute to academic debates about migration, citizenship studies, critical geographies of 'race,' and the burgeoning body of work on anticolonial geographies, as well as participatory geographies. My approach was explicitly inductive, participatory, feminist, and motivated by anti-colonial principles, which justified its open-endedness, non-prescriptive, and exploratory methodology. This meant that, rather than starting with a fixed, pre-determined set of questions to which I sought answers through data collection, I began my research with one exploratory question about integration and dis-integration in the context of migration and the VCS, as stated in the previous paragraph. In the next section, I unpack this question.

## 8.1 Regrounding as a Dis-Integrative Practice of Belonging

The idea of a dis-integrative approach to the notion of 'belonging' comes as a response to the dominant, racist way that the migration of racially constructed others is traditionally framed: under adaptive, assimilationist terms, where belonging is a political project (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2019) of ordering and homogenising, or, in other words, according to the Western nation-states'

“political modes of inclusion” (Favell 2022, p. 17). Dis-integrative practices, thus, are practices that tend to the dis-integration of the nation-state and what contributes to its reinscription (Favell 2021) (e.g., immigration controls, belief in a homogeneous national community, humanitarianism). Building on these arguments, my contention in this thesis was that the role played by the VCS for those that operate under the state-sanctioned model of the charity, inadvertently reinforce the legitimacy of the commonplace ideas on migration and integration and the nation-state, and possibly even becomes complicit in reproducing everyday borders (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, et al. 2018). My exploration of two charities in the North East of England, thus, allowed me to question the extent to which the wider sector from which they emanate could facilitate a different kind of belonging, that is not premised on assimilation and thus, would not work on humanitarian generosity, but on *actual* solidarity. Importantly, it would imply that there is a recognition that the wider political system traps the efforts of people who wish to extend support within bureaucratic, white governance structures with limited resources that perpetuates not only unequal access to opportunities (El-Enany 2020), but also prevents migrants accessing these structures from acting autonomously. Realising this, I suggest, would be a crucial first step in shifting these organisational structures and may go some way in facilitating the process of establishing somewhere new for migrants, rather than inadvertently work on their assimilation.

As such, I introduced the concept of ‘regrounding’ as a conceptual framework that underpins the thesis and stems from a critique of racist immigration policy and integrationist tendencies, that bleeds into the VCS’s discourses and practices. I formulated regrounding as a concept that challenges ideas of belonging as routed through the territoriality of a nation-state, and that does not preclude the co-existence of multiple *belongings*. In essence, it is a form of attachment that dis-integrate the nation-state, insofar as it is not premised on legal recognition, homogeneity or hierarchy. Instead, it is forged through the material worlds that compose the lived experiences of people crossing borders and resists the violent politics of “state recognition” (El-Enany 2020, p. 227). The dis-integrative power of regrounding also lies in its capacity to acknowledge the complex histories that led to the presence of a person or people to be where they are, and importantly, the implication of racially coded, colonial projects that induce migration. I have shown this in chapter 6 with the story of the tea ceremony in the shed, as part of my research with GSG where multiple historical connections to other times and places converged into this particular moment via the vital materiality of objects such as tea, sugar, and biscuits, but also, and importantly, through the spontaneous formation of a ritual on the women’s own terms. In a different setting, I have argued that while Segue exhibits more rigid structuring mechanisms that feature a strict power dynamic between music tutors and students, interfering with usual time and space components of the sessions works toward unsettling those power geometries. This was explained in chapter 7, which comes as a response to the argument in chapter 5 that identified the ways in which the charity stifles voices,

## 8.1 Regrounding as a Dis-Integrative Practice of Belonging

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which exposes how integration is commonly valued as the path of choice for people in the VCS in migration.

The question of whether the sector can foster dis-integrative approaches to migration, can only be answered relatively. While I have showed how the default mode of Segue was the integrationist discourse through chapter 5, I credit my methodological approach for bringing my observations to the charity, and to create a space for reflection with some of the tutors, such as Ella, Mark, and Calum. These one-on-one explorations enabled me to bring nuance to what I initially saw as a clear-cut lack of awareness from the part of the charity's staff. Alongside my continuous presence at meetings where I would attempt to stir conversations about points that were taken-for-granted (i.e., the source and redistribution of the charity's finances or the location of the sessions), this ongoing dialogue demonstrated that, at least for some of the people active in the coordination of Segue, there was a willingness to move toward a model of organising that does not perpetuate unequal power dynamics and racially biased structuring. However, alternatives were never explicitly defined as sitting in contradiction with integrationist discourses. What I noticed instead, is that through the conversation, Segue's staff would generally come up against a feeling of helplessness in relation to the question of *how to appropriately help migrants*, which only reinforced a sense of humanitarian duty.

In contrast, GSG did not employ such discourses. As explained in chapter 7 it did use a semantic laden with notions of the homeland to which one could/should return. The looser structure of this charity seemed to foster a different common sense about migration. There, it is rather explicit that the end-goal was autonomy, through the facilitation of skill-sharing and collective learning. What this posture enacted by coordinator Tonderai prompted, is the ability for the women to create their own ritual which became a central piece of the experience of gardening. They benefited from more freedom to do what they wanted, within the bounds of the allotment, thus demonstrating that facilitating the creation of a space does not mean that structures are totally absent. Instead, putting a space, tools, skills at the disposal of this group of women fostered their individual attachments to the place. As rewarding as that was for Tonderai, it gave way to spontaneous social interactions between all of us, and what felt like a sense of freedom to come as we were. As such, my response to the initial research question is that, while there is scope for the VCS to shift its approach in order to foster dis-integrative regrounding, it can only be so if there is an openness to better understand how interpersonal interactions mimic wider state's discourse (Ellul-Knight 2019), and if the terms upon which the VCS is building its capacity centres on (and this is by no means prescriptive) mutual trust, common interest, decolonised attachment, and feminist material solidarity (see chapter 6).

If these principles are necessary to sustain, it is because, if the VCS is to assist migrants in establishing a home in their new location, it must have a thorough understanding of the asylum policy background, which actively discourages people from coming and criminalises many of those who

do. My work showed that the VCS (Segue and GSG at least) currently operate by continually navigating a tension that opposes on the one hand the im/mobility in which people in the asylum system are placed (e.g., by providing opportunities to socialise, engage in activities that would be out of reach due to the cost, and explore parts of the city that they would not necessarily inhabit), and on the other, the policy context and overarching national narrative that always finds new ways to produce and enshrine the difference between racialised migrants, established migrants and white nationals. Throughout this project, I identified and questioned the nature of certain relationships that shape the ecosystem in which migrants come to be involved in the city. These connections have come to the surface, informed by my learnings, the insights of my participants, and a growing body of work in critical geography and migration studies that looks critically at the liberal ideal of open borders and multiculturalism (De Genova 2019; McNevin 2019; Mezzadra and Neilson 2012; Picozza 2021; Tazzioli 2021). This ecosystem's dynamics play important roles in the reproduction of integration narratives as I go on to unpack in the next section.

## 8.2 Contributions

Through this thesis, I explored three concomitant relationships: (1) the relationship between the VCS and the state (practice/application); (2) between integration and asylum (conceptual); (3) and between participation and the researcher (methodological). Each of these connections was driven by a question that informed the following contributions.

### **1. My research illustrates the importance of understanding the work of the VCS with migrants through the lens of a racist state's social and immigration policy**

Guided by the question *how is the VCS reproducing nation-state ideas of integration?* this contribution became particularly explicit once I looked into the long-term history of immigration and social policies (see chapter 2) and the way in which they have been wired through colonial conquest and expansion. While the VCS can be seen as fulfilling important voids in the provision of welfare services, it does so within a wider system with an intricate history defined by white supremacist values. As part of this belief system, that seeps through society via policies, laws, and discourses, addressing asylum through humanitarianism and charity (for people who manage to make it through the system) is a common posture (El-Enany 2020). In the UK, under the VCS, organisations form to provide help to migrants on terms that can vary greatly. As such, while it is not possible to generalise about and homogenise the sector, this contribution aims to speak to the wider relationship between the state and organisations acting in the area of migration in the particular context described in this thesis: the North East England.

As detailed in chapter 2, it is crucial to account for the unique history of the North East in relation to immigration when making such claims. As Bonnett (1990) explains, anti-racist ideologies developed differently and unevenly across the country as a result of uneven ethnic composition. While the capital city had a greater proportion of Black, Asian, and other minoritised ethnic groups, the North East has always been one of the whitest regions in the country. As such, Bonnett says, the impetus for organising and representation of racialised people came from the top down, in this case through local policy intervention (for more information see section 2.4). Therefore, the intention and framework of reference for anti-racist organising (which, I would argue, migrant charity work is a part of) is based less on people's active struggles with the asylum system, and more on the co-optation of these struggles in the form of humanitarianism and multiculturalist politics, which precludes radical work. Consequently, while I would hypothesise that state co-optation is a widespread phenomenon that has a broad impact on organising, additional research is required to determine the extent to which the sector can be identified as reproducing such nation-state bound notions of integration.

In the particular context brought to light in this thesis, I showed in chapter 5 how Segue, by seeking social and sonic harmony signals an impulse to keep their 'service' out of politics. They envision the space that they create as an escape for migrants in need of soothing, entertainment, and an opportunity to socialise. My contention is that none of these needs are devoid of politics. By looking at this through the modality of depoliticisation proposed by Darling (2014), I demonstrated how harmony can operate as a way of silencing and smoothing out differences. In light of an asylum system that operates outside of the welfare system, and always finds new ways of criminalising the most disadvantaged migrants, it is evident that by depoliticising asylum, the state aims to create moral distance (Gill 2016) between people who seek asylum and those sit on the side of administering services in that system.

While Segue's staff and volunteers distanced themselves from these politics, they did so under pressures imposed by the charity framework set out by the state. This framework precludes organisations operating under the auspices of the Charities Act (GOV.UK 2011) from engaging in political activities. Despite the fact that this piece of legislation extends to the entire United Kingdom, it is necessary to keep in mind that the geographical context of the North East makes this argument particularly pertinent. Indeed, as described in Chapter 2, this region is predominantly white, which explains why the majority of VCS organisations are coordinated by white individuals. As a result, pointing out how 'race' manifests itself in the sector, as this contribution addresses, will be context-dependent and cannot be extrapolated to include the entire sector.

In addition, this is not to say that the politics of 'race' were ignored by my participants. During my interviews with Segue's staff, politics were talked about at length. Their politics demonstrated that the discourse of the state on migration seeped through into society, through the medium of

language and the taken-for-grantedness of borders and the nation-state. In their practice as staff and trustees, the people I talked to, and worked alongside inadvertently reproduce some of these ideas in the way that they structure Segue. I showed in chapter 7 how white governmentality (Hesse 1996) infiltrates the charity sector through mechanisms that structure the service and hinder the participation of racialised migrants (i.e., long meetings in daytime, heavy bureaucracy and wordy discussions in English, inadequate consultation mechanisms, music performance that suits a white audience, and as showed in chapter 6, the reproduction of borders on a micro scale).

Because all of these practices, mechanisms and biases reflect a wider tendency, rather than being single instances of individual actions, I contend that it is crucial to scrutinise the VCS through the lens of race. In turn, to comprehend how a sector such as the VCS can become entangled with bordering processes, it must be analysed through the historical context of nation-states' formation (Sharma 2020). By emphasising the colonial history that haunts immigration law, El-Enany (2020) illustrated that even what can sometimes be portrayed as impartial, such as the legal system, is founded upon a belief system that is rooted in a long history of producing differentially positioned people, according to their race. As such, even though many VCS organisations do not necessarily pursue the explicit goal of *integrating* migrants, they can inadvertently become complicit in reproducing nation-states' assumptions about racial ordering, even (and especially) when the intention is to extend care. Ellul-Knight (2019) called these "the slippery power dynamics of caring encounters" (p. 11) and explains how "charged" with "state affect" they can be (p. 10-11).

Unearthing and placing the VCS's relationship to the state in the context of this history enabled me to better understand why Segue in particular, is operating according to a model that seem to alleviate some of the ills caused by the asylum system (Bagelman 2013), whilst maintaining its members in the position of passive recipients, grateful for the generosity of the charity's coordinators. The complexity of disentangling the history of differently constructed migrants (e.g., established ethnic minorities on the one hand, and people in the asylum system on the other) for which two different systems were implemented, led me to see how much the posture adopted toward racialised people since the 1940s has continually been one of moral panic (Hall et al. 1978), which produced them as a problem—either as one to do away with or as one to silence—.

For each category of migrants that is produced by the government, a different set of policies and discourses apply. While some will be portrayed as in need of help that the UK can provide, others will be constructed as criminals and a narrative of limited resources will be deployed. The response from the VCS in both cases shows that civil society wants to have a say. In fact, the Government itself encourages charity as a civic duty, but also historically relied on the VCS to support the administration of the NASS, which produces migrants as materially and socially distinct from the rest of society. The Government also encourages the formation of charitable organisations to ostensibly support interethnic and intercultural encounters. What this does is support the idea that discontent

among racially constructed migrant communities is only a matter of sociality, divorced from the structural barriers that many encounter in everyday life due to their racial assignation. While this historically applies to established ethnic minorities and not to asylum seekers, by looking at how Segue describes its mission under integrationist terms, I showed in this thesis that asylum and immigration policies overlap. In light of this framework, the role of the VCS must be viewed as tinged with the state's racist agenda to restrict all entrance or aid their assimilation to British values which ends up reinforcing the nation-state's project of a cohesive whole, rather than challenging this racist ordering between 'citizens' and 'others'. In turn, this entrenches a form of white governance that leaves the hierarchies of belonging (Back et al. 2012) unchallenged, and even suggests that the VCS by supporting the integration of some migrants (those who make it in and potentially through the asylum system) could inadvertently contribute to bordering.

### **2. The proposed concept of *regrounding* offers avenues to move away from asylum, integration, national belonging and citizenship**

I have demonstrated in this thesis that questioning the givenness of integrationist models of inclusion goes hand in hand with questioning that of the nation-state. In turn, the management tools deployed by the state to secure the nation and its elite is routed through a nativist or autochthonous understanding of citizenship and the idea of belonging (see chapter 3). In addition, because this perspective on belonging is racially coded, this means that no racialised person can ever truly belong to the UK, as they are assigned a race and a location that is outside of the nation's territorial boundaries, regardless of the official status they hold. Though an asylum system has been built to keep out those constructed as racially different, the rhetoric of inclusion for ethnic minorities already established in the country could be considered a paradox. As such, I have questioned the relationship between asylum and integration and found that they largely overlap in their capacity to produce and reproduce 'race' at all levels of sociality and charity. For instance, the framing deployed by Segue to explain its mission, draws on the repertoire of integration, despite being first and foremost targeted at people in the asylum system (who would normally be kept out of society). At GSG, it is the connection to one's 'homeland' that is valued and with which Tonderai hopes to create ties, with, in the horizon, the idea of *going back* there. Whilst this shows how even with the formal status of British citizen, racially constructed people are not made to feel like they are at home in the UK, it also exposed the rootedness of belonging in the national territory and attaches it to citizenship.

In an effort to expand on the literature on citizenship and belonging that envisions alternatives to membership-based models (Askins 2016; Hughes and Forman 2017; Isin 2021; Isin and Nielsen 2008; McNevin 2011; 2019) I sketched the contours of a model based on an attachment to the socio-materiality of one's environment, encapsulated in the concept of *regrounding*. In doing so, I wish to

build on previous work on belonging (Akinwumi 2016; Mee and Wright 2009; Muller et al. 2009; Schein 2009; Yuval-Davis 2006), which has established the importance of identifying with a place by focusing on fluid connections, social locations, individuals' emotional attachments, and ethico-political values. While this framework was critical to my thinking, the material and emotional dimensions of belonging are less visible in these conceptualisations. The salience of emotion, as demonstrated by Antonsich's (2010) framework of 'place-belongingness', is an exception to this. He identifies five factors correlated with a greater sense of belonging (i.e., "auto-biographical, relational, cultural, economic, and legal" (p. 647)). While all of these factors could be seen as dealing with material dimensions of the experience of migration (particularly the factor of culture, as expressed through food production and consumption practises (p. 648)), his framework appears to focus more on the feeling of being 'at home', and less on material implications. According to Antonsich (2010), temporalities matter in the construction of 'place-belongingness', and "in order to generate a sense of (group) belonging, these relations must in fact be long-lasting, positive, stable, and significant" (p. 647), as well as take place on a consistent basis, he adds. The idea that a sense of 'place-belongingness' develops over time points to belonging as an affective experience that unfolds in space and time. Raffaetà and Duff (2013) and Laketa (2018) address the material implications more explicitly by demonstrating the shapes and forms of such material practises, as well as the importance of incorporating this dimension of people's migration experiences into definitions of belonging. This is an observation that has stood out in my fieldwork, particularly in the context of GSG.

My proposal to work with 'regrounding' does not contradict these (or other previous) definitions of belonging, but rather attempts to bring them together while focusing on the socio-material implications of belonging for people experiencing the asylum system. My observations led me to wonder whether, as a working concept, 'regrounding' provides a constructive alternative to integrationist approaches, on which much work on belonging is founded (as Antonsich 2010, p. 649 argues, "[T]he absence of this sense of place-belongingness is not exclusion, as scholars usually tend to say (Trudeau 2006, 423)"). By conceptualising 'regrounding' as a fluid, continuous process of connection-making, home-making without having to detach from earlier place-attachments, my intention is to deterritorialise and re-materialise the notion of belonging (though understanding which practices and forms qualify as material requires further investigation), and ultimately, centre the apparent paradox between '(migrant) belonging' (to use Fortier's (2000) expression) that are at once "made of movement... and rootedness" (Antonsich 2010, p. 652). This came as a response to the way in which the VCS –and Segue in particular– envisions its role as one that fosters integration 'into British society', on terms that are defined in (and disseminated through) political discourse. It was expressed explicitly in chapter 1 by Calum who questioned Segue's success in enabling migrants to adapt to British society. My contention is that for a truly anti-racist society to

emerge, inclusive/exclusive models of belonging premised on the nation-state, territory and race cannot persist.

Building on Raffaetà and Duff (2013), I propose that materially and socially mediated links to one's environment are the focus of regrounding, where one's sense of belonging is produced relationally, through the socio-material configurations in which individuals find themselves, and that this sense is not ontologically connected to a project as large as that of a nation-state. Regrounding also builds on 'acts of citizenship' (Isin 2009), whereby a rupture in the givenness of the nation-state's order constitutes a site for claims to citizenship to be made. I have showed in chapter 7 the importance of 'transgressions' to cultural norms and expectations of where should migrants be seen and heard, to ground claims to being present. However, 'regrounding' distances itself from citizenship as a concept, insofar as it envisages a 'dis-integrative' (Favell 2022) approach to nation-states' framings of belonging, which means that it is not rooted in the necessity for a system of hegemonic recognition and sovereignty. Instead, it builds on El-Enany (2020) who argues for a "counter-pedagogy to that of law... which resists...state recognition" (p. 227), and contends that racially constructed people, just like white people, are "collectively entitled" (p. 227) to being where they choose to be, not only as the result of colonial dispossession, but as a recognition of a "planetary commons" (Sharma 2022) that must be taken away from "capitalist and colonists" (Sharma 2020, p. 281). Regrounding offers avenues to keep engaging with these debates on alternatives to nation-state framings of belonging, citizenship, and integration, asylum and borders.

### **3. Approaching the VCS through a long-term praxis in research can help geographers feel into power geometries and challenge them**

The question that prompted this contribution: *What is the benefit of participatory/engaged forms of ethnography to study the VCS?*

This methodological contribution addresses the relationship between participation and the researcher and aims to highlight the significance of conducting geographical research that not only describes the processes involved in migrants establishing themselves in the UK, but also challenges what we view as counterproductive to the pursuit of social and racial justice. While I believe that a long-term engagement is required to develop mutual trust, I argue that when the aspiration is to go beyond merely describing, it is essential to include critical dialogue (Freire 2017) in academic engagements with VCS organisations. As such, the methodological contribution of this thesis is to demonstrate the value of participation in the institutional contexts at the heart of the inquiry. I deployed and built upon Billo and Mountz (2016)' institutional ethnography in the VCS and found that it was particularly generative for comprehending the complex processes that connect the state to the VCS, but also for reworking them with nuance. This approach, I argue, is even more productive for critical geographers committed to social justice and activism, insofar

as the geographical concern for spatial and scalar context is attended to through this method. For the purposes of this project, I blended an anthropological methodology (ethnography) grounded in institutions with a participatory ethos and a concern for guiding principles such as doing no harm, minimising extractive research, acknowledging power geometries, reciprocity and acting in response to social realities (Brown and Knopp 2008; Kindon et al. 2007; Wijnendaele 2014). I believe that the embeddedness provided by longitudinal ethnographies that centre on some form of co-production and reciprocity can help scholarship in geography and beyond.

In addition, for scholars interested in studying “Othered worlds” (Nagar and Shirazi 2019, p. 241), I showed the importance to question the impulse to objectify those who are othered in dominant discourses, academic and beyond. Therefore, I demonstrated the value of turning the lens onto the structures that position themselves as ‘hosts’ of racialised migrants (see chapter 4). By combining this epistemological stance with a relational ontology, I proposed that more attention is given to more-than-representational empiricism (Barron 2021; Knudsen and Stage 2016; Saldanha 2007) in order to draw out the unfolding experiences of participants and researchers. As an example, ‘feeling into’ the power geometries between Segue and the state, or within the organisation itself, by attending to dynamics between what is visible/audible and what is not: interactions between people in real life or via WhatsApp channels, how the distinctions between migrants/non-migrants are actualised through hierarchies enacted materially (see the example of the bar in chapter 6), the heavy silences at the meeting table. Importantly, participating myself in running the charity constituted an immense resource to navigate the complexity of the charity landscape. By being on an equal footing with other volunteers, I felt more inclined to share my thoughts and observations which in turn made me earn the trust of most of my colleagues among whom some gladly accepted to participate in my research project. As such, I find combining participation with IE particularly valuable. In addition, deploying reflexive interviews as a tool to create a space for collective reflection thus bridged some of the less visible elements I observed with the discourse and interpretation of the people I interviewed. My contribution is thus for geographers to take these tools forward into other contexts where the goal is to move beyond describing and understanding worlds.

### 8.3 Limits of the Research

To premise this section, I must state that the research upon which my thesis is based did not commence until eight months into my first year as a doctoral student. As my study idea arose, I encountered significant divergence with my initial supervisor. I began my ethnography under the supervision of Dr John Clayton and Dr Jon Swords after a considerable delay and reorientation of the subject of this research. Following a few months, Dr Sarah Hughes joined the team. These disruptions have had a serious influence on my capacity to do this study with confidence, but with the assistance of a supportive team, I feel I was able to transform my initial PhD project, despite a

difficult beginning. Nevertheless, as 2019 progressed, I realised my time to collect data was limited. On the back of these disruptions, the Covid-19 pandemic most likely impacted my work the most. Importantly, though, it is the people that regularly attended Segue and GSG who were hit the hardest (Finlay et al. 2021). The enforcement of social distancing and closure of non-essential services means that my research sites have been inaccessible for several months during my period of data collection. Segue during this time focused on providing critical services to support migrants' feeling isolated as a result of ceasing all activities. There was an increased need for presence and support through shifting to online provision. At the time, I had planned for my field work to engage more actively with people in the asylum system in the Spring-Summer of 2020. However, given the difficulties that many experienced during that period, I found myself unable to hold interviews in the way that I would have done under normal circumstances. Hence, the presence of people with lived experience of the system are only minimally explicit in this thesis, despite the fact that I have spent a great deal of time with many people who have shared these experiences with me. These, I believe, do not have to be centred in this work in order to be accounted for, for my hope is that they inhere in the ethos of this work. As such, I re-adapted my field work to further scrutinise the VCS, whilst respecting that Covid-19 was a period particularly difficult for Segue. This shift in focus fed into an initial sense of discomfort with situating the object/subject of the research in people with lived experience of the asylum system. The period of the first lockdown represented therefore an opportunity to grapple with this question, informed by literature on this topic (Cabot 2016; Chowdhury et al. 2016; Coddington 2017).

As for GSG, all activities had stopped, and I have not heard from Tonderai despite my requests. As for AC, I decided to move away from it myself, partly because I was taking on significant amount of work as part of my volunteering at Segue, and was attending weekly gardening sessions with GSG, but also because the project started very slowly, and had to be put on hold during Covid-19. Consequently, I worked with my supervisors to think of reducing the empirical scope of my project (amount of data collected), altered my choice of methodology (re-purposing of past collected data, collect secondary data), and reframed my theoretical contribution (focus on the structures of asylum systems rather than lived experiences of the system) which constituted a significant task. Despite the inaccessibility of my charitable partner's locations and availability, where possible, I rescheduled interviews and a participatory activity online (focus group) but this had mixed results due to low attendance and engagement. I tried to design an alternative 'interview' through WhatsApp by exchanging voice messages for the few participants who had data and internet access, but this was not a successful approach for a qualitative project of this nature. Given the extensive disruption in data gathering, the theoretical consequences of this lack of access to the organisations with which I was involved in this endeavour are substantial for the anticipated contributions and discussion. Consequently, the limited number of interviews I conducted reflects the reality of data collection during a time when my encounters with individuals were unevenly affected. While I have taken

steps to ensure a balanced depiction of the voices of people represented in this work, analysing and writing as a single author necessarily results in a subjective viewpoint. As a result, I expect that the future research I conduct on these topics will involve a more extensive joint effort, as I explain in the next section.

## 8.4 Future Work

In this thesis, I drew inspiration from a wide range of disciplines within and outside of geography. In keeping with my philosophy, if all the work presented in this thesis has consequences for geographical study, I also wish to emphasise the importance of contributing this type of in-depth analysis beyond academia. As such, the two main directions I propose for future study reflect my personal interest in disseminating academically earned knowledge to the people that enabled me to undertake this research, as well as finding concrete ways of challenging the taken-for-grantedness of ‘systems of suffering’, as Darling’s (2022) latest book is titled.

### 1. Working with VCS organisations to shift modes of organising from charity to solidarity

My experience as a Segue volunteer enabled me to see the intricate dynamics at play within the organisation that prevent it from becoming the ‘grassroots’ organisation that some wish it to be. Individuals’ ideals frequently clash with their fear of losing their jobs or their influence. Due to their financial restrictions, both Segue and GSG are unable to afford the time to ‘think outside the box’. As a result, they are unable to conceive of a scenario in which they would be able to operate without the influx of cash or to question the assumed nature of their operating model. However, when the opportunity to reflect presents itself, they accepted to participate. Important as it is to provide the environment for critical conversation, I have advocated for longer-term praxis-based research to support organisational transition in chapter 4, but also for developing the work of Billo and Mountz’s (2016) on IE which, I believe, would serve academics as well as organisations. Therefore, a potential direction for study in this context would be for academic researchers to accompany organisations through the transformation of their operational model. The work would be participatory, meaning that all project participants from the organisation would also be active researchers.

I envision this kind of work as a collaborative platform to think through existing structures, models of governance, and ethos that drive the group. This is a period of important learning for the researcher(s) who are outsiders to the organisation, but also for those in the organisation who may not take the time to reflect. The academic researcher(s) then facilitates a space for setting out questions that the organisation would like to answer as part of the process of transitioning, here,

bringing in theories of social change and transformation that can provide examples of other ways of organising, and show how groups have structured migrants' solidarity in other contexts. This is also the stage when the wider national context is approached to understand the wider system at play. Throughout the process, the group works on establishing new modes of structuring and operating, and likely moves away from old patterns and hegemonies. I envision this kind of approach as particularly productive for exploring different forms of solidarity, building on diverse economies (Gibson-Graham 2008), solidarity economies (Hart et al. 2010; Rakopoulos 2014), and postcapitalist politics (Gibson-Graham 2006).

### 2. Unsettling citizenship as bounded with the nation-state

This avenue is more of a theoretical nature. I am interested in understanding the fundamental thinking that drives people's general acceptance of the regime of citizenship, without questioning its connection to the notion of the nation-state. This brings the work of Berlant (2011) in *Cruel Optimism*, as the tension between the (cruel) promise of citizenship that can never be fulfilled. For the development of the concept of regrounding, a deeper engagement with this work would be particularly promising. It also draws on work on abolition geographies (Gilmore 2022) and the autonomy of migration (De Genova and Roy 2020) that I would like to keep building on. I am also interested in exploring people's embodiment of, and connections to citizenship outside of the UK and interrogate citizenship as the object of their attachment. Are people's emotional ties to a place drawn by the nation-state, or by something else, as I argue for using the concept of regrounding? The concept of citizenship has always been a source of much debate. However, I believe that more can be done that grapples with the givenness of nations and borders and the material linkages between citizenship and place, as the work of (Hughes and Forman 2017) explored. More generally, I hope to continue expanding upon the work of scholars in urban politics of citizenship who are shaking up these notions (Bagelman 2013; 2016; Darling 2010; 2013; Favell 2021; 2022; Isin and Nielsen 2008; McNevin 2011; 2019; Roy 2019; Squire 2011; Squire and Darling 2013; Tazzioli 2021).

## 8.5 Une Dernière Danse

Leaving Segue happened almost imperceptibly. I started by receiving less and less phone calls from the other volunteers, trustees, and less and less emails and invitations to join meetings. Perhaps at the image of much of what I discussed, things ended silently. Certainly, the Covid-19 pandemic precipitated the end of my sustained engagement with the charity, but I have always apprehended the moment of departing. Being part of the organisation for over two years means that I have seen it evolve in ways that I could not do total justice to in this brief account. In that sense, the process of capturing a picture at a given point in time and fixating it into words can be frightening. Things are

## Le Mot de la Fin

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continually changing, and so is Segue. The analogy of the PhD as at times a dance, and at others a wrestling match speaks to me a lot (Back 2002). In particular, I have experienced moments of deep reverence for the work of everyone involved with Segue, and believed genuinely in the ability of the project to transform lives – and I still think it does. Dancing with Segue meant that I felt part of something meaningful, which is an aspect of the living experience that often get sidetracked during a PhD project. Over time, though, and inconsistently, being part of Segue felt more like wrestling indeed. I credit for that the multiple interactions and discussions I attended or took part in, that enabled me to unravel the perpetuating stories that structure the dynamics between white ‘hosts’ and non-white ‘guests’ in the sector. The difficulty now, is to bring this all back to the groups that made space for my learning and held my hand while I outgrew some of the beliefs that I myself held dear around the meeting table. All this wrestling and dancing was not in vain, of course, and it has not only served the purpose of this thesis, but also my personal *regroundings*. Journeying through the histories that framed my own partial perception of difference, keeps revealing how little I know. Reckoning with my own limits is maybe something for the start of a new field diary, and a new dance.

## **Appendix A**

# **Charity Legislation**

## A.1 Charities Act 2011

ELIZABETH II c. 25



**Charities Act 2011**

**2011 CHAPTER 25**

An Act to consolidate the Charities Act 1993 and other enactments which relate to charities. [14th December 2011]

**B**E IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

**PART 1**

MEANING OF "CHARITY" AND "CHARITABLE PURPOSE"

**CHAPTER 1**

GENERAL

*Charity*

**1 Meaning of "charity"**

(1) For the purposes of the law of England and Wales, "charity" means an institution which—

- (a) is established for charitable purposes only, and
- (b) falls to be subject to the control of the High Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction with respect to charities.

(2) The definition of "charity" in subsection (1) does not apply for the purposes of an enactment if a different definition of that term applies for those purposes by virtue of that or any other enactment.

2

*Charities Act 2011 (c. 25)*  
*Part 1 – Meaning of “charity” and “charitable purpose”*  
*Chapter 1 – General*

*Charitable purpose*

**2 Meaning of “charitable purpose”**

- (1) For the purposes of the law of England and Wales, a charitable purpose is a purpose which—
  - (a) falls within section 3(1), and
  - (b) is for the public benefit (see section 4).
- (2) Any reference in any enactment or document (in whatever terms)—
  - (a) to charitable purposes, or
  - (b) to institutions having purposes that are charitable under the law relating to charities in England and Wales, is to be read in accordance with subsection (1).
- (3) Subsection (2) does not apply where the context otherwise requires.
- (4) This section is subject to section 11 (which makes special provision for Chapter 2 of this Part onwards).

**3 Descriptions of purposes**

- (1) A purpose falls within this subsection if it falls within any of the following descriptions of purposes—
  - (a) the prevention or relief of poverty;
  - (b) the advancement of education;
  - (c) the advancement of religion;
  - (d) the advancement of health or the saving of lives;
  - (e) the advancement of citizenship or community development;
  - (f) the advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or science;
  - (g) the advancement of amateur sport;
  - (h) the advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity;
  - (i) the advancement of environmental protection or improvement;
  - (j) the relief of those in need because of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage;
  - (k) the advancement of animal welfare;
  - (l) the promotion of the efficiency of the armed forces of the Crown or of the efficiency of the police, fire and rescue services or ambulance services;
  - (m) any other purposes—
    - (i) that are not within paragraphs (a) to (l) but are recognised as charitable purposes by virtue of section 5 (recreational and similar trusts, etc.) or under the old law,
    - (ii) that may reasonably be regarded as analogous to, or within the spirit of, any purposes falling within any of paragraphs (a) to (l) or sub-paragraph (i), or
    - (iii) that may reasonably be regarded as analogous to, or within the spirit of, any purposes which have been recognised, under the law relating to charities in England and Wales, as falling within sub-paragraph (ii) or this sub-paragraph.

- (2) In subsection (1)–
- (a) in paragraph (c), “religion” includes–
    - (i) a religion which involves belief in more than one god, and
    - (ii) a religion which does not involve belief in a god,
  - (b) in paragraph (d), “the advancement of health” includes the prevention or relief of sickness, disease or human suffering,
  - (c) paragraph (e) includes –
    - (i) rural or urban regeneration, and
    - (ii) the promotion of civic responsibility, volunteering, the voluntary sector or the effectiveness or efficiency of charities,
  - (d) in paragraph (g), “sport” means sports or games which promote health by involving physical or mental skill or exertion,
  - (e) paragraph (j) includes relief given by the provision of accommodation or care to the persons mentioned in that paragraph, and
  - (f) in paragraph (l), “fire and rescue services” means services provided by fire and rescue authorities under Part 2 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.
- (3) Where any of the terms used in any of paragraphs (a) to (l) of subsection (1), or in subsection (2), has a particular meaning under the law relating to charities in England and Wales, the term is to be taken as having the same meaning where it appears in that provision.
- (4) In subsection (1)(m)(i), “the old law” means the law relating to charities in England and Wales as in force immediately before 1 April 2008.

#### **4 The public benefit requirement**

- (1) In this Act “the public benefit requirement” means the requirement in section 2(1)(b) that a purpose falling within section 3(1) must be for the public benefit if it is to be a charitable purpose.
- (2) In determining whether the public benefit requirement is satisfied in relation to any purpose falling within section 3(1), it is not to be presumed that a purpose of a particular description is for the public benefit.
- (3) In this Chapter any reference to the public benefit is a reference to the public benefit as that term is understood for the purposes of the law relating to charities in England and Wales.
- (4) Subsection (3) is subject to subsection (2).

#### *Recreational trusts and registered sports clubs*

#### **5 Recreational and similar trusts, etc.**

- (1) It is charitable (and is to be treated as always having been charitable) to provide, or assist in the provision of, facilities for –
  - (a) recreation, or
  - (b) other leisure-time occupation,if the facilities are provided in the interests of social welfare.
- (2) The requirement that the facilities are provided in the interests of social welfare cannot be satisfied if the basic conditions are not met.

## A.2 Step-by-step Guide for Setting up a Charity

Print Set up a charity: Set up a charity - GOV.UK https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/print

 **GOV.UK**

Part of  
[Set up a charity: step by step \(/set-up-a-charity\)](/set-up-a-charity)

# Set up a charity

### 1. Set up a charity

There are 6 steps to setting up a charity.

1. Find trustees (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/finding-new-trustees-cc30>) for your charity - you usually need at least 3.
2. Make sure the charity has 'charitable purposes for the public benefit' (<https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/charitable-purposes>).
3. Choose a name for your charity (<https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/name-your-charity>).
4. Choose a structure for your charity (<https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/structures>).
5. Create a 'governing document' (<https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/governing-document>).
6. Register as a charity (<https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/register-your-charity>) if your annual income is over £5,000 or if you set up a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO).

There are different rules in [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

#### Tax relief

To get tax relief (<https://www.gov.uk/charities-and-tax>) your charity needs to be recognised by HM Revenue and Customs ([HMRC](#)).

### 2. Charitable purposes

Your charity must have 'charitable purposes' that help the public (known as being 'for public benefit').

Charitable purposes include things that contribute to:

- relieving poverty
- education

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- religion
- health
- saving lives
- citizenship or community development
- the arts
- amateur sport
- human rights
- religious or racial harmony
- the protection of the environment
- animal welfare
- the efficiency of the armed forces, police, fire or ambulance services

Read guidance on [writing your charitable purposes](https://www.gov.uk/how-to-write-charitable-purposes) (<https://www.gov.uk/how-to-write-charitable-purposes>).

You should also [read about public benefit](https://www.gov.uk/public-benefit-rules-for-charities) (<https://www.gov.uk/public-benefit-rules-for-charities>) to decide if your charity's aims are suitable.

**You can't set up a charity to help one specific person.**

### 3. Name your charity

Your charity name must not:

- be similar to the name of an existing charity (unless you can prove you need to use it)
- use words you don't have permission to use, for example a trade mark
- use offensive words or acronyms
- be misleading, for example suggest your charity does something it doesn't

[Search the charities register](https://www.gov.uk/find-charity-information) (<https://www.gov.uk/find-charity-information>) to check the names of registered charities. Unregistered charities won't appear in the register.

#### Additional names

You can use:

- abbreviations, for example National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is known as NSPCC
- alternative names, for example Comic Relief is a working name for Charity Projects

Print Set up a charity: Set up a charity - GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/print>

You must list any alternative or working names your charity uses when you apply to register.

**Non-English names**

You must include a translation of any non-English words in your charity's name when you register.

**Using 'charity' in a name**

You can use the words 'charity', 'charities' or 'charitable' in your charity's name but you need approval from the Charity Commission if you use them when you register a company name with Companies House.

**4. Structures**

You must [choose a structure for your charity \(https://www.gov.uk/charity-types-how-to-choose-a-structure\)](https://www.gov.uk/charity-types-how-to-choose-a-structure), which will affect things like:

- who runs the charity
- how the charity is run
- what the charity can do, for example employ people or own property

There are 4 common charity structures.

**Charitable company**

Your charitable companies will have to be limited by guarantees rather than shares when you register. Select 'private company limited by guarantee' on the form.

Trustees have limited or no liability for a charitable company's debts or liabilities.

**Apply online**

You can [apply online to register a charitable company with Companies House \(https://www.gov.uk/limited-company-formation/register-your-company\)](https://www.gov.uk/limited-company-formation/register-your-company).

**Apply by post**

Fill in the form to [register a charitable company with Companies House by post](#).

It costs £40.

You may also need:

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- [continuation sheets](#) if you need extra space to write
- [a Welsh version](#) of the form

### Charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)

A CIO is an incorporated structure designed for charities. You create a CIO by [registering with the Charity Commission](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/register-your-charity>). You don't need to register with Companies House.

Trustees have limited or no liability for CIO debts or liabilities.

### Charitable trust

A 'charitable trust' is a way for a group of people ('trustees') to manage assets such as money, investments, land or buildings.

### Unincorporated charitable association

An 'unincorporated charitable association' is a simple way for a group of volunteers to run a charity for a common purpose.

Unincorporated charitable associations can't employ staff or own premises.

## 5. Governing document

You must create a 'governing document' (or 'rulebook') for your charity that explains how your charity is run.

Your governing document lets trustees and other interested parties find out:

- your charity's purpose
- who runs it and how they run it
- how trustees will be appointed
- rules about trustees' expenses
- rules about payments to trustees
- how to close the charity

What type of governing document you need depends on [your charity structure](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/charity-types-how-to-choose-a-structure>).

Read guidance on [writing your governing document](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/how-to-write-your-charitys-governing->

Print Set up a charity: Set up a charity - GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/print>

[document](#)), including example templates.

You can create your governing document using your own templates but it may mean registration takes longer.

The trustees must meet to sign the governing document. You'll need an independent witness if you're setting up a charitable trust.

### 6. Register your charity

You must [apply to register your charity](#) if:

- its income is at least £5,000 per year or it's a charitable incorporated organisation (CIC)
- it's based in England or Wales

The rules are different:

- [if your charity is based in Scotland](#)
- [if your charity is based Northern Ireland](#)

#### Supporting documents

When you apply you'll be asked:

- about your charity's [charitable purposes](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/charitable-purposes>)
- how you [run your charity for public benefit](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/public-benefit-rules-for-charities>)
- for proof that your charity's annual income is above £5,000, unless you're a CIC

You'll also need to give your charity's:

- name
- bank or building society details
- most recent accounts
- contact details, including a postal address
- trustees' names, dates of birth and contact details
- a copy of your charity's [governing document](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity/governing-document>) (in PDF format)

#### Proof of income

Proof of income, if needed, can be any one of:

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- your charity's latest 'published' annual accounts (in PDF format) - they must have been approved as proof of income by an independent examiner or auditor
  - a recent bank statement (as a scanned image)
  - a formal offer of funding from a recognised funding body (as a scanned image)
- 
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## **Appendix B**

# **Interview Guides**

### Interview questions: Music tutors, volunteers and trustees at Segue

Guideline questions for reflexive interviews with tutors, volunteers and trustees at Segue. Interviews are reflexive – which means that reflecting on and with the questions asked is the goal. As such, the interviews are considered semi-structured, and adapted for each interviewee to include their own questions.

Procedure is:

1. Invitation to a pre-interview (send via text or email) + suggestion of date
2. Pre-interview: explanation of the research project, literature informing the project (some key papers were sent), questions of the researcher, purpose of the research and approach taken, explanation of consent form, questions from the interviewee, ask interviewees to bring 3-5 questions they have/would like to reflect on during the discussions
3. 48-72h later, interview: beginning with the 3-5 questions prepared by interviewees.

As you know I am conducting research as part of my PhD on migration and citizenship, sound and resistance, and I wanted to ask you about your work with Segue. Some of this we might have covered already, but it is important for me to have it in an interview format for my research.

If it is okay, I would like to start with some broad questions about your role in the organisation:

1. Position/status
  - a. What do you see your role as, as part of Segue?
  - b. Since when do you occupy this/these position(s)?
  - c. How did you come to work/volunteer at Segue and what was your motivation in doing so?
2. Organisation Structure
  - a. Could you explain the structure of Segue? i.e. what kind of structure is it, who is leading, what are the modes of governance and decision making, etc.
  - b. From the best of your knowledge, has the structure evolve over the years?
  - c. What do you think about the way that Segue is currently ran?
  - d. What is your opinion on the variation of attendance that Segue is experiencing? (when does attendance go up/down, possible factors, etc.)
    - i. **In your opinion, what has the covid-19 situation revealed about the work that Segue is doing?**
  - e. **What are, in your opinion, the goals that Segue is pursuing as an organisation and how successful is it?**
  - f. **How do you see Segue operating in contrast with other work/organisations in the region? What sets Segue apart?**
  - g. To what extent do members have a say in the direction of Segue?
  - h. What are your thoughts about Segue' financial situation?
    - i. Are you aware of how funding works?
    - ii. Do you think third sector organisations working with migrant communities should be supported by the State?
  - i. How do you see the future of Segue and its sustainability?
3. Music

- a. **Is your tuition different with Segue members to that with other music students? Do you enjoy it?**
- b. **What did you think of the session organised at the Cumberland Arms? How do you think us being there was perceived? (reclaiming space? Being present where we do not expect us?)**
- c. **What would the British citizenship sound like to you?**
- d. **Is sound dangerous/threatening?**
- e. Could you talk about how important you think music is for asylum seekers and immigrants more broadly
  - i. *If solidarity and care are brought up: How is Segue fostering a culture of solidarity and care through music?*
- f. **Do you think it matters what genre/style of music is sang/played/written/shared?**
  - i. **Specific for choir: I noticed we tend to sing in different languages, why do you think that is?**
  - ii. Specific for drumming: what do you think is making the drumming group so popular?
  - iii. Specific for guitar:
  - iv. Specific for violin: As a violin tutor, what are your priorities for people taking part in your tuition?

4. Politics

- a. Do you see Segue as political in any way?
- b. How important is it for Segue to be up-to-date with asylum and immigration policies? Whose role is it?
- c. How important is it for Segue' staff to align with political views that welcome and support migrants?
- d. Do you consider Segue as a form of activism? Resistance? Expand.
- e. What barriers do you see for Segue work? Where do they come from? (state/local/private?)

5. Status, Migration, Citizenship

- a. Do you see a connection between music and migration? Expand.
  - i. Between music and citizenship?
- b. Is citizenship important to you? Why?
  - i. Is there any other conceptions of 'belonging' that you think are more important than that to the State?
- c. In your opinion, why are asylum seekers coming to Segue?
- d. **How do you feel Segue has an impact/plays a role in developing/facilitating forms of belonging for those with precarious status? What difference can Segue make?**
- e. In your opinion, are those who come to Segue making use of it in different ways to the intended aims of the organisation?
- f. **Do you think that taking part in Segue should benefit asylum seekers' cases? (making a claim through music) Expand.**
- g. Are Segue members' sometimes coming to you to talk about their claim or any other issues related to their case? Expand.
  - i. Do you think it is ok or not?

6. Research

- a. What do you see my role as, as part of Segue?
- b. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

## Interview Guides

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Questions brought by interviewees:

Do you feel like Crossings equips its members with tools for adapting to British society?

Do you feel Crossings gives its members social capital to live and thrive in the UK?

Do you feel like there are issues preventing Crossings from being successful in achieving well-being for its members?

Do you feel like Crossings looks after its members' well-being effectively?

Do locally born people experience crossings differently to migrants, and how should crossings be mindful of this?

Why are there few people with migrant backgrounds running crossings?

What do people get out of crossings? How can we work with this?

Thank you for your time.

# Acronyms

AC	Art Collective
AGM	Annual General Meeting
BNA	British Nationality Act
CCRT	Community Cohesion Review Team
CIO	Charitable Incorporated Organisation
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
FMPT	Fempowerment
FOI	Freedom of Information
GSG	Green Space Garden
IE	Institutional Ethnography
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
PAR	Participatory Action Research
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector



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