

**Migrant Surveillance and State Power:  
Electronic Tagging of Asylum-Seekers in the UK**

**by Devika Ranjan**



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# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction: Electronic Tagging and the 'Hostile Environment' .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Electronic Tagging .....	6
Contributions .....	9
Methodology.....	10
Text Notes .....	11
<b>Chapter 1: Contextualizing 'Crimmigration' .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Borders and Colonialism .....	14
<i>Immobilization and Racialization.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies.....</i>	<i>16</i>
Asylum-Seekers .....	17
<i>Bogus Refugees .....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Dangerous Migrants.....</i>	<i>20</i>
Border Imperialism.....	20
<b>Chapter 2: Histories .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Barbara .....	23
<i>Escape .....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Imprisoned.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Life with the Tag.....</i>	<i>25</i>
Thierno.....	27
<i>'Indefinite' Leave to Remain.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>'Not Complying'.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Curfew Orders.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Legal Challenge.....</i>	<i>30</i>
Michael, David, and Shu.....	31
<b>Chapter 3: The 'Crimmigration' Apparatus.....</b>	<b>33</b>
The Home Office .....	34
<i>Kafkaesque Bureaucracy .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Asylum Interviews.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Deliberate Negligence.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Discipline and Surveillance.....</i>	<i>38</i>
Contractors .....	39
<i>G4S and (In)security.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Asylum Housing.....</i>	<i>41</i>
Accountability .....	42
Policies of Dehumanization.....	45
<b>Chapter 4: The Struggle of the 'Bad Immigrant'.....</b>	<b>47</b>
Criminalization within the Community.....	48

<i>Isolation</i> .....	49
<i>The Good Immigrant</i> .....	50
<i>Monitored Motherhood</i> .....	52
<i>'Aggression' and Compliance</i> .....	53
Resistance.....	55
<b>Conclusion: Home</b> .....	<b>57</b>
Summary.....	58
Possibility for Future Research.....	59
End Note.....	60
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>61</b>

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tamaso mā jyotir gamaya

from darkness, lead me to light

## **Abstract**

While the electronic tagging of asylum-seekers is often considered a humane alternative to detention, it is actually a tactic of Theresa May's 'hostile environment' that deeply constricts an individual's physical, psychological, and social freedom. This study focuses on the experiences of asylum-seekers who have been electronically tagged— their struggles and their methods of resistance.

The electronic tag administers a mandatory curfew on asylum-seekers, administered by a 'cimmigration apparatus' that is made up of the Home Office and its (in)security contractors. The apparatus neglects asylum-seekers and their cases through bureaucratic loopholes, lack of accountability, enforced paranoia, and dehumanization. Within the community, asylum-seekers are unable to work, volunteer, or participate in civil society because of the tag. Yet despite the psychological trauma and physical restrictions, electronically tagged asylum-seekers fight against this socio-political oppression through everyday and extraordinary acts.

As the Home Office continues to expand the detention estate and issue new contracts to corporations, asylum-seekers are increasingly endangered by the propensity of further surveillance, privatized abuse, and restricted civil liberties.

## **Introduction:**

# **Electronic Tagging in the 'Hostile Environment'**

In 2003, Former Home Secretary Alan Blunkett introduced electronic tagging to monitor asylum-seekers. As Blunkett said, capturing the Home Office's attitude about asylum-seekers, "we can do it in relation to cars. We can certainly do it in relation to people" (Morris, 2003).

Despite the fact that over 65 million individuals are forcibly displaced from their homes (UNHCR, 2018), and despite the fact that the UK claims to be a humanitarian state, ready to "[help] the most vulnerable people in the world's most dangerous places" (Theresa May, 2015, cited in Canning, 2017, p.49), the Home Office continues to push poor, Black, and disenfranchised migrants out of the country. In 2002, Theresa May publicized her intent to create a "hostile environment against illegal migrants" (Krikup and Winnett, 2012). Through indefinite detention, forced deportations, and electronic tagging, the Home Office has constructed this 'hostile environment' to make life as difficult as possible for 'undesirable migrants.'

I came to this project because I was interested in the intersections between bodies, technology, and migration, but also because I was horrified by the blatant dehumanization of asylum-seekers by the Home Office. I decided to investigate the ways in which the hostile environment's power is enacted on asylum-seekers in England; specifically, I focus on the experiences of individuals who are electronically tagged and who experience this social control on a daily basis. I aim to contextualize the experiences of asylum-seekers as part of a systematic criminalization of 'undesirable migrants', creating a critical analysis of the 'crimmigration' apparatus. Within this dissertation, I will:

1. contextualize the criminalization of migration within Britain's imperial history, focusing on immigration restrictions that intend to preserve the Whiteness of the nation,

2. demonstrate how the Home Office and its (in)security contractors neglect asylum-seekers through bureaucracy, lack of accountability, and dehumanization,
3. explain the ways in which electronic tagging is not a humane alternative to detention for asylum-seekers since it serves as a device to exclude and isolate, rather than integrate them within society,
4. and tell the stories of those who have been electronically tagged, with a focus on their physical, emotional, and psychological experiences while restricted by the government.

## Electronic Tagging

Electronic tagging is a form of bodily surveillance that comes directly from the prison industry; the same equipment is used to monitor ex-convicts and sex offenders (Paszkievicz, 2011, p.43). Introduced in the United Kingdom in 1994 as a means of enforcing curfew orders for people who were incarcerated, tagging was lauded as a community-based alternative to detention (Mair and Rumgay, 2014). When it is used in the criminal justice system, electronic tagging is preceded by an extensive risk assessment of a person's surroundings, behaviors, and criminal history.

An asylum-seeker can be electronically tagged after their release from immigration detention. When they apply for bail, they 'opt-in' to electronic tagging by checking a box, as pictured below in Figure One (*How to get out of detention*, 2018). Unlike the Ministry of Justice,

Section 3		Personal Information	
<b>A</b>	Recognition	I agree to be bound to a recognizance of £ 1.00	
<b>B</b>	Deposit – applies to bail applications in Scotland only	If bail is granted, I will pay a deposit of £	
<b>C</b>	Electronic monitoring – If bail is granted and electronic monitoring is considered an appropriate condition of bail, you will remain in detention until such times as the Home Office have arranged for you to be electronically monitored, but not exceeding 2 working days after the date on which bail is granted. If appropriate, do you consent to the above?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>D</b>	Applicant's signature and date	<i>John Smith</i>	01/01/16
<b>E</b>	Name of the Applicant. Please use CAPITAL LETTERS.	John Smith	
Section 4		About your sureties (if any)	
<b>A</b>	Surname or family name. Please use CAPITAL LETTERS.	Surety 1	Surety 2
<b>B</b>	Other names	Osborne	George

Just put £1 in this box. It isn't very important

By ticking 'yes' and signing this part you consent to electronic tagging, if the judge should decide this.

Figure 1: The bail form, as described by *Bail for Immigration Detainees'* handbook for bail. Note Section 3C: opt-in for electronic tagging.

the Home Office does not conduct a risk assessment; judges may order indefinite electronic tagging as part of a bail condition without justification.

Asylum-seekers who are electronically tagged must adhere to a curfew which is enforced by a radio-frequency ankle bracelet. During the curfew period—usually 8-12 hours at night—they must remain within range of the Home Monitoring Unit, a machine that is installed in their house. If the monitored person ‘breaches,’ or steps outside of the house during curfew period, the radio-frequency tag signals the Home Monitoring Unit and alerts the security contractor (Nellis, 2018). The security contractor can then call the tagged person through the Home Monitoring Unit’s phone, report the breach to the Home Office, and trigger an arrest or deportation.

Unlike a British citizen, there is no time limit specifying how long an immigrant can be tagged. A non-citizen can be tagged indefinitely, in the same way that they can be detained indefinitely. The Home Office claims that these extreme surveillance measures reduce the risk of ‘absconding,’ or an asylum-seeker’s evasion of the Home Office (Goodchild and Bloomfield, 2003).

But the risk of absconding is almost non-existent. In a study conducted by Bruegel and Natamba in partnership with Bail for Immigration Detainees, “some 3.6 percent of all outstanding asylum applicants could be identified as absconders from Home Office published statistics for 1998” (Bruegel and Natamba, 2002, p.2). In fact, Bacon cites a report from Dustan (1994) stating that “a rare acknowledgement of the low rate of absconding among asylum seekers was made by the Home Office Minister in 1995, who informed Parliament that of the 37,120 persons who were refused asylum in the three-year period 1992-94, only 220 were known to have absconded, the equivalent of 0.59 per cent” (2005, p.5). Despite these statistics, asylum-seekers have been electronically tagged since 2003.

Since the electronic tag does not really prevent absconding, its use is often described as ‘mission creep’: it invades the private life of the individual and normalizes a technology of social



control. Klein and Williams write that “tagging is applied by monitoring agencies because they can, and former detainees are a vulnerable group with no voice to protest” (Klein & Williams, 2012, p. 758-849). While I disagree that former detainees have “no voice to protest”—which I contest further in Chapter Four—asylum-seekers often are ignored by mainstream media and the tag is generally unreported. Through this dissertation, I explore the ‘mission creep’: electronic tagging provides revenue for the Home Office and its contractors, it socially isolates asylum-seekers from the British public, and it objectifies ‘undesirable migrants’ in the gaze of the Home Office.

It is important to note that electronic tagging and other forms of asylum surveillance do not actually reduce bed spaces within immigration detention; on the contrary, the number of people in immigration detention is growing and the Home Office continually expands its powers to further detain and deport individuals. There are already 10 immigration detention centers in the UK with 3,500 people held at any given time (Bosworth, 2014); and within the 2002 Bruegel and Natamba study, it was found that over 90% of people who were released from immigration detention kept their bail conditions, suggesting that 9 out of 10 people were unnecessarily incarcerated (cited in Gill, 2009, p.190).

The Home Office refuses to release the number of asylum-seekers who are electronically tagged. In a response to my Freedom of Information request, the Immigration Enforcement Secretariat wrote that “the cost of meeting [my] request would exceed the cost limit of £600” because “the information is not held in a reportable field on our case management system. In order to answer your question we would have to search each record case by case...” (Home Office, 2018a). However, the Home Office is charged by private contractors for every person who is electronically monitored; therefore, there should be a straightforward record or invoice of how many asylum-seekers are tagged. Within Chapter 3, I argue that the bureaucracy is intentionally obtuse to conceal its own behavior, deny knowledge to asylum-seekers, and keep them in a state of powerlessness. But according to my interviewees, the practice of tagging

asylum-seekers seems widespread; they all knew people who had been tagged after release from immigration detention.

## Contributions

The voices of those who are tagged are not heard or properly acknowledged by the public, academia, or policy makers. The Home Office rarely publicizes tagging policies and there is no means for asylum-seekers to complain directly to the government. Asylum-seekers' stories are suppressed by general media; because people who are tagged are perceived as 'foreign national offenders' rather than 'victim refugees,' their histories are often marginalized in the mainstream press.

The effects of electronic tagging on asylum-seekers have not previously been studied. Most previous literature focuses on the electronic tagging of British citizens who are released from prison, or the experiences of asylum-seekers who are in immigration detention, or the policy implications of tagging in general. Through the stories of five individuals, I hope to demonstrate how electronic tagging is an unjust and extreme form of social control that extends far beyond restrictions on privacy. While tagging is often lauded as a 'humane' alternative to detention, I argue that the device and its social, physical, and psychological implications are deeply restrictive for asylum-seekers.

My work will emphasize the role of the body—especially the migrant body—within a technological and political sphere. While there are a number of articles that discuss surveillance of migrants, especially in the context of airports, most do not focus on the actual experience of technological surveillance. And as Wilcox writes, discussions of international relations, including war and violence, tend to focus on the power of machinery and disregard the body—even though the body is the object of the violence (2015).

The Home Office tags the body as an object, without concern for the mental and psychological traumas that the technology imposes on asylum-seekers. In response, my

research centers the physical, social, and psychological experiences and resistances of asylum-seekers who are electronically tagged.

## Methodology

I sought to center experiences of asylum-seekers through direct testimony, but it was difficult to find people who were willing to share such sensitive stories. NGOs or refugee aid organizations were usually hesitant to give me information or contacts, for fear of violating confidentiality and further endangering vulnerable people. In other instances, people did not want to talk because they had open asylum claims or because they were worried that the Home Office would confiscate their status—concerns which, as I learned, were not unfounded.

Five people shared their stories with me for this research project; they all are, or have been, electronically tagged. They come from the Middle East, West Africa, and the Caribbean, and currently live within the northeast of England. The four men and one woman who spoke to me about their experiences were more than generous with their time—they risked their asylum statuses, anonymity, and the emotional pain that comes with retelling painful stories.

I was aware that interview-style research could recreate the violence of Home Office interviews; asylum-seekers often have to repeat their traumatizing histories over and over again, often in front of those who do not believe them. My interviews could be a further imposition on their privacy, especially for those who are already monitored by the state.

To mitigate a re-traumatizing interview, I conducted oral histories. Instead of a set of questions, I asked the participant how they came to be in the UK and invited them to speak from there. I hoped to create an environment in which the interviewee could offer the information that they felt was relevant to tell their story. This way, the individuals I spoke to provided their own narratives without my imposition or assumptions. They spoke not only about the tag and the ways in which it affects their lives but also about other technologies of control put in place by the Home Office. After I wrote my analysis, I returned to my interviewees to discuss their

thoughts on what I had written and to ensure that I had portrayed them—and their experiences—appropriately.

I also spoke to a number of human rights activists, solicitors, and journalists for this piece who had investigated pieces of electronic tagging—from the asylum housing situations to the abuses of G4S and other security corporations. Their work has been vital to my understanding of electronic tagging, and they are cited throughout this dissertation.

## Text Notes

The rhetoric surrounding migration is steeped in weighted language—for instance, ‘expatriate’ and ‘migrant’ both describe a person who has moved from their country of origin, but imply different socio-economic positions and ‘value’ within neoliberal British society. Throughout this dissertation, I will use quotation marks around words and phrases to alert the reader to the socially-constructed nature of migration discourses. Expressions such as ‘removal’ and ‘distribution’ and ‘undesirable migrants’ are labels created to stigmatize; I do not necessarily agree with the sentiments evoked by this language, but I find that they are necessary in order to understand the socio-political environment in which decisions like electronic tagging are made.

The following is a list of frequent terms relating to migration that may be useful to the reader:

- A **migrant** is someone who has moved from one location to another for any reason.
- A **refugee** is a person who has received official ‘status’ from the UN or from their country of asylum. Traditionally, a refugee must be someone who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...” (*Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1951). The UK is internationally required to protect only those who fall under the Convention’s

definition. Notably, it does not account for people fleeing generalized violence, gang activity, gender-based violence, and climate change.

- An **asylum-seeker** is someone who has applied for refugee status and is awaiting decision, or has been rejected and has appealed their rejection. Between September 2016 and September 2017, 26,617 people applied for asylum; the top five countries of origin of asylum-seekers were Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Bangladesh, and Sudan (Home Office, 2017a).

While Theresa May directs her ‘hostile environment’ at “illegal migrants,” I note that migration is not inherently illegal; rather, laws and policies have made parts of migration illegal. Within my dissertation, I will concentrate on the experiences of asylum-seekers who are tagged—although they are not the only people subject to the ‘hostile environment’ or detention and deportation practices. Asylum-seekers are often the target of the ‘hostile environment’ because they entered the country on false pretenses, or use forged documents to arrive, or extended their stay—but within this justification, every traveler might be considered ‘illegal’ as we always have the potential to overstay our visas.

While everyone I spoke to was once an asylum-seeker, their status in the UK remains fluid. Some received their indefinite leave to remain and then were stripped of those rights; some have never had ‘permanent status’ yet have been here for the majority of their lives. Although it seems disingenuous to call them all ‘migrants,’ especially since they ‘migrated’ years ago, they are still categorized as such in the eyes of the government, the media, and the public. They are tagged because of their non-citizen status; but more so, they are tagged because of their poverty, racial identity, and disenfranchisement. Therefore, I will use the word ‘asylum-seeker’ to describe my interviewees, as it provides an important rhetorical and societal context as to why they were tagged.

## Chapter 1: Contextualizing 'Crimmigration'

Migration is traditionally known as the flow of bodies from one bounded area to another—but increasingly, migration has become a concept at the intersection of politics, crime, bodies, and technology. As more people move and states increase their restrictions upon this movement, migrants are at risk of violating ever-expanding immigration law.

While migration itself is not illegal, certain parts of migration have *become* illegal through a series of laws, bills, and policies implemented by the Home Office, designed to criminalize and restrict migrants. This process, termed 'crimmigration' (Stumpf, 2006), means that minor crimes are now grounds for deportation, immigration enforcement is handled by security forces, and individuals who come in as immigrants are more and more seen as criminals.

While 'crimmigration' is generally considered a recent phenomenon, it is important to understand that the criminalization of non-white immigrants, and especially the criminalization of asylum-seekers, has occurred throughout British history. In this chapter, I:

1. examine the imposition of borders upon colonial subjects to consider the ways in which brown and black people were immobilized for administrative ease, as well as 'racialized' as a technology of social control,
2. discuss the selective and 'racialized' past of asylum-seekers in the UK, from the Aliens Act of 1905 as the basis of excluding 'undesirable migrants,' 'bogus asylum-seekers,' and 'dangerous migrants',
3. argue that the deterrence campaign against asylum-seekers is meant to scapegoat migrants for economic and social problems, disenfranchising those who are already vulnerable,
4. and note how the systematic discrimination against poor, Black migrants is part of a long history of criminalization of migration and Britain's imperial past.

At core, the policies described within this chapter intended to ‘keep Britain British’—a sentiment now associated with Brexit, but actually has driven immigration policy since colonial times. As Bosworth writes, “the ‘island’ character of Britain remains sacrosanct, binding its residents together, while providing a natural barrier to those who would penetrate it” (Bosworth, 2014, p.51). By criminalizing asylum-seekers, the State assigns and enforces the identity of an ‘alien Other’ onto ‘undesirable’ migrants. This serves the dual purpose of encouraging them to leave ‘voluntarily’ as well as reinforcing a morally ‘superior’, White, British identity.

## Borders and Colonialism

In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia triggered the creation of modern political states divided by formal boundaries. The ensuing Westphalian political system, characterized by modern state sovereignty over its territory and people, enabled nationalist ideologies and the state’s legal monopoly over legitimate violence. Within this system, the border aims to contain national subjects and separate the constructed “self” from the “Other”— protecting insiders from (real or imagined) outsider threats (Newman, 2003, p.14). Additionally, the border binds citizens to the violences, judicial codes, and values of the nation.

These borders were imposed on individuals through the exclusionary technology of citizenship—allowing the state to determine which people embody its ‘values’ and which fall outside the requisite bounds. In that way, citizenship was used to (b)order subjects, keeping certain people in and shutting others out at the same time. Van Houtum and Naerssen understand this phenomenon as (b)ordering, which fixates on the processes of creating, enforcing, and maintaining borders rather than the existence of a border as a static object (2002). The concept of (b)ordering indicates that different types of borders are constantly present in everyday life: not only the militarization of state borders, but also divisions along class, ‘racial,’ gendered, cultural, religious, and moral boundaries.

## *Immobilization and Racialization*

Westphalian sovereignty, and with it nationalism and citizenship, spread through European colonialism. The British colonial forces imposed borders on nomadic, pastoral, or otherwise non-boundaried societies. In India, for example, the immobilization of nomadic peoples was one of the ways in which the colonizers established control over the native population. British rulers “pressed Indian society into greater physical immobility... by settling (and this is a telling word) the land revenue on farming groups in return for rights in land, and goading once nomadic rural groups into a settled lifestyle” (Brown, 2006, p.11). Individuals who did not comply were criminalized under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. As Scott writes, “the state has always seemed to be the enemy of people who move around” (Scott, 1998, p.1)—but more notably, the Empire decided that black and brown bodies do not deserve the liberty to move on their own land. Through the gaze of the Empire, it was easier to immobilize and criminalize individuals than allow their freedom of movement—a concept that continues throughout British immigration policy.

Another technology of colonization was ‘racism,’ a tool to separate and categorize native people (Stoler, 1995, cited in Anderson, 2013; Mbembe, 2001). Foucault notes that ‘racism’ is a crucial mechanism to justify biopolitics, in which the sovereign—in this case, the colonial power—had the right over life and death of all subjects, therefore (b)ordering their lives (Foucault, 2003). The (b)ordering of colonial subjects was formalized in an empirical imposition of identification cards, tangible reinforcements of hierarchies enforced by the British rulers—also known as Divide and Rule policies. Again, colonized people had to adhere to the categories that were validated by pieces of paper indicating ‘status’—and those who constructed those identities held the power over their lives.

While the Empire constructed an outside ‘Blackness,’ it contrasted it with an inward, national ‘Whiteness’ within Britain (Anderson, 2013). British ‘Whiteness’ was not only a racial category but also a value-laden label of cultural, social, and moral superiority. The homogenous



Whiteness was intended to unite British citizens despite socioeconomic status, as well as encouraged Old Commonwealth settler colonies such as Canada and Australia to identify with the 'mother country.' Simultaneously, the rationale of White superiority was a justification for British colonialism in the New Commonwealth countries like India and Nigeria.

Though members of both New and Old Commonwealth territories were all, legally, subjects of the British Empire, de facto and de jure restrictions limited the movement of people of color from the New Commonwealth. For instance, in Natal, the Immigration Restriction Act of 1897 was created in order to block Indian migrants from entry. The Act stipulated that potential immigrants must hold property and money in order to apply for entry; they also needed to be fluent in a European language that was arbitrarily chosen by the Immigration Officer (Anderson, 2013). Similar racist practices were encouraged throughout the Empire and within the UK in order to justify the rejection of migrants of color.

### ***Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies***

After the fall of the Empire, Britain passed the British Nationality Act of 1948 to maintain colonial access to cheap labor. The Act created yet another semi-citizenship: Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies (CUKC). Through this (b)ordered category, former colonial subjects were generally able to move between the Commonwealth territories and the United Kingdom "although there were explorations of the ways in which 'coloured people' could be prevented from migrating" (Dummett and Nicol, 1990, cited in Anderson, 2013, p.39).

During the 1960s, as flocks of South Asians fled oppressive policies in Uganda and Kenya, the British public became alarmed by the increased non-white population and the threats against British jobs, which were now more limited than they had been during the end of the Empire. The UK passed the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which stated that "those who held the right passport needed also to have been born, or to have a parent or grandparent who had been born, in the United Kingdom" in order to permanently reside in the country (Anderson, 2013, p.40). Also known as 'patriality,' the Act ensured entry rights to white

Australians, Canadians, and New Zealanders—but not Commonwealth citizens of color. Similar acts in 1971 and 1981 systematically stripped Commonwealth citizens of their right to remain in the UK and then their citizenship altogether (Anderson, 2013).

Although this thesis is concerned with asylum-seekers specifically, it is important to understand the history of colonial migration. When migrants of color were needed to build the country at minimal wage or fight in colonial armies, they were invited in. But as soon as British citizens required jobs, the immigrants became disposable. The discrimination against migrants of color from colonial times onwards provides the foundation of immigration law, especially as the process of claiming British citizenship is “designed to fail specific groups and populations” (Tyler, 2010, p.62). Citizenships are given and taken based on a person’s worth to the state. And an asylum-seeker—especially one who is poor, black, and does not appeal to the neoliberal values of Britain—is at the bottom of that list.

## Asylum-Seekers

While the UK claims to have a culture of accepting refugees, beginning with the French Huguenots in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, not all asylum-seekers were so readily welcomed. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, thousands of Russian and Eastern European Jews arrived in Britain fleeing famine, pogroms, and exile. Fueled by the anti-Semitic outrage of the British public, the government passed the Aliens Act of 1905 which gave Immigration Officers the power to deny ‘undesirable migrants’ (Silverman, 2012, p.1137). These could include criminals, the mentally ill, sex workers, and those who could not demonstrate sufficient monetary stability (*Aliens Act*, 1905). By deeming certain individuals ‘undesirable’, the state cemented its ability to deny admission to those who did not fit the desired criteria of wealthy Whiteness. Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to the phrase ‘undesirable migrants’ to illustrate the legacy of the Aliens Act in modern times.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the government continued to screen migrants, housing them in reception centers or internment camps (Bosworth, 2014, p.22). But as war crimes,

discrimination, and identity-based persecution rose during the First and Second World Wars— alongside a liberal international regime to formalize and persecute war crimes— Britain found it more difficult to ignore asylum-seekers. After extreme international pressure and public reactions to the Holocaust, the UK became a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees in 1951.

The number of asylum-seekers rose throughout the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the total number of asylum applications in 1979 was 1,563, by 1988 it increased to 3,998; the figures rose sharply in the following years, to 11,640 in 1989 and 44,840 in 1991 (Silverman, 2017). Because of the growing number of asylum-seekers and their progressive criminalization, it became unsustainable to hold immigration ‘offenders’ in prisons. Two ‘immigration removal facilities’ were opened in the early 1970s but quickly filled to capacity (Bosworth, 2014); officials created impromptu holding facilities on ferries like the MV Earl William, which dislodged and blew 40 asylum-seekers across a harbor (Bosworth, 2014, p.27).

### ***Bogus Refugees***

While brown and black asylum-seekers were overcrowding prisons and holding facilities, the British public celebrated European refugees during the Cold War. The British considered Soviet refugees politically moral, as they fled Communism and chose freedom over oppression (Anderson, 2013, p.55). Within the public imagination, the white, freedom-loving, European refugee was a sharp contrast against the poor, exiled, black migrant, known as a ‘bogus’ asylum-seeker. The media and the government popularized the concept of a ‘bogus’ asylum-seeker throughout the 90s, rousing public suspicion of non-white migrants who exploited the welfare and safety of the UK (Smith, 2013).

When the Labour Party came to power in 1997, the new government instituted a series of incriminating immigration restrictions to demonstrate its opposition to ‘bogus’ asylum-seekers. The 1998 White Paper, entitled *Fairer, Faster, and Firmer: A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum*, introduced the Detained Fast-Track system, or DFT (Secretary of

State for the Home Department, 1998). DFT automatically detained all asylum-seekers from 'White List' countries, or nations that the Home Office considered to be 'safe'. The White List includes over 60 countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria (Bacon, 2005, p.26). The Home Office considered 'White List' asylum-seeker claims to be 'clearly unfounded' and 'fast-tracked' their refusal.

Like the criminalization of nomadic peoples in colonial India, DFT was a shortcut on behalf of the Home Office, which had recently been criticized for not being in control of asylum processing. Asylum-seekers were detained simply for administrative convenience and denied the right to a 'full and fair' consideration of their claim. "Lawyers for the asylum seekers [were] expected to take instructions, prepare statements, translate documents, make bail applications, arrange expert witnesses and make representations... all within a strict timetable of seven working days" (Travis, 2015). Although the fast-track asylum process was ruled unlawful in three separate instances, it was only blocked in 2015—yet in 2017, Justice Secretary Liz Truss again proposed a detained fast-track asylum system that is being considered by the Tribunal Procedure Committee (Detention Action, 2017).

As the European Union celebrated a 'borderless world' through the establishment of the Schengen Area, restrictions on migration, especially for immigrants from the Global South, increased rapidly. "Migrants on the borders of Fortress Europe know from everyday experience that any attempt to characterize Europe as an open space with no barriers to flows and no frontiers is a fiction that conceals the intense violence at its borders" (Raj, 2006, p.514). Yet current immigration policy is not an example of 'Fortress Europe,' which evokes an image of high stone walls around the continent. Certain travelers are welcomed—those who can 'provide' economically or benefit the state's neoliberal agenda as highly-skilled workers, entrepreneurs, or "those with exceptional talent" (Home Office, 2018b). Geddes and Taylor consider current European immigration policy to be more akin to a fishing net, which lets certain, well-documented and moneyed fish pass while ensnaring the more vulnerable (2016).

## ***Dangerous Migrants***

9/11, 7/7, and the War on Terror marked a new era of immigration restrictions justified by rising xenophobia and mistrust of the Muslim 'Other.' At the same time, increasing numbers of asylum-seekers applied for residence in the UK, with over 84,000 applications in 2002 (Canning, 2017, p.16). During this time, immigration rhetoric shifted from doubting the 'bogus' refugee to fearing the 'dangerous' migrant; and as a result, 2002 also saw 50,362 people denied entry at the British border (Canning 2016, p.16). Though Britain has always practiced a harsh immigration regime, the 'War on Terror' and surrounding events justified an increase in 'security' measures and surveillance mechanisms under the state of exception (Agamben, 2005).

The 2002 White Paper entitled *Secure Borders, Safe Haven* responded to the 'threat' of the terrorist migrant by demanding that anyone claiming asylum must remain in "close contact" with the Home Office throughout the asylum process (Bruegel and Natamba, 2002, p.1). Reminiscent of the (b)ordering policies within the British colonies, the Home Office attempted to catalogue and surveil all asylum-seekers through systems of mandatory reporting, surveilled asylum housing, and electronic tagging. In this way, the distrust of migrants morphed into a surveillance structure that was supported by national law.

## **Border Imperialism**

The construction of a public enemy during a time of 'insecurity', as Hall writes, served two political purposes: the scapegoating of vulnerable people for "unresolved economic and political crises, and an articulation of a dystopic future, to be fought against at all costs" (Hall, 2015). The Labour government launched a blatant 'deterrence' campaign, aiming to subjugate current asylum-seekers and dissuade others from entry.

A series of laws inflated minor crimes or illegalized normal activities, so that a non-citizen would be punished harshly—often with detention and deportation. For example, in 2002, asylum-seekers were stripped of the right to work; those who continued to work risked

incarceration. “When the 2004 Act also removed welfare support from families of failed asylum seekers, the government was accused of trying to “starve out” asylum seekers and to bolster the deterrence function of detention” (Mulvey, 2010, p.442, cited in Silverman, 2012, p.1139). Parliament continued to pass laws that reduced and cancelled welfare services, encouraged ‘dispersal’ to impoverished areas of the country, abolished language classes, and decreased benefits to £35.13 per week for a single person. In this way, the state punished those who are most disenfranchised through a ‘policy of destitution’ (De Chickera, 2010, p.175).

A dehumanizing media campaign encouraged this criminalization, and especially through journalistic rhetoric of ‘surges,’ ‘swamps,’ ‘swarms,’ or ‘floods’ of asylum-seekers who were ‘at large’ or ‘locked up’ (Parker, 2015; Jones *et al.*, 2017, p.89). The ‘British Jobs for British Workers’ movement also villainized migrants as job-stealers, even though asylum-seekers could not legally work. These sentiments were widespread. A poll conducted by *The Times* in February 2003 suggested that the public perceived asylum-seekers as “the most serious problem in Britain at present” (Kushner, 2003, p.261, cited in Smith, 2013).

While it seems that the public was driving these sentiments, Statham’s research indicates that “British governments dominate and shape public discourse on asylum. This supports the view that the nature of the asylum debate-- at present restrictive and stigmatising- - to a large extent comes politically from the top down, rather than in response to mobilised public pressure” (2003, p.174). But as this chapter has revealed, public emotion is powerful driver of public policy. The “affective economies,” as described by Ahmed, aligns politics with emotion; she describes how immigration policy worldwide was shaped by a fear of physical and cultural insecurity especially after 9/11 (2004).

The Leave Campaign, similarly, was a command—both to those who have come and to those who are unwelcome. The language of Brexit was based on a fundamentally racist desire for homogeneity, harkening back to a Westphalian isolation. In their analysis of Brexit, Virdee and McGeever state that the Leave campaign emphasized “a deep nostalgia for empire, but one

secured through an occlusion of the underside of the British imperial project: the corrosive legacies of colonialism and racism, past and present... [and] a more insular, Powellite narrative of retreating from a globalizing world that is no longer recognizably 'British'" (Virdee and McGeever, 2017, p.2).

Walia terms this phenomenon 'border imperialism,' which is "characterized by the entrenchment and reentrenchment of controls against migrants, who are displaced as a result of the violences of capitalism and empire, and subsequently forced into precarious labor as a result of state illegalization and systemic social hierarchies" (2014, p.38). Border imperialism has now moved inwards. Through crimmigration policies like electronic tagging, 'undesirable migrants' who were not apprehended at the border are constantly being (b)ordered within White, British society.

Even though Britain claims to be a progressive safe-haven for individuals fleeing persecution, as well as a modern democratic state that touts 'freedom of movement,' Theresa May's "deport first, appeal later" attitude openly harms migrants who do not directly benefit the economic welfare of the UK (Travis, 2015). The next chapters will describe the ways in which the 'hostile environment' exists in the lives of those who are electronically tagged—immobilized as punishment for daring to move.

## Chapter 2: Histories

While there has been substantial discussion about the effects of indefinite detention on migrants, there has been comparatively little about asylum-seekers who are electronically tagged. I first came across tagging in *openDemocracy's* 'Shine A Light', an online news platform that focuses on human rights abuses in the UK. Activist and researcher John Greyson wrote an article in July 2015 about Barbara, a woman who had been electronically tagged after claiming asylum (Greyson, 2015). After asking her permission, John put me in contact with Barbara. She was eager to share her story with me since she has recently opened a new asylum claim to fight her case.

The people who agreed to speak to me were extremely generous with their time and energy; they had all either been electronically tagged recently or still wore an ankle bracelet. Though I will focus on the histories of Barbara and Thierno, whose stories encapsulate two very different experiences of electronic tagging, I will supplement my discussion with the thoughts of Michael, David, and Shu. In order to respect them and their privacy, I have changed all names and omitted all locations.

### **Barbara**

Barbara opened the door with her 3-month-old baby Noah in her arms. I cooed. "You've come to ask me questions and now you just want to play with the baby!" She laughed at me. Barbara's house is one of many 'mother-and-baby' houses in the 'asylum housing industry'; this one is managed by G4S, a government contractor that runs asylum services in the northeast of England.

Barbara led me upstairs to a tiny single room with an ensuite bathroom. She set the baby in his crib, where he toyed with an ABC mobile. I spread out on the floor and she perched on her bed, propping her feet up. Two suitcases press between the foot of the bed and the wall. Every night, she falls asleep staring at them; she wonders when she will need them next.



## *Escape*

Barbara fled West Africa to escape her family's violence and coercion. After her father died, her uncles pulled her out of school; she spent her adolescence struggling to care for her mother and her late brother's children. When her abusive uncles forced her to marry against her will, Barbara said she "would rather die than marry that man." She fought with her family for 12 hard years—and has two less teeth and countless unseen bruises to show for it— before she decided to leave. Though she was legally married to the 'husband' since her uncles had already given him the dowry, she refused to participate in the marriage.

Someone offered to help her, and she took the opportunity to escape. Barbara packed a small bag and boarded a plane to London on a 6 month visa. When she arrived, the person was waiting for her outside the airport. After buying her a meal of chicken and chips, he took her return flight ticket, hotel reservation, and passport from her. He said that he required the paperwork to buy her a house. She never saw him again.

Barbara spent one month on the streets, terrified of the police because of the experiences that she had had back home. She felt ready to give up when a Black man with dreadlocks smiled at her. For the first time since she arrived, she felt like she could trust someone. He advised her to go to Europe, where she would have better support. He took her to take a shower—"the best shower, I still remember that shower"—and then put her on a bus to Germany.

## *Imprisoned*

Border guards stopped Barbara on the French border. They arrested her for travelling on false documents and took her back to Kent, where she was held in the police station for four days. Then, she was imprisoned in Brompton Women's Prison for six months before she was

moved to Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre. Though Barbara was trying to *leave* the country, she had become confined in it.

But Barbara had fought her family for years and was prepared to fight in the UK, too. During the two months that she was in Yarl's Wood, she applied for bail twice; the judge permitted her release on the condition that she would be electronically tagged for six months. Though other women warned her about the tag, she did not care. She was finally out.

She could never have imagined how difficult life would be with the tag. "It's the worst experience, I wouldn't pray for my worst enemy to have," she said. She rubs the back of her neck, pausing. "I have pain," she explains, from the stress of remembering. She sings to Noah gently, ABCs and Twinkle Twinkle.

### ***Life with the Tag***

Barbara was under curfew from 7pm to 6am every day; despite having to wear a tag that monitored her location, she still had to travel to the nearest city to sign in with a Home Office Official every week. Both of these measures were to ensure that she did not abscond, or run away.

Barbara lived in fear. If she breached her curfew, she would be detained or deported back to her country where she would be the property of her 'husband's' family—and would certainly face abuse, if not worse. But Barbara lived in confinement in the UK too. She could not volunteer, study, or work because of stipulations on asylum-seekers. Even if she went to the garden to have a cigarette, the tagging company would call to ask where she was since she was technically outside of her house.

Eight months later—two months longer than she was initially supposed to be tagged—G4S said that she, and the rest of the tenants in her house, would need to move to a different accommodation. But Barbara had to stay within the range of the Home Monitoring Unit and could not move it herself. Barbara called the tagging center and explained her situation. The

representative told her to wait for a technician to arrive, but nobody came. Barbara was forced to move without the Home Monitoring Unit.

From her new accommodation, Barbara continued to report weekly to the Home Office official in the city and receive food vouchers. When she explained the issue at the sign-in center, the official recommended that she contact the Home Office directly. She was overdue to have her tag removed anyway; the probation officer had already written to the Home Office to take the tag off because she had been following the orders precisely.

Two weeks after she had moved, she went to sign in at the reporting center. Immigration Officers were waiting for her. They arrested her “because she had absconded” by leaving the accommodation without the Home Monitoring Unit. Despite the fact that her move was required by G4S and that she had been reporting for the last two weeks, she was again detained in Yarl’s Wood.

At Yarl’s Wood reception, she was apprehended. “You can’t go in with a tag on your leg,” the receptionist explained, and again Barbara was in limbo. She waited for 7 hours for the tagging technicians to arrive at Yarl’s Wood reception, but again, they never came. So two Immigration Officers decided to cut her tag off—which proved difficult, as it was designed to be. They said, “if we lose your legs, we’re going to go to the hospital.” Barbara responded—feisty as ever— “if you lose my leg, it’s going to be a big fight.” Eventually, they put a thin piece of metal against her shin to protect her leg and burned the tag off. There was a long burned line down the piece of metal afterwards; Barbara was sure it would have burnt her badly had she not commanded them to protect her body. But she was so thrilled that the tag was off —“that was the happiest day of my life.” In total, she had worn the tag for nine months; yet now she was back in prison. She was scheduled to be deported on a charter flight that week.

Again, Barbara fought. She contacted her solicitor, who advocated for her release. Her friends created a petition that circulated around the country. Since Barbara was fighting an active asylum case at the time, it was unlawful for the Home Office to detain her. The Home

Office quietly released her on the afternoon of her deportation; this time, she was not tagged at all as the Home Office attempted to cover up its mistake.

Barbara was sent back to the same town in the north of England, where she initially lived with people she liked in the city center. But after she became pregnant, she had to move to mother-and-baby housing—far outside the center where none of her old housemates can come to visit her or see the baby, because a round-trip bus ticket is 1/6 of their weekly budget. Barbara finished breastfeeding Noah. She was starving. Barbara's small refrigerator was nearly empty, except for baby food.

Barbara and Noah survive on 35 pounds a week. Though she was supposed to get additional funding while she was pregnant and after Noah was born, she has not received anything from the Home Office. She only eats one meal a day so that she has enough money—and barely enough energy—to care for her child.

Though Noah was born British, and his father is a British citizen, the father refuses to claim Noah as his child or apply for a British passport for him. So the baby, too, is stuck in limbo. "Me and Noah, we have each other," she says. And she waits—as she has become accustomed to doing. She watches *Say Yes to the Dress* on television, as blonde, joyous brides pick out thousands of pounds worth of wedding dresses. She thinks back to the threats of marriage that started it all, and that await her if she is forced to return. "It is just one trauma after another, some problem after another," she said sadly. "Nothing good is happening my dear, except my cigarette. Except my baby. That's life."

## Thierno

I met Thierno at a conference where he spoke out passionately as an activist, eager to share his story so that people would understand the difficulties of a life as an asylum-seeker. He showed me the tag on his leg, covered by a sock, and agreed to talk to me about his experience.

A few weeks later, we met up in his home. We chatted over an eclectic meal of iced hibiscus tea, meat curry, and banana bread.

Thierno is originally from a conflicted border region in West Africa. His uncle was kidnapped and put in a camp; after he was released, he knew he had to flee. He quickly bought passports for himself and Thierno, and they arrived in the UK when Thierno was only 16.

### ***'Indefinite' Leave to Remain***

Thierno registered as an unaccompanied minor in Croydon while his uncle continued to Canada. He was sent to a children's group home in Whitechapel; shortly after, he moved out of the hostel and into a flat that was also provided by social services. Thierno was granted 'indefinite leave to remain'—the 'status' that is so coveted by asylum-seekers in this country.

Thierno was still under 21 when he went to prison for the first time. "I didn't have no role model, you know what I'm saying. I was on the street, cuz everybody also out there... so that lead me to like taking drugs, and drinking alcohol, and that lead me to doing violence." He was stripped of his indefinite leave to remain and imprisoned for 15 months; after he had served half of his sentence, he was given a deportation order and detained indefinitely in Callum Brook Immigration Removal Centre.

Thierno's first daughter was born while he was detained and he wanted to see her, but social services refused to give him contact. He became angry and frustrated; as a punishment, security contractors bounced him from one detention center to another "because he wasn't complying." Eventually, he applied for bail and was released after 20 months of detention.

### ***'Not Complying'***

After his release, Thierno had to report to the Home Office three times a week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. He lived in 'Peace House,' a homeless shelter whose vegetarian owner provided transportation for the asylum-seekers to report to the sign-in center. But one night, after Thierno came in from a night of drinking, he fell asleep with a kebab beside him. The woman

who ran Peace House was upset, especially because she had warned him before about bringing meat into the shelter. She kicked him out—and Thierno no longer had a place to live nor a way to get to the reporting center. He could no longer sign in with the Home Office official.

After a few months, Thierno was stopped at a club. The police officers asked him for his name and details; they arrested him for being ‘on the run’ because he had not been reporting to the Home Office. They detained him in Callum Brook, this time for a year. He felt like he was going crazy from the stress and again, the detention staff accused him of “not complying” and decided to send him to prison.

When Thierno arrived at the prison, he still had his mobile phone in his pocket (while phones are allowed in immigration detention, they are not permitted in prison). The prison officers accused him of smuggling a phone into the facility and a judge sentenced Thierno to 28 days in prison—but after those 28 days, Thierno was released. He was shocked and sure that the release was a mistake, since he had been awaiting deportation in detention. But he was told to report to the Home Office once a week and given transportation to do so.

Thierno soon ended up in prison again for violence. He felt traumatized—he had been getting stressed again, drinking more, and taking out his anger on other people. “I was worried about like my papers, no job, drama, no place to live, no money, family stressing me back home—send me money, I was just going crazy, you know what I mean?” He spent 2012 to 2013 in jail and then was further detained in prison for 7 months, where he applied for bail three times. Finally, he was released on the condition that he would be electronically tagged, follow a curfew between 11pm and 7am, and again report at the sign-in center 3 times a week. While the tag is supposed to be fitted within 48 hours of a person’s release, Thierno was not tagged until two months after.

### ***Curfew Orders***

After his release from detention, Thierno gave up drinking, smoking, and anger and became a devout Muslim, “al-Hamdulillah.” He found that the tag often interfered not only with

his time with friends but also with his night-time prayer at the mosque. During the first year, when Ramadan came, he wanted to pray in the mosque at night with the local Muslim community. He wrote to the Home Office, who granted a change in his curfew. But during the second year, he began a court case for custody and contact with his daughters, who lived in a separate part of the country. Again, he wrote to the Home Office to get permission to leave, but nobody responded. Thierno went anyway—the stakes were too high. Though he was worried about the consequences, he had to be there for his children.

When Ramadan came, Thierno again wrote to the Home Office to request an extension on his curfew. This time, they refused to grant it to him because he had breached his curfew during the court case with his daughters. Thierno's solicitor wrote a letter to the Home Office stating that he had a right to pray whether or not he was being electronically monitored. He advised Thierno to pray regardless of permission.

During Ramadan, Thierno went to the mosque every night but his mind was cluttered with thoughts of detention and deportation. He could not concentrate on his prayers. When he returned, the Home Monitoring Unit rang off the hook. The G4S tagging representative asked him where he had been and informed him that it would be “reported as a breach.” Every night for a month, they called. Every night for a month, he told them that he was praying. Though his paranoia continued, he was never arrested or confronted except for during the nightly phone calls.

In 2016, Thierno's original deportation order was set to expire since it was ten years old. Yet the Home Office decided to revoke his papers for a second time, trapping him again within the crimmigration cycle.

### ***Legal Challenge***

Thierno went to High Court to challenge the curfew, supported by a solicitor who argued that the curfew was unlawfully administered on all asylum-seekers since Parliament only permitted the Home Office to tag individuals, not curfew them. They were successful, and had

the curfew removed. Yet Thierno still wears the tag, although it does not do anything now except mark his body. He is terrified to cut it off—the paranoia continues. He wants to fight the tag as well, but does not yet have enough money for another solicitor. Thierno hopes to go to the European Court of Human Rights to convince them with his charismatic demeanor and persuasive story.

Thierno believes that if his story is disseminated, people will realize how wrong the situation is and try to change it. In the weeks following our conversation, Thierno took me to an asylum-seeker drop-in center close to where he reports to the Home Office, introducing me to people and broaching the subject of the tag.

## **Michael, David, and Shu**

I met Michael, David, and Shu at two drop-in centers. Their stories are similar to Thierno's—they were imprisoned for a criminal offence, then moved to immigration detention, and finally released with an electronic tag. They also all had papers and 'status' which were revoked after their conviction.

Michael came to the UK in 2012. He was homeless and arrested for committing a burglary; he was then sentenced for 6 months in jail, and then 6 months on parole. In the end, Michael was incarcerated for 3 years, including immigration detention. He was released in 2015 after which he was tagged for 15 months, from 7pm to 8am.

David, like Thierno, once had papers and status, but they were revoked after he was arrested. He went to prison and was detained afterwards. When he was released, he was tagged for a year, from 6pm to 7am.

Shu came to the country in 2005. He was convicted in 2007 and sent to prison and detention; afterwards, he was released in 2012 and was tagged for 8 months. He was convicted again for a fight and sent back to prison for 11 months. When he was released in 2013, he was put on another curfew for 18 months.



Each of their stories—from the ways they were treated to the length of time in which they were imprisoned and tagged—exemplifies the Home Office's carelessness towards asylum-seekers and their well-being. In the next chapter, I will describe the workings of the Home Office and security contractors like G4S as a 'crimmigration' apparatus, working together to criminalize and dehumanize asylum-seekers through practices like electronic tagging.

## **Chapter 3: The 'Crimmigration' Apparatus**

While it has long been understood that the modern nation-state holds a monopoly over legitimate violence (Weber, 1994), Torpey writes that the state holds “a monopoly on the legitimate means of *movement*” (Torpey, 2000, p.1). Yet asylum-seekers and other ‘undesirable migrants’ have surmounted the various barriers erected by the state to keep them out. They have entered despite restrictions on visas, passports, citizenships, hard and soft borders. As a result, Britain must devise other ways in which to curtail the movement of unwanted peoples without ruining its public reputation as a ‘humanitarian’ state. Within the logic of the ‘deterrence campaign,’ crimmigration tactics intend to administer, control, and (b)order asylum seekers, making their lives so difficult that that they want to leave ‘voluntarily’.

Through the process of ‘crimmigration,’ as described in the first chapter, the state not only enacts laws to criminalize migrants but also controls the ways in which they are able to live through a constellation of embodied practices—using its monopoly on violence to enforce its monopoly on movement (Foucault, 2003). Known broadly as biopolitics, the state controls the ways in which a person lives through a set of institutions, administrative mechanisms, rhetorical devices, and knowledge structures known as an apparatus (Foucault, 1980). This apparatus is not only made up of the government, but also by private corporations, media, and other knowledge-constructing institutions that enforce and propagate social control. In order to punish migrants for the crime of mobility, the crimmigration apparatus—made up of the Home Office and its (in)security contractors—aims to immobilize them. In this chapter, I:

1. discuss the ways in which the Home Office is a Kafkaesque bureaucracy, designed to neglect asylum-seekers and see them as files, quotas, or paperwork,
2. examine the nature of the surveillance state as it is enacted upon migrants by the Home Office,

3. consider G4S as an (in)security contractor that places a buffer between the Home Office and the asylum-seeker, thereby mitigating all accountability and human rights standards,
4. and explain that the crimmigration apparatus dehumanizes asylum-seekers, viewing them as data, objects, or price tags.

The crimmigration is not designed to provide asylum to vulnerable individuals. Instead, it is constructed to fail ‘undesirable migrants,’ enforce the ‘hostile environment,’ and push them out of the country.

## The Home Office

The Home Office is responsible for governmental matters of immigration, national ‘security,’ and law and order—‘crimmigration’ housed within one department. Within this section, I explore the carelessness with which the Home Office handles asylum cases and the fate of vulnerable asylum-seekers.

### *Kafkaesque Bureaucracy*

After Thierno went to prison in 2006, his leave to remain had been revoked; he was stripped of his status in the country, including his right to work. But in 2016, during one of his weekly check-ins with the Home Office, “the lady from the reporting center said to me yeah, oh, we have a note on your system... You still have your leave to remain. You can go and work, and you can claim benefits... BUT we considering revoking it. Give me a reason why we shouldn’t revoke it... and I give them the reason why and now they say that they revoked it.” There is a circular lack of logic to these proceedings, and Thierno feels entirely powerless in front of them. Though his deportation order had expired after 10 years, he has to comply with the sudden Home Office decision to extend it—yet cannot understand why it happened or who permitted it.

The Home Office operates in a Kafkaesque reality, built to be a bewildering process of bureaucracy, judicial proceedings, and unnecessarily complicated and frustrating experiences. Like Josef K. in *The Trial*, Thierno and his compatriots navigate a maze of sudden arrests, confusing paperwork, shocking decisions, and endless confinement—often without help or legal counsel. They are constantly delivered decisions (or lack of decisions) with seemingly little reason. But unlike Josef K., the asylum-seekers know exactly why they are trapped in this nightmare: their lack of citizenship. Bureaucratic messiness hides the deliberate negligence of asylum-seekers, and enables the ‘hostile environment’ within the realm of the Home Office.

### ***Asylum Interviews***

Home Office decision-makers are deeply entangled in the bureaucracy around them—and ironically, the bureaucracy impedes the quality of their work. According to a Home Office whistleblower, “decision-makers [on asylum cases] are required to complete 225 interviews or decision reports a year” (Lyons and Brewer, 2018). Because of the pressures to meet the interview quota, “staff are so overworked that they routinely walk into interviews unprepared and feel so pressured for time that they race through the interview and sometimes ‘copy and paste’ paragraphs from one decision to another” (Lyons, 2018b) —sacrificing a person’s well-being for the sake of governmental efficiency and impersonal, ‘objective’ judgements. As a result, the interviews are faulty at best.

A typical asylum interview is often painful for the asylum-seeker. Officials not only force the interviewee to relive their trauma, but also expect them to interview for an average of two to five hours—in which the asylum-seeker must repeat the exact details of their story. One woman claimed asylum in the UK after she realized that she could no longer live in Uganda safely as a bisexual woman. She was detained in Yarl’s Wood and subject to a 10 hour interview over two days, consisting of more than 400 questions. In a classic torture intimidation tactic, “the interviewer asked her the same questions over and over, including once asking six times in a row why [she] would live with her girlfriend in a country where homosexuality was illegal” (Lyons,

2018b). Others are rejected because of slight inconsistencies in English, even when they are interviewed without a translator. The Home Office denied one man's claim because of a linguistic slip—he said that his brother had shot him in the foot after catching him with a man, and then later said he had been shot in the leg (Lyons, 2018a).

While the Home Office is expected to “provide a decision within six months on all straightforward asylum claims and within a year for all cases considered to be ‘nonstraightforward,’ the officials regularly exceed their own time limit (Home Affairs Committee, 2017, p.8). A 2017 report compiled by David Bolt, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, states that “the Home Office is not ‘in effective control’ of its asylum process... The independent report expressed concern that of the non-straightforward cases in March, more than half were over 12 months old and less than one-quarter had been reviewed” (Hill, 2017). Despite these testimonies, the Home Office still insists that “there is no evidence to suggest that there is a refusal culture or a culture of intimidation, and every case is considered on its individual merits. Asylum decision-makers are allocated time to prepare for interviews, which are fully noted and digitally recorded where possible”(Lyons and Brewer, 2018).

But interviews are not the only place in which precarious and bureaucratic practices endanger the lives of asylum-seekers. In the case of emergency situations for asylum-seekers, paperwork is so badly delayed that Home Office decisions that should be made in 24 hours are, on average, delayed by 59 days (Lyons, 2017) . According to research conducted by Refugee Action, those in need of emergency services are routinely left homeless and destitute; these ‘errors’ on behalf of the Home Office force people to “stay in accommodation deemed not fit for habitation, with leaking toilets or no heating” at best (Lyons, 2017).

When Thierno went to court to fight his curfew in 2014, the Home Office floundered to explain why he had been electronically monitored for five years—an incredibly long time, seeing as the limit for a citizen's electronic tagging is merely 6 months (or 12 months, in exemplary

cases). “They admit, yeah, there was something wrong. They say that one case worker has left, one case worker has gone to Australia, one is dead, one left his job. They don’t know where the problem started.” Because the Home Office ‘didn’t know’ what happened to Thierno’s case, he had been subject to extra surveillance and extreme constrictions for an incredibly long time. Most of the people I had interviewed had similar experiences—especially of neglect within bureaucratic dysfunction. Like the many case workers who abandoned Thierno’s case, a 2018 report stated that “more than a quarter of staff had quit over a six-month period” (Lyons and Brewer, 2018).

The power mechanism of the Home Office is bound in the ‘files’ of asylum cases. Those files are not only the means of acquiring knowledge about a person, but also the ability to control that individual’s fate. The case worker who handles Thierno’s file enacts power upon Thierno’s life with every decision— or indecision. And when the file is lost— or even if it is temporarily misplaced, at the bottom of the pile, or handed off between multiple people—the person ceases to exist within the eyes of the bureaucracy. Ignored by the state, welfare services, and the workings of the asylum system, the ‘lost’ asylum-seeker can suffer in this limbo for years.

### ***Deliberate Negligence***

The biopolitical state openly disregards asylum-seekers through bureaucratic neglect. These sentiments have recently earned headlines as Amber Rudd stepped down from her position as Home Secretary in April 2018, after promising that she would oversee the deportation of 10% more people than previous administrations, 4,000 migrants yearly (Booth and Hopkins, 2018). Yet deportation targets have been a Home Office practice since far before Rudd took office—Theresa May encouraged the same practices as Home Secretary in 2014. During her administration, “Home Office officials have been set targets of turning down 70% of asylum appeals” and were rewarded with “gift vouchers, cash bonuses, and extra holiday if they hit them” (Doward, 2014). In this culture, it is not a surprise that “some staff took pride in rarely, if ever, granting asylum” (Lyons and Brewer, 2018).

People in the asylum-system are treated like numbers (70% to be rejected, 225 decision reports) and not individuals. The Home Office uses bureaucracy as a cover to hide its chaos, not least because case workers are encouraged to think of the people as paperwork rather than as humans who have complex cases and histories. As Deleuze posits in his theory of 'societies of control,' individuals are no longer viewed as human beings with complicated lives (Deleuze, 1992). Rather, they are broken down into a "bundle of traits" that is easy to categorize and file away—crucial for the organization and simplification of the bureaucracy (Jones, 2000, p.10). This 'bundle' can be easily rejected because it is not seen as a person, but rather a set of criteria that deems a person 'valid' or 'invalid'.

Detained Fast Track used to be a process of administrative convenience to sort if a person had a credible claim on the least amount of information—either a valid or invalid country of origin. Although Detained Fast Track is no longer in use, the same principles operate in the Home Office's crude case decisions. These 'bundles of traits' makes social sorting easier for the Home Office's administrative body; as a result, the bureaucracy aims to categorizes data rather than understand individuals.

### ***Discipline and Surveillance***

Biopolitics is not only concerned with the categorization of individuals, but also making them live in certain ways through crimmigration policies. Paszkeiwicz writes that "the UK asylum process is about 'disciplining' (i.e. controlling and penalizing) of the asylum-seeking subject" (2011, p.45); the Home Office disciplines and surveilles asylum-seekers through the electronic tag. Like the Foucauldian Panopticon, a person who is tagged might be under the gaze of the state at all times and must act accordingly.

Surveillance and the Panopticon are already part of the widespread 'culture of control' that spans the UK, ranging from street-wide CCTV cameras to specific biometric technology like passports (Garland, 2001). The government rationalizes these technologies foremost for security. CCTV cameras catch criminals in the act; passports allow for 'safe' travelers to pass

through borders and prevent the movement of 'unsafe' people. As a result, surveillance became a tool of social sorting to determine which individuals were safe bodies and which were threats (Lyon, 2003).

On the terms of social sorting, Bigo expands Foucault's general Panopticon into a 'Ban-opticon,' which rejects the idea of blanket, indiscriminate surveillance. The Ban-opticon instead retraces the border around those who are deemed 'foreign' or 'Other'—those who are deemed abnormal, and therefore subject to abnormal legality like infinite detention or indefinite electronic tagging (2008).

Especially after the 'War on Terror,' the UK implemented surveillance mechanisms that would screen enormous amounts of population in order to reduce 'risk.' Yet as Amoore writes, risk management within in this massive context is based on the idea of "a world that would be safer if only ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty could be controlled" (Amoore, 2006, p.337). Of course, it is difficult to surveille the entire society thoroughly; as a result, certain groups or individuals are profiled as 'riskier.' In other words, surveillance (b)orders those who are considered 'threatening' to the physical or cultural security of the state.

When surveillance and social control is designated to mitigate risk, it "becomes more about predicting and preventing deviance—always assuming that it will, indeed, happen—rather than responding to a violation after it had occurred" (Staples, 2000, p.6-7). Through categorizing, monitoring, and recording certain members of the population, the state attempts to mitigate *all* risk—and since such wide-scale surveillance is an enormous project, the state must hire (in)security personnel to conduct this work.

## Contractors

Contractors, or the (in)security personnel,<sup>1</sup> handle the biopolitics of asylum-seekers through the management of detention centers, asylum housing, and electronic tagging. Their

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<sup>1</sup> I first came across the term '(in)security professionals' in Bigo's 2008 paper "Globalized (in)security: The field and the Ban-opticon." He uses (in)security to link private corporations with the United States'



presence as an intermediary between the asylum-seeker and the Home Office is particularly harmful—not only for the dehumanization of the asylum-seeker, who is now one more level removed from the policy that affects them, but also for the coherence of the ‘crimmigration’ apparatus. Barbara’s experience encapsulates the great deal of harm that can be caused by the confusion between the Home Office and its contractors:

“I wore the tag for 8 months until G4S, they came to me and said I have to move to another accommodation... The rules is you can’t unplug the machine, so I said what am I going to do? She said to me call [the electronic monitoring staff]. So I did call them, and they said this call has been recorded for training purposes. I said, I am being moved to a different housing accommodation, they said wait. I had to wait until everyone left, and then G4S took me to the new accommodation. They never came. And then they said, I have breached my contract. The Home Office said I have absconded... I was arrested and taken back to detention center, and given a flight ticket back to my country, the same week.”

### *G4S and (In)security*

G4S is one of many for-profit government (in)security contractors and the one that I will focus on within this dissertation, as G4S holds the contract for ‘asylum services’ the northeast of England. I had never heard of them before I started working on this project—but when I started looking, I saw G4S everywhere. Heavily padded security trucks drive around town to pick up money from banks and businesses. The back of my passport is covered with G4S stickers, verifying my body and my luggage as ‘safe’ to fly out of Gatwick Airport. The G4S logo is stamped all over the news for running Israeli prisons for Palestinian detainees. In 2013, G4S was found to be overcharging the Ministry of Justice for billing for non-existent services—specifically, charging for the electronic monitoring of people who were dead, incarcerated, or had never been tagged in the first place (Travis, 2013). G4S has intimate ties with the Home Office—for instance, former Home Secretary John Reid is on the board of G4S (Syal, 2009) — and its international reach protects it in the face of scandal.

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response to the War on Terror, highlighting the globalized nature of international cooperation in the context of global (and for-profit) policing.

In Britain, their services—and presence— are much more normalized than one would think. Greyson writes, “the UK is amongst the most intensively covered by private security with one private guard to every 170 people compared with one police employee to every 382 citizens” (2012). Private security increasingly supports, enforces, and controls the state’s monopoly on violence as the state depends on these contractors to fulfil their ‘security’ needs. G4S earns a global revenue of £7.4 billion per year and, with over 570,000 worldwide employees and 30,000 in the UK, it is one of the largest employers in the world (G4S, 2018). G4S is almost unavoidable—especially if one is an asylum-seeker.

All travelers must cross G4S at the airport—at border control, in the security lines, checking passports. If they are detained, they may be transported in a G4S vehicle to a short-term holding facility managed by G4S or sent to a detention facility run by G4S. If they are dispersed to asylum accommodation in Northeast England or Midlands and the East of England, that too will be run by G4S. If they are electronically tagged, they are monitored by G4S. They are an integral part of the crimmigration apparatus—and, in the words of a Zimbabwean asylum-seeker who spoke to John Greyson in 2012, “I don’t want a prison guard as my landlord”.

### ***Asylum Housing***

While this dissertation focuses on electronic tagging, an asylum-seeker is confined to their home during their curfew. As a result, asylum housing conditions are a major concern for those who are tagged. In 2012, the Home Office gave G4S the contracts to run asylum housing in the Midlands and the Northeast and East of England. This contract, called COMPASS, was initially set out for 5 years and worth £1.7 billion. Since then, it has been extended for two more years, now expiring in 2019. Through the COMPASS contracts, local authorities were almost totally excluded from the provision of support; and since asylum tenants were stripped of their right for council or private housing in 1999, asylum-seekers are entirely dependent on companies like G4S to provide shelter. In fact, out of the three (in)security contractors managing

asylum housing, G4S accommodates 17,308 of the 38,441 asylum tenants in the UK (Home Affairs Committee, 2017).

Four separate Parliamentary inquiries have confirmed the horrific situations that asylum-seekers face within G4S housing. G4S' standard of properties has often come under scrutiny for being unsafe and inadequate for people to live in. One Parliamentary Inquiry in January 2013 reported that "families are living in poorly maintained, overcrowded accommodation which can be damp, dirty, cold and unsafe; infested with mice, cockroaches and other pests, rotting floorboards and locked windows" (Parliamentary Inquiry, 2013, p.19). In 2016, G4S was fined £5.6 million for the terrible standard of housing; yet despite these charges, G4S has made minimal changes to its standard of care. The corporation still holds the COMPASS contract and has bid for the next one, which is a 10 year deal worth £4 billion.

## Accountability

Michael told me that his previous house had been "demolished because it was inhumane, it wasn't good for human beings." But he, and others who are entirely dependent on G4S, cannot move out or complain. People are terrified to register their complaints to G4S because their landlords not only house them but also monitor and police them. For instance, Canning writes, "after some disagreements among residents about leaving room doors open in shared accommodation, the private housing provider (in this case, Serco) placed a warning that 'anyone who leaves their door open will be reported to the Home Office'" (2017, p.80).

One person was "told by a G4S worker if they complained... it will backfire" (Home Affairs Committee, 2017, p.33). Barbara, too, said that people would "rather die in silence" than report the things that G4S did. But G4S exists for this purpose. Because of the presence of an intermediary, especially one that is as widespread and powerful as G4S, asylum-seekers have nowhere to complain—especially not to the Home Office.

Clare Sambrook, a journalist who works to uncover human rights abuses, stated in a presentation that G4S is "not in the work of caring for people; rather, it is in the work of

warehousing things and objects”—especially because G4S considers its ‘clients’ to be commodities. In 2017, G4S was receiving an “average payment of £9.35 per [asylum tenant] per night, which equates to £280 per month or £3,412 per year”—that number is probably higher for those who are electronically tagged (Home Affairs Committee, 2017, p.3-4). “Their representatives explained that G4S’ ‘primary concern’ was to make money for their shareholders in what they called the ‘asylum market’” (Greyson, 2012a).

(In)security professionals like G4S are a buffer between the asylum-seeker and the state; with the exception of asylum interviews, a migrant mostly deals with contractor services “even though it is the British state—not corporate providers—that is signatory to international legislation relating to refugees” (Canning, 2017, p.144). Because the (in)security personnel do not have to run for office or ascribe to political agreements, they are able to abuse, dehumanize, and neglect asylum-seekers without consequence—and if a scandal breaks, it is easy for the Home Office to drop the company or blame them, and continue running the system through different (or slightly renamed) contractors (Athwal, 2015, p.53).

The lack of accountability extends throughout the crimmigration apparatus, as the Home Office’s ‘constant contact’ is generally one-way. When Barbara became pregnant, the Home Office was supposed to send her £300 on maternity grounds. Then, she said, “they’ll add £3 on your £35 when you are pregnant.... And then when your baby is born, they give you £45 until he is 5 months old. But all of those things, they have never given me anything.” She has called “everyone,” including NAAS and the Home Office and G4S, but received no answer. “You know they have so many departments, right,” she sighed to me. Since then, she has received some additional money from the Home Office for Noah, but not nearly the £2000 that the six-month-old baby is entitled to.

Asylum-seekers have no place to report this negligence, and no person from whom they will get a response. This lack of communication is by design—it is post-panoptical, as Bauman writes, since the ‘watcher’ is completely removed from the situation. There is no way to get in

contact with the disciplinarian, who hides behind technology and layers of bureaucracy in “unreachable realms” (Bauman and Lyon, 2012, p.4). When things go wrong, no one can provide answers.

For instance, the rules for breaching an electronic tag offense are supposed to be explained to the tenant when they are fitted with the tag, including that they can have up to two hours of ‘enforcement thresholds’ of brief absences or late arrivals home (Nellis, 2013, p.3). Yet many asylum-seekers had no idea what constituted a breach.

David was confused by the system of curfew. “They activate it sometime and then... they cheat, they cheat... Wednesday, they tell you you have to, five o’clock, they tell you you can go out five o’clock to 11 o’clock. But if you do, then that count against you because you have to be in between 6 and 7 for the rest of the week.”

Thierno, too, was paranoid about violating his curfew. “If I’m five minutes late, they will ring me and say ‘where was you?’ And then they say ‘okay, we’re going to report it down as a breach... And it played with my head thinking I’m gonna go back to detention.” He knew that he would not be rewarded for ‘good behavior,’ and that it was likely that he would be deported soon anyway because he had been on the tag for so long. But he was still worried.

Building on Deluze’s theory of the society of control, Jones describes post-modern surveillance society as ‘digital rule’—“a new form of at-a-distance monitoring which becomes possible with the advent of certain electronic technology” (2000, p.11). Shrouded by technology and physical distance, ‘digital rule’ protects the Home Office’s culpability for stacks of unanswered paperwork and exacerbate the stress of those who are already marginalized.

Through the denial of knowledge, and through the mysterious record of the ‘breach’ that was inaccessible to them, the Home Office kept Thierno and David in a state of powerlessness and confusion. They did not know if or when the Home Office was going to take them away, and they were constantly worried about the consequences. But there was no one to answer their

questions because the crimmigration apparatus was designed to hide in ambiguity, blame asylum-seekers for their ignorance, and create tension as part of the 'hostile environment'.

## Policies of Dehumanization

In the Parliamentary Report released in January 2017, "asylum seekers reported being treated with hostility and being made to feel 'sub-human' or 'like animals'" (Home Affairs Committee, 2017, p.40). Nowhere was this clearer than Barbara's case. After she was wrongfully arrested for 'absconding,' she was told that she could not enter the detention facility with a tag on her leg. The receptionist called the Tag Office to remove it:

"I waited at reception for 7-8 hours and they never came. So two officers came and they were like, you know what, if we lose your leg, we're going to go to the hospital. And I said to them, if you lose my leg, it's going to be a big fight. So they have to cut it, it's electronic, it's not easy. They brought so many things and they did cut it. Something like a metal, they put it here to protect my leg, and it had a burn. If they had not put it there, it would have burned my leg."

Barbara was happy to have her tag off—but not at the cost of her leg. Yet her leg, like the rest of her body and the bodies of other unwanted migrants, is simply disposable in the gaze of the crimmigration apparatus.

According to Bauman, dehumanization is a facet of the bureaucratic 'liquid society'. He terms it adiaphorization —"in which systems and processes become split off from any consideration of morality" (Bauman and Lyon, 2012, p.7). Adiaphorization is built up through extended isolation from the subject—such as tracking and monitoring them through electronic and managerial means, or reducing them to data bundles, or ignoring their files and human histories. Asylum-seekers are seen as data (within asylum interviews or detained fast-track), price tags (by G4S' measure), or objects (that must be tracked)—they are not considered human by any part of the crimmigration apparatus. Even the rhetoric surrounding asylum-seekers—'removing' in the context of deportation, 'dispersing' instead of moving someone or allocating them a residence—allows the apparatus to dehumanize and objectify asylum-seekers into mere bodies, or less.

Unlike Foucault's disciplinary society, the 'hostile environment' is not meant to force asylum-seekers to behave in a certain way; rather, it makes their lives so unbearable that they agree to leave. Since a 'voluntary' return saves the public reputation of the British humanitarian state, but also is £14,000 cheaper for the Home Office than a forced deportation, the 'hostile environment' is the most neoliberal route of deterrence. It maximizes profit and minimizes state support, blaming the individual for their own suffering.

Therefore, the 'voluntary' returns are not really voluntary, but reflect the successes of the crimmigration apparatus in its destruction of the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of asylum-seekers. The next chapter will explore the ways in which individuals experience electronic tagging, especially at the hands of the crimmigration apparatus—their difficulties and their methods of resilience.

## **Chapter 4: The Struggle of the 'Bad Immigrant'**

The electronic tag enforces the Home Office's biopolitics, forcing asylum-seekers to comply with unjust punishment that is attached to their bodies like electronic tagging. As Bauman writes, surveillance technology holds separate functions: "confinement (or 'fencing in') on one front line, exclusion (or 'fencing out') on the other" (2012, p.64). Electronic tagging reinforces the notion of 'crimmigration' by locking asylum-seekers inside during curfew hours while denying them the ability to interact with 'British' society for extended periods of time.

Slow death, as defined by Berlant, is the long-term effects of biopolitics—the prolonged "physical wearing out of a population" when one is confined and isolated (2007, p.754). She builds on Foucault's biopolitical world, but focuses on the "crisis ordinariness" of constantly being 'made to live' in a certain, precarious way (2007, p.761). 'Slow death' is particularly applicable to asylum-seekers because of the indefinite nature of electronic tagging and other social controls.

This chapter will explore the effects of the 'hostile environment' through the lens of 'slow death,' especially the ways in which people are isolated, strained, and blamed for their own suffering because of their migration. Within this chapter, I:

1. interpret the electronic tag as a visual tool to criminalize asylum-seekers rather than integrate them within their community,
2. consider the concepts of a 'good immigrant' and a 'bad immigrant' through the double-standards set for tagged asylum-seekers, which spurs racist and xenophobic sentiment,
3. analyze the ways in which 'community-based' electronic tagging is not liberating, but rather an isolating form of necropolitics,
4. and describe the ways in which asylum-seekers resist state surveillance and oppression.

While the electronic tag is often regarded as a positive alternative to detention, it is actually a particularly violent technology of control placed on asylum-seekers who should not have been detained in the first place. Beyond surveillance, the tag exists to separate, isolate, and



ostracize asylum-seekers from the 'local' community so that they cannot integrate— or live a 'normal' life.

## **Criminalization within the Community**

A British citizen is only tagged after extensive risk assessments, behavioral studies, and house visits; while the tag can still be problematic for citizens who have been released from prison, many scholars claim that it is a method of rehabilitation (Nellis, 2006). The tag allows them to re-integrate into the community after a period of incarceration and the curfew ensures that they get enough rest so that they can go to work the next day. As a result, citizens who are electronically tagged have opportunities to work, earn social capital, and interact with those around them.

For asylum-seekers, however, electronic tagging is not meant to reinstate them back into society, but rather to reinforce their exclusion. Despite the advancements in wearable technology—many people wear inconspicuous activity and location trackers as fashion accessories—the electronic tag is a bulky device that serves as a visual symbol of exclusion. On top of the color of their skin, asylum-seekers are marked by the tag as people who do not belong in 'society'.

Because of the tag, all of the interviewees feel isolated from their communities. They were not able to participate in civil society activities because they were afraid that people would see their tags and consider them to be “a killer, a pedophile, a child molester or something” (Shu). Thierno feels that he cannot “put the sunglasses on, wear short, play football... and just walk around and look at the world” because people will be afraid of him. Shu, too, said that he “[doesn't] go close to the community that much” because he is afraid that the tag will show. As a result, he became depressed and stayed within the house in order to avoid the social shame that is associated with tagging (Amaral, 2011, p.34).

Similarly, when Barbara went to TK Maxx or Marks and Spencer's, the store's alarm was triggered by her electronic tag. “They look at me like I have stolen something,” she said, “They

have a way that they look at you... It makes me like, I am not going out." Barbara is tagged by the (in)security apparatus just like the items in the store. She is seen as a piece of property not only by the Home Office but, upon revealing the tag, raises the suspicions of the community around her. Even when Barbara tried to go volunteer, they asked her if she had ever been to prison. "I had to say yes," she said, and that was the end of it. She resigned herself to staying at home and watching television.

### *Isolation*

In order to illustrate extreme social control of modern systematic racism, Mbembe contrasts Foucault's biopolitics with his theory of necropolitics. He writes, "vast populations are subject to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead" (Mbembe, 2003, p.40). For instance, though they are technically 'in' the community, asylum-seekers who are electronically tagged are extremely isolated. Shu says, "imagine, right, you can see from window, your main door, you see cars driving, people are walking, you cannot process... anybody is gonna be scarred." Shu says he often felt desperate and alone, especially since he could watch the world going on around him and was not able to participate in it.

Because they cannot leave their house for certain hours, they depend on others to come by and see them—although many of their friends who are also asylum-seekers cannot afford the £5.40 bus ticket. Additionally, they are discouraged from bonding with the people who live within their house. Most of the interviewees I spoke to had lived in between three to five asylum houses. Thierno says, "people can come here and I'm starting to build a bond with them, and friendship and they move away... You missing them. Next man come to your life again, is gone. Next man come, is gone... It's very hard to call this home." Barbara, too, felt jarred when she was moved out of her first asylum accommodation because she had tried to make it feel like home. She has stopped bothering since.

As Gill writes, "the constant moving and repositioning of asylum seekers means that they are depicted as transitory, fleeting and depersonalised to those actors with the greatest degree

of influence over them” (2009, p.186). G4S and the Home Office are not worried about the ways in which they separate friendships, relationships, or families; it is part of the crimmigration apparatus’ system of dehumanization. Michael told me that the hardest part of being tagged was that he could not see his kids. “They’re damaging a lot of people brain and families and breaking up families. Break up break up break up.” By not allowing asylum-seekers to leave their houses, then forcing them to move so that they break their relationships within their houses, the state strips ‘undesirable migrants’ of any stability. Despite the fact that the Parliamentary Inquiry recommends that “movement without consent should be limited, and for those individuals engaged with local services, such as schools or specific welfare support, it should be used only in exceptional circumstances,” the movement of asylum-seekers is ubiquitous (Home Affairs Committee, 2017, p.40). They are not only punished through immobilization but also through forced movement.

### ***The Good Immigrant***

Despite these obvious barriers, Britain expects asylum-seekers to be ‘good immigrants’—as explicitly stated in the 2005 White Paper *Controlling Our Borders: Making Migration Work for Britain*: “permanent migrants must be as economically active as possible; put as little burden on the state as possible; and be as socially integrated as possible” (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2005, p.21). Yet people who are tagged are unable to do any of these things because they cannot work, as stipulated by immigration law as of 2005; some of them were arrested for doing just that. Shu felt like he was systematically pushed towards criminal activity because he is unable to support himself. “Imagine, I’m 30 years old right, I’ve been living on 35 pounds for 5 years... you gonna go to for example to shop, to steal some food for your belly, and then they gonna think you a criminal.”

Denying people the right to work strains individuals and their families. Thierno said, “the family where I’m from yeah, my dad provide for my mom. That’s what I’m used to. So here, my baby mama she’s taking care of me.... I was forced to live like that. That was not my choice. Cuz

it's either live like that or commit crimes. And if you commit crimes, then you worry your family as well." Though Thierno completed a cooking class and wants to work, he cannot get a job because he does not have 'status'.

But even their paltry benefits spark xenophobic sentiment from the communities around them—especially since asylum-seekers are usually dispersed to impoverished areas. Spencer writes that "...asylum-seekers' dependency on welfare while they wait for a decision on their claim, coupled with their greater need for health services in particular, can -- in those few areas where asylum-seekers are congregated -- create demands that over-stretched local services are ill-equipped to meet" (Spencer, 2003, p.5).

Because they cannot work, are seen as stealing welfare, and cannot participate in the community, people who are tagged are marked as 'bad immigrants' by the media, the government, and the society. Nukesh Shukla references essayist Musa Okwonga in *The Good Immigrant*, stating: "The biggest burden facing people of colour in this country is that society deems us bad immigrants – job-stealers, benefit-scroungers, girlfriend-thieves, refugees – until we cross over in their consciousness, through popular culture, winning races, baking good cakes, being conscientious doctors, to become good immigrants" (Shukla, 2016, p.xv). A non-citizen who depends on welfare must, somehow, earn their stay in the country—although they cannot work, volunteer, or interact with the community without being criminalized. As Barbara says, "they say, so why can't you make friends? How can you make friends with this thing on your leg. You can't do anything."

The Home Office draws these distinctions through its two asylum programs: one, the normal asylum application in which 70% of people are targeted to be rejected, and two, the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme, in which Syrians who are 'verified' by the UN are admitted and resettled in the UK. A moral border is drawn around Syrians, who are perceived as legitimate and deserving (Jones *et al.*, 2017, p.7), and are settled in places like Cambridge and

the south of England; while the (b)order excludes other asylum-seekers who broke the immigration laws that were created to incriminate them.

Because of these encouraged perceptions, many of the interviewees I spoke to experience intense racism within their local communities. “Racist racist people,” says Barbara. “Everywhere is racist.” Michael experienced racist and xenophobic hatred particularly badly within his community.

“Every white English person that lives here, they hate us because they know we want asylum... I used to get eggs thrown at me, tomatoes, and dog shit and all that shit. We used to have red doors, all the doors for asylum used to be red. So all the white English people they knew, they used to go around in cars and bikes and, shit was in the newspaper that... they have to change the doors. But still, they still know who we are, they still know where we are.”

Michael refers to the period when Jomast, a subcontractor of G4S, housed asylum-seekers in houses with red doors. Though Jomast officials denied intentionally painting the doors red, journalists tracked that 175 out of 298 asylum homes in the area had red doors (Pidd, 2016). For Michael, who was both electronically tagged and confined within a red door house, he was doubly marked by the Scarlett Letter and trapped amongst the hate crimes.

### ***Monitored Motherhood***

When Barbara became pregnant, she was not surprised—many of the others around her had as well. The Azure card on which she gets her benefits cannot even buy condoms. “What are single girls supposed to do? We cannot work, we cannot go to college though it’s free for people in [the town where I live], cannot get a volunteering job.”

And when Barbara’s baby begins to walk, she will need to be in the garden to watch him; but the Home Monitoring Unit was calibrated to exclude her back garden and part of her kitchen, since the tag is designed for men with ‘anti-social’ behavior. “Sometimes I go behind the house to smoke... The next minute they are calling like I’m not home. I’m in the kitchen cooking, they’re telling me like I’m not home. It’s like you are a prisoner but you are out!” If she were still on the tag, she would constantly breach her curfew order to take care of her child.

In a study on women wearing electronic tags, Holdsworth and Huckesbury write that “female offenders... are more likely to suggest that non-compliance results from their domestic responsibilities” (Holdsworth and Hucklesby, 2014, p.15). If she is a single parent, the mother cannot run to the store for emergencies or buy something for her child; and if her children go outside during curfew hours, she cannot follow or watch them properly. And according to a 2011 report by Bail for Immigrant Detainees, “that the tagging of parents “had a detrimental effect on their children” because the parents could not “attend school sports games or birthday parties with their children, and could not take their children outside the vicinity of their home because” they had to stay nearby so as “to be in the house at certain hours. [ . . . ] Parents also reported that the stigma and restrictions of electronic tagging had contributed to their social isolation [and] that they suffered from stress and anxiety as a result of being tagged” (cited in Bloomfield, 2016, p.41).

The tag is designed for men—not only in function, but also in design. For instance, the tag severely limits what women can wear in different ways than men. Skirts, boots, and most fitted clothing would reveal the tag. “You still have to wear long trousers even if it is so hot!” Barbara said.

### ***‘Aggression’ and Compliance***

All of the men I spoke to were enraged by their indefinite monitoring and indefinite detention. “I served my time already,” Thierno, Shu, and Michael said. They feel that they cannot have a better future because they are still being punished for their crimes from when they were young.

As Mbembe writes, citizens and non-citizens are made to live (and left to die) in different ways, depending on their identity. British citizens who commit crimes are incarcerated for a much shorter period than non-citizens, especially since migrants often have to serve additional punishments after prison—including administrative immigration detention, tagging, and surveillance— because they are not protected by their citizenship. Thierno said that “English

boys... they could come in, yeah, their sentence finish, they go out. They commit another crime, they come back in. Maybe two-three time, they come back yeah. You're still in there, you're detained... Just because you're not born here, know what I mean. And then they're not even deporting you. And then they complain that their prisons are full."

The first time Thierno was arrested, he was furious because social services mistreated him and would not allow him to see his daughter:

"I was going crazy in there, slamming doors, going angry, you know, cuz I have not seen my daughter.... And they goes to me, oh, cuz you're not complying, we're gonna send you to different detention... I go there and I try to explain to people, and this time my English yeah, my English was not good either... And then they send me to different detention. I try to explain to them, yeah, I need to see my daughter... I got angry, yeah, and then they said COMPLY... And then when you do something they just say comply, and when you don't comply, then they keep on sending me to more higher security."

Thierno felt that he could not 'comply' because the (in)security officials did not treat him as a person, merely an object to be stored and shifted. Shu experienced similar feelings. "Every single time I try to speak to these people, Home Office... every time they talk about I'm aggressive. Of course I'm gonna be aggressive, what do you mean? Keep me in prison for as much as you want, you put me in curfew for as much time as you want, and then you tell me calm down! I'm not calm. I'm gonna be aggressive!" Though he was "cool" with his neighbors and had never been in a dispute with them, he felt that the system had consistently mistreated him through the indefinite punishment.

Thierno panics every time someone knocks on the door—fearing that they have finally come to deport him or take him back to detention. Though he has fought a court case that ruled his curfew unlawful, the tag remains on his leg. "And even if I cut it off, you know, I still got problems in my head... they gonna do something to me." This enforced paranoia—constructed by years of needless punishment and inhumane treatment—affected all of the interviewees. Shu says, "Probably the Home Office thinks we're gonna put 'em on curfew for much time, when he comes off curfew he's gonna forget about it. That's not true. Cuz that's gonna stay with me for the rest of my life... It's affecting me like inside of me... Can't show it to no one."

Shu noticed that ‘slow death’ was a game played by the Home Office. “If you don’t want me kicking around the country, send me back. Or come just poison me once, let me to die. Don’t kill me slowly, I don’t like that.” The crimmigration apparatus, though, is not interested in killing; instead, it uses the bodies of people like Barbara, Thierno, and Shu to set an example amongst the ‘local’ British community and other asylum-seekers. By mistreating them—and barely keeping them alive—the state hopes that it can discourage future applicants; “but the Home Office’s own research in 2002 found that asylum and detention policies were among the least considerations of asylum seekers coming to the UK” (Robinson and Segrott, 2002, cited in Bacon, 2005, p.6).

## Resistance

While the crimmigration apparatus attempts to reduce asylum-seekers to mere bodies without political agency, they continually resist socio-political oppression through their activities and presence. All of the interviewees had applied for bail and appealed their asylum claims, often multiple times, from within and outside of detention. Though they are physically constrained to their houses while on curfew, they resist the ‘hostile environment’ by existing as non-White human beings within the United Kingdom. For people like Barbara and Thierno, they defy the state’s suppression simply by raising a family, cooking their food, and talking to people in their community.

They also push back against what they see as injustices. Thierno, for instance, defied his curfew for the things that were most important in his life—his family and his religion. Despite the curfew order, Thierno was away from home for 29 days to attend the court case about his daughters. On 108 occasions, he breached curfew in order to return from court as well as pray during Ramadan. Even though the tag and curfew weighed on his mind, traumatizing him to the point of mental anguish, he continued to fight against it to maintain the important things in his life.



Thierno protests publicly against bedroom sharing practices in which two adult strangers must share a single bedroom. His activism group successfully lobbied against the spread of the hostile environment by pressuring a local hospital to withhold medical data of asylum-seekers from the Home Office. Thierno also advocates for asylum-seeker rights in his area and tells others about curfew for tagging.

From the bus pass to her escape from deportation, Barbara proves that she will not submit to the systematic discrimination of the Kafkaesque bureaucracy that attempts to obstruct her life. She continues to petition the Home Office for the money that was promised to her baby, and has recently opened a new asylum case that is supported by her friends and local activists. She is fundraising through the #RightToRemain campaign in order to acquire enough money for a solicitor.

From Barbara's defiance of the immigration officers to Thierno's breaches, asylum-seekers fight the system in the ways that they can. Though they can face consequences, they force the digital system to see them as more than 'dataviduals' or empty bodies through their acts of defiance. The Home Office must deal with them as people—and they challenge those as weighty as the Secretary of State in their struggle for recognition. Thierno and Barbara believe that their stories will make a difference, if people hear them. "I want people to get to know me," Thierno says. "Instead of just like judging me, I want people to get to know me and why I am like this."

## **Conclusion: Home**

In 2017, Thierno challenged his curfew in a High Court battle against the Secretary of State. The curfew was ruled unlawful, reflecting the ruling in *Gedi v. Secretary of State* in May 2016. The judge decided that while the Home Office had the legal right to tag an individual, it did not have the power to enforce a curfew. The Home Office barristers appealed the decision because they believed that the compensation granted to Thierno and other tagged asylum-seekers was too high.

In a Court of Appeals case in May 2018,<sup>2</sup> the Home Office defense argued that the electronic tag and curfew did not merit high compensation because the restrictions did not construe “forced imprisonment.” The barrister argued that Thierno could always “open the door and walk out” because there was no “guard to push him back into his home”; it was merely a “suggestion” to stay indoors.

But of course there are consequences—as stipulated in Thierno’s bail condition, failure to comply would result in “fine, imprisonment, or both”—if not deportation and indefinite detention. And despite the barrister’s claim, there is a guard—and it is attached to his ankle. Through the ‘digital rule,’ Thierno was constantly monitored and the presence of a physical restraint on his body ensured that he never forgot it.

His ‘guard’ not only limited his body but his mind. Aside from the legal consequences, Thierno endured mental anguish in following the curfew. He rushed home night after night, fearing the omnipresent threats of detention or deportation.

This court argument summarizes the ways in which the Home Office considers tagging on asylum-seekers—as something that is a mere administrative convenience. Thierno’s paranoia, trauma, and restraints are simply collateral damage.

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<sup>2</sup> I attended this hearing; it is unpublished as of June 10, 2018.

## Summary

The electronic tagging of asylum-seekers is not only a matter of surveillance, but also a way to punish, mark, and torture individuals who committed the 'crime' of migration. Through extra punishment and social isolation, migrants are (b)ordered through the 'hostile environment.'

The 'hostile environment' has several purposes for the Home Office. If an asylum-seeker becomes exhausted of their dehumanization and state-sponsored suffering, they can 'volunteer' to return—which not only looks better for the 'democratic' state's public image, but also saves the Home office £14,000 per person who is deported. Additionally, the 'hostile environment' preserves the 'island' character of Britain—a nostalgia for imperialist ideals that was not only central to Brexit, but to British immigration policy as a whole.

The 'hostile environment' is enforced by the crimmigration apparatus, which is a matrix of power comprised of the Home Office and its (in)security contractors (amongst other assemblages of knowledge such as media and education). The crimmigration apparatus does not provide safety for asylum-seekers; instead, it works to make their lives as difficult as possible through bureaucratic chaos, lack of accountability, and dehumanization tactics. The crimmigration apparatus also dehumanizes asylum-seekers, interacting with them as paperwork, objects, or price tags. And by withholding information about their cases, moving them between asylum housing, and ignoring questions or complaints, the crimmigration apparatus enforces an asylum-seeker's paranoia and keeps them in a state of fear and instability.

Within the community, the tag socially isolates an asylum-seeker. The public perceives the asylum-seeker as a criminal; therefore, the individual cannot integrate with the community—reinforcing the xenophobia within current media and political discourses. This isolation, as well as open racism and discrimination, further contributes to the 'hostile environment' that seeks to reduce an asylum-seeker to an 'undesirable body.'

Electronically tagged asylum-seekers fight against this socio-political oppression through everyday and extraordinary acts—simply surviving the ‘hostile environment’ is resistance on its own. Asylum-seekers also apply for bail, appeal asylum rejections, and assert their identities as non-White individuals within the United Kingdom. Like Thierno, they fight court cases against the Secretary of State—the ultimate Goliath—and win. But people who seek asylum should not have to fight to be seen as human, to practice their religion, or to see their families. Whether or not they have committed a crime, asylum-seekers—who come to the UK seeking safety—deserve the civil liberties that citizens enjoy.

## Possibility for Future Research

For future research and expansion on this project, a much wider study can be conducted with adults from all over the United Kingdom, as well as with non-English speaking asylum-seekers. I would be interested in a study of women who are tagged and the ways in which this affects their family, home, and work dynamics. Additionally, it would be beneficial to study the ways in which tagging affects the assimilation of children into the country. This study could be conducted over years, focusing on the ways in which children grow, learn language, and interact with local citizens despite the restrictions of the apparatus and ‘hostile environment’ around them.

Regarding the apparatus, potential research can focus on contractors that implement and enforce this technology. This study could investigate the employees who monitor the asylum seekers. Are they minimum-wage workers or people of color? How do they feel as they police refugees—is it powerful or draining? Do they see tags as degrading or necessary?

Another study could focus on the public perception of electronic tagging of asylum-seekers, especially the communities in which they are primarily resettled. Has it changed over time? What programs are there to support them at the community level?

## End Note

On June 1, 2018, Thierno's ankle bracelet was finally removed after five years of 'tagging'. "Alhamdulillah," he texted me, thanks be to God. He still awaits the decision on his latest court case, hoping that the case will go to the Supreme Court and end electronic tagging for all asylum-seekers—for the time being.

Even if Thierno wins this case and earns compensation, the Home Office is already circulating new regulations to permit the tagging and curfew of asylum-seekers. And in January 2018, the Home Office proposed a new bid for contract for April 2018, announcing the desired separation between Home Office's monitoring of asylum-seekers and the Ministry of Justice's tracking of citizen parolees (Home Office, 2017b).

The UK is the only European country that electronically tags asylum-seekers; within the European Union, the electronic tag contradicts the right to privacy. As the UK moves further away from European legislation around human rights, electronic tagging of asylum-seekers should not be seen as a positive alternative to detention but rather as a severe extension of the 'hostile environment'—intended to limit a person's physical, social, and psychological freedoms.

As the Home Office continues to expand the detention estate and issue new contracts to corporations, migrants are increasingly endangered by the propensity of further surveillance, privatized abuse, and restricted rights because they are not British citizens. This pattern is likely to continue without substantial pressure from voters and lawmakers.

Thierno hopes that after years of Home Office restrictions, he can finally build a home in the UK. "My oldest daughter, she's nearly 12. So when she come I want to be ready for her, I got my little two bedroom house, I got my papers, I got me a little job, you get me? I can give her some money for cinema. Just some simple life, innit. There's nothing more I want more than that."

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