“Freedom is a constant struggle”: Women’s journeys after modern slavery in the United Kingdom

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Dedication

For Tungombili.

Acknowledgements

Ubuntu: Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu is an African philosophy that profoundly translates to "a human being is a human being through other human beings." Throughout my journey, I have witnessed this pivotal African philosophy in action. I owe this journey's commencement, endurance, and culmination to the individuals who supported me. Thank you to the Wilberforce Institute and the Doctoral College for funding my studies.

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Abstract

This thesis provides insights into the journeys of women who have left situations classified as modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) and are remodelling their lives in the UK. Employing critical methodologies, this thesis utilises narrative analysis to reveal the women's complex journeys. These narratives were collected through semi-structured interviews with survivors of MSHT and the practitioners who support survivors within the UK context. Critical methodologies played a crucial role in foregrounding the voices of survivors and facilitated the exploration of alternative, more adaptable, and humane perspectives for understanding their journeys. In a holistic approach, this thesis traced the women's journeys through three stages: Liberation, the navigation of support systems, and the transition into independent living. It uncovered fresh insights into how the women navigated life after exploitation, including their decisions and actions to safeguard themselves, preserve their well-being, and extend these protections to others.

By holistically examining the women's experiences after MSHT, this thesis also scrutinised their encounters with existing support systems, highlighting how these systems often created never-ending obstacles along their journeys. Concurrently, it underscored the resilience displayed by the women as they resisted adversity and employed various strategies to advocate for their rights. In drawing upon the narratives of both the women and the practitioners, this study uses a critical lens informed by weathering, including black feminist and postcolonial perspectives. Through these lenses, it becomes clear that the journeys of women who participated in this research post-MSHT demand a nuanced and comprehensive approach that necessitates systemic change at both macro and micro levels. Without such a transformation, the struggle for freedom remains constant long after exiting exploitation.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Interest in modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) has seen significant growth since the start of the 20th century, mainly gaining traction in the UK in the late 1990s and early 2000s. MSHT in the UK has subsequently become the focus of extensive research efforts, garnering significant media and political scrutiny from 2012 to 2022 (Broad & Gadd, 2022). Nevertheless, even though MSHT has received vast attention across various facets, there is a distinct lack of focus on what happens in the aftermath of MSHT, particularly in terms of how survivors navigate this journey. Understanding how survivors navigate their journeys after MSHT is crucial for understanding their experiences. It underscores their humanity and disrupts much of the dominant image of a victim of MSHT, as revealed in Sections 1.5.2 and 7.3.1. It also serves as an essential foundation for improving policies and practices concerning MSHT. Therefore, the central theme of this thesis is the journey of life after MSHT, focusing on women navigating that life in the UK.

This introductory chapter presents the thesis's main objectives, briefly summarises the methodology, and details the theoretical underpinnings. It explains why women are the exclusive focus and explores relevant terminology. It concludes with the thesis outline.

1.2 Thesis Focus and Objectives

This thesis seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of women's journeys after leaving MSHT situations in the UK. This understanding is pursued through the exploration of the following research questions:

1. What happens to women after leaving situations of MSHT in the UK?
2. How do women navigate life after leaving situations of MSHT in the UK? In this context, navigating life after MSHT refers to the strategies women employ to overcome challenges they may face in their journeys after leaving exploitation.

How do women remodel their lives after MSHT in the UK? In this context, remodelling life refers to how women reconstruct their lives after MSHT, considering their experiences before, during, and after MSHT. It encompasses integrating these varied life phases to start anew and create a fulfilling life. Remodelling differs

from navigating in that it focuses explicitly on reconstructing their lives and piecing together their past and present experiences, whereas navigating primarily addresses how they overcome immediate obstacles encountered along their journey. Qualitative critical research methodologies, including semi-structured interviews, have been utilised to collect and analyse data from survivors of MSHT and practitioners who support survivors in various capacities in the UK. Central to this research is the emphasis on amplifying the voices of survivors and recognising their pivotal role in MSHT knowledge production. However, the perspectives of practitioners who work with survivors have been included to provide a holistic understanding of life after MSHT in the UK.

The structure of this thesis has followed a non-traditional path compared to conventional academic writing. Survivor voices have been integrated into this thesis from the beginning, in line with Dang's (2021) ideals of prioritising survivors' perspectives and scholarship. This strategy is deliberately continued throughout the thesis to fully engage the humanising research underpinned by feminist perspectives that shaped this work.

1.3 Theoretical Underpinnings

This thesis is composed with the understanding that the nature of research concerning people's lives cannot be adequately comprehended within the confines of a single theoretical context. It thus aligns with the concept of theoretical synergy proposed by Meghji (2021) and Brah's (1996) notion of creolised theory. These approaches emphasise the necessity of employing multiple theoretical and conceptual frameworks to study the complexity of social reality (Brah, 2022). Therefore, this research examines the journeys of survivor women who participated in this research within weathering. This theory encompasses aspects of other theories, such as Black feminist theory, including intersectionality and postcolonial theory.

Black feminist theory is fundamental in examining the experiences of survivors of MSHT from various racial backgrounds, as it recognises individuals as knowledgeable agents for social change whose politics are often ignored or misinterpreted (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019). Therefore, applying Black feminist thought in the context of this research goes beyond merely referring to women racialised as Black. It is employed in the same way it was utilised by women who "mobilised the figure of Black as a political colour rather than skin tone," whose biographies or that of their ancestors likely have histories of migration (Brah, 2022, p. 36). Political

blackness has been defined to include women “who originate from or have ancestry in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, as well as women of Indigenous and bi-racial backgrounds” (Swaby, 2014, p.12). Therefore, the Black in Black feminism is theorised in the context of this thesis as a political colour, not of skin tone. As Hamad (2020) aptly provided, terms used to describe race are imprecise because race is not biological; it is imposed. Hence, the categorisation of individuals as "White," "Black," or "a Person of Colour" is primarily a political matter rather than being grounded in any inherent characteristics. They are determinants of the privilege or prejudice associated with people (Hamad, 2020). Black feminism encompasses a political and theoretical perspective focused on affirmation and liberation, representing a politics of ethical freedom (Lewis, 2020). It was not merely “against” various forms of oppression and exclusion but was equally “for” the collective creation of a self-affirming, confident, constructive, and optimistic “presence,” emphasising “a new cultural politics of representation” (Gunaratnam, 2014, p. 1).

Postcolonial theory is a framework that examines the social, cultural, and political impact of colonialism, particularly in the aftermath of decolonisation (Gandhi, 2019). It focuses on the legacies of colonial rule and how these legacies continue to influence contemporary societies, cultures, and power structures (Gandhi, 2019) because it recognises that although the physical and formal structures of colonialism may have been dismantled, the colonial world continues to influence lives (Fanon, 1990/1961; Hall & Schwarz, 2018; Mbembe, 2019). Postcolonial theory is especially relevant for examining the dynamics of power, identity, inequality and resistance globally (Ashcroft et al., 2006). It often intersects with other critical theories, such as feminism and critical race theory, to explore the composite and interconnected nature of oppression and resistance in postcolonial contexts (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997). Intersectionality is discussed in further detail in section 1.4.1.

Dr Arline T. Geronimus coined weathering to refer to a process that encompasses the physiological effects of living in marginalised communities that endure racial, ethnic, religious and class discrimination. It is a process of hopeful, hard-working, responsible, skilled, and resilient people dying from the physical toll of constant stress on their bodies because they live in a rigged, degrading, and exploitative system (Geronimus, 2023). In short, weathering relates to the cumulative and detrimental effects of chronic stress on people’s health.

Geronimus coined weathering to specifically understand why people belonging to a particular race faced higher health disparities, with chronic stress having a vital influence on their physical and mental health over time. However, while Geronimus' articulation of weathering focuses on its effects on the body and how it can be used to understand and eliminate population health inequity, she also recognises that weathering is a human process about any oppressed, marginalised or exploited groups who employ high effort coping to survive day-to-day and incorporates the broader social policies and standard treatment of those who are "Othered."[1]

It includes experiences that erode people's opportunities to progress and recognises the efforts people employ to push back at the erosion. Weathering thus fits the analysis of life after MSHT, as weathering is a contranym, capable of describing deterioration and erosion but also signalling strength and endurance (Geronimus, 2023). Weathering reflects the resistance of survivors in all conditions (Beutin, 2023). Being aware that survivors are eroded by their experiences of exploitation but also by the systems they encounter after leaving exploitation and can also be resilient, agentic individuals is vital. This multidimensional view allows for a holistic understanding of the survivor journey and is a valuable way to re-evaluate policies and practices.

Thus, weathering broadly considers the "total climate" of survivors' journeys, considering the totality of their experiences, including external factors imposed by intricate and inadequate systems. Their struggles, resilience, resistance and politics of survival reveal that this climate is anti-freedom because "while the air of freedom might linger around the ship, it does not reach into the hold, or attend the bodies in the hold" (Sharpe, 2016 p. 104). Sharpe also used the weather (not the term weathering) in her work to refer to: "the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack… anti-blackness is pervasive as climate" (p. 104).

Weathering is further pertinent to this research because it allows for hearing survivors' whole stories. It unearths not only accounts of incredible suffering and what is sensationalist to garner funding and interest

[1] Concepts of "Other," "Othering," "the Other," "an Other," "Otherness" refers to the social and psychological process of classifying people or groups as profoundly different from oneself or one's own group. It involves constructing a division between the "self" and the "Other", often resulting in the dehumanisation or marginalisation of the "Other". (See Said, 2003/1978; Fanon, 1990/1961, Ahmed, 2000).

(Nicholson, 2022; Quirk, 2023) but also what may be understood as the mundane of everyday life where survivors settle into ordinary life (Brennan, 2014). This is important because survivor narratives humanise, and a humanising approach is a complete approach, a "total climate" to understanding the survivor journey. Their narratives are essential to allow survivors to reclaim or recreate their identities (Green et al., 2020), revealing that survivors are more than their experiences of exploitation and are powerful change agents who are activists and much more (Nicholson, 2022). Exploitation is an interruption (Brennan, 2014), a disruption (Lazzarino et al., 2023) to plans, a journey, a life, but not who a person is.

Weathering leaves room to view the neoliberal heroics of resilience and the victim politics of vulnerability with its "specific feminist, anti-racist and decolonial intersectional attentiveness; it also recommits to the need for an analysis of structural and systematic violence as an essential to thinking through life in a changing climate" (Neimanis & Hamilton, 2018, p. 83). Finally, weathering is comprehensive enough to accommodate vital theories, as already mentioned. It interrogates power dynamics and the interplay with race. It accommodates feminist praxis to visibilise how and why weathering occurs and how and why people endure and persevere amidst adversity, making it more relevant to this research. The following section will delve into the "why women" question, examining women's marginalisation to explain why this research employs this gender focus.

1.4 Why Women?

This research was initially designed to focus on women and young people. However, the focus was altered midway through the process due to challenges securing access to interview young people, as explained in Section 3.4.2. This section describes why focusing solely on women is still essential, starting with intersectionality.

1.4.1 Intersectionality

The term "women" is not used in this research to suggest in any manner that women have universal needs, struggles, and victories. It is used with an acknowledgement that women have their differences, often informed by the intersections of their identity aspects such as race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ability, ethnicity, and age, among others that shape and shift their experiences in the world (Brah, 2022; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2020; Hull et al., 1982).

Black feminists, such as Hull et al. (1982), identified the interlocking systems of oppression, which gave rise to the concept of intersectionality. Crenshaw (1989) put a name to what scholars before her already identified, coining the term intersectionality to acknowledge that Black women face double discrimination due to race and gender. Intersectionality, according to Crenshaw (1989), is a metaphor for the compounding of multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage that conventional thinking often fails to comprehend. Crenshaw notably used the analogy of traffic intersection to describe that Black women experience discrimination flowing from various angles. In her traffic intersection metaphor, Crenshaw described a Black woman in a traffic intersection where discrimination came from every different lane. Should an accident occur, the Black woman could be harmed by a single car coming from either lane or by multiple cars coming from separate lanes. Intersectionality thus calls for multitudinous ways of thinking to understand the oppressions that different women face. Recognising that race, class and sex set women's experiences apart has disrupted the tendency of homogenising women (Davis, 1981). Intersectionality is not only beneficial for understanding the complexities that Black women navigate daily but also helpful for all women, and it is an apt way of understanding women's lives (McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006b).

While some exploitative elements may affect men and women similarly, women are usually influenced by additional factors specific to them – not because women are inherently vulnerable, but because systems exist that make women vulnerable (GAATW, 2010) and have thus been reported over the years to account for more than half of the Worlds' trafficked persons (UNODC, 2018), even though notably over recent years, more male survivors have been identified (UNODC, 2022). Nevertheless, women's exploitation and after-exploitation experiences may differ from men's in several ways. For example, women experience physical or severe violence at the hands of traffickers at a rate three times higher than men (UNODC, 2022). Women and girls are primarily impacted by sexual exploitation (Lightowlers et al., 2021; UNODC, 2018), and women produce physical bodies – they can become pregnant and possibly bear children, which can uniquely shape their lives. Their shared experiences of oppression make them vulnerable to exploitation in specific contexts (Hodges et al., 2023), including certain types of work, as noted in the following section.

1.4.2 Women and "Women's Work" in the UK

Women are disproportionately affected by exploitation that occurs in labour that is hidden from the public eye, such as domestic work, where housework is traditionally considered women's work. Most domestic workers are migrant women (Anderson, 1993, 2007; Mantouvalou, 2020; Mantouvalou & Sedacca, 2022; Oxfam & Kalayaan, 2008), as women, especially from the Global South, increasingly migrate to the Global North to do "women's work" in the domestic sphere (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2001, p. 3). Therefore, most people found in domestic servitude situations are women (Broad & Gadd, 2022), a type of exploitation reported to last longer than others, with an average number of days spent found in one study to be 1022 (2.8 years) (Lightowlers et al., 2022).

Women who choose or are compelled to take up domestic work as a career, such as Migrant or Overseas Domestic Workers (MDWs) in the UK, are specifically vulnerable to exploitation, often subjected to sexual assault and rape and other abuse, such as physical and psychological abuse at the workplace (Anderson, 1993; ASI, 2021; Human Trafficking Foundation, 2022; Mantouvalou, 2015; Kalayaan, 2014; Stepnitz, 2009). Unfortunately, domestic workers are usually excluded from various workplace protections, such as health and safety inspections, because of the private nature of their work (Mantouvalou, 2012, 2020).

In the UK, the government had made MDWs even more vulnerable to exploitation by reducing their protections and freedoms over the years by tying them to one employer (Anderson, 1993), even though their vulnerabilities had been known before the boom of MSHT in the early 2000s as Anderson's (1993) research demonstrated. Before 2012, MDWs could change employers (but remain in the domestic work sector) and had other rights under the 1998 Migrant Domestic Worker Visa (also known as the Overseas Domestic Worker Visa or ODW). This changed in 2012 when the ODW visa was amended, which tied MDWs to their employers and made it impermissible for them to switch employers regardless of whether they experienced exploitation and abuse. If they leave said employment or run away, they lose their secure immigration status and become trapped in cycles of exploitation (Mantouvalou, 2015). The ODW visa thus creates dependence and a ripe environment for exploitation and is a "Visa of enslavement" (Mantouvalou, 2015, p. 348).

The ODW was retained after the UK enacted the Modern Slavery Act (MSA) 2015, an Act passed in the UK which applies to England and Wales,[2] to address and prevent MSHT. The UK is said to be tolerating slavery and conditioning situations of severe exploitation in its treatment of MDWs by refusing them legal protections that place them in greater vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, and when they escape such conditions, they face further vulnerabilities as they become undocumented (Mantouvalou, 2015, 2020). Changes made in 2016 now permit MDWs to change employers during the six months of their visa but still tie them to the domestic work sector (Mantouvalou, 2023). The ability to switch employers could have been a positive move; however, it is ineffective as it may be impractical - for instance, it is improbable that an employer would hire an ODW for only three months or whatever duration is left of their visa (Mantouvalou, 2023), thus making it practically challenging to change employers. ODWs who are identified as victims of MSHT may remain in the UK for up to two years (Home Office, 2016a). This position is also challenged by other factors revealed in Chapter Two, such as the fear of deportation or removal from the UK and challenges associated with the UK's system of identification of victims of MSHT (Mantouvalou, 2023), as further discussed in section 2.4.

This section briefly highlighted the significance of recognising specific factors related to women to understand how they might impact their life paths post-MSHT. Focusing on women is not meant to deny men's and children's exploitation; instead, it highlights the fact that women have specific experiences explicit to them that require particular attention. As Kempadoo and Shih (2023) indicate, foregrounding women's lives and experiences is necessitated by knowing that women have been disproportionately affected by poverty, insecure migration, debt bondage, and the international migrant workforce. While some argued that overly focusing on women can leave other populations unattended (Loseke & Cahill, 1984), the intention is not to do that; instead, it ensures that women's specific needs are not ignored, overlooked, or simplified. The following section delves into the terminology pertinent to the thesis.

[2] Interviews for this research exclusively involved women residing in England, thus the emphasis on the MSA. It is noteworthy that Northern Ireland and Scotland have distinct MSHT legislation in place.

1.5 Terminology and H (er) stories

1.5.1 Slavery and its Legacies

In law, the definition of slavery in the Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery of 1926 has been recognised as the authoritative definition of slavery to date. Article 1 (1) provides that slavery is “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised. Sub-article 2 specifies what the slave trade includes:

> All acts involved in the capture, acquisition, or disposal of a person with the intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a slave acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged, and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves.

The 1926 Convention never specified what those “acts” were. When the United Nations upheld this legal definition in its Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery 1956, it listed and defined certain acts that may be considered as slavery, namely by listing them as debt bondage, servile forms of marriage, and the exploitation of children and adolescents by persons other than their parents or guardians (Brownlie, 1992).

However, there has been a lack of clarity regarding the legal meaning of slavery in international law, and the Bellagio-Harvard Guidelines on the Legal Parameters of Slavery of 2012 set out to provide such clarity. However, it is noteworthy that the voices of formerly enslaved individuals have been excluded from the international legal definitions of slavery. Nicholson et al. (2018) assert that survivors of slavery play a crucial role in shaping the definitions related to slavery and freedom.

Despite legal abolition, the enduring consequences of slavery continue to present intricate challenges for some people today. Slavery encompassed an economic structure and a deeply ingrained racist dimension that assigned racial identities to slavery and freedom, designating them as Black and White, respectively (O’Connell Davidson, 2022). This racialisation of freedom as White laid the groundwork for the establishment of White supremacist societies, and it is essential to note that the legal abolition of slavery did not lead to the automatic eradication of White supremacy (O’Connell Davidson, 2022). Thus, even after the legal abolition of slavery, systemic racism persisted, leading to institutionalised discrimination against people of African descent and

other people of colour. Today, racial inequalities in income, education, housing, and criminal justice directly result from this legacy. When slavery, past or present, is considered, it is apt to recognise that those previously expelled from humanity altogether (Mbembe, 2019), especially Black people whose racialisation became synonymous with slavery during transatlantic slavery, resulting in being Black being excluded from the realm of the human (O'Connell Davidson, 2022) are still affected by its legacies today. As Bhambra (2015) aptly provided, the injustices of displacement, dispossession, enslavement, and domination are not and have not been overcome by extending ''equal citizenship'' to those who were previously excluded from it and subjugated by it.

A pertinent example can be found in the experiences of several Black and Brown British citizens who continue to be treated as foreign or labelled as second or third-generation migrants despite being formally recognised as British citizens. Their treatment, along with that of their descendants, remains deeply troubling (de Noronha, 2020). The Windrush Scandal of 2018 is a remarkable illustration of this, where people who had lived in the UK before 1973 were improperly denied access to their rights and entitlements, with some even being forcibly removed from the UK. This underscores the unsettling reality that the settled status of Black Britons could still be subject to revocation (de Noronha, 2020).

It is impossible to detail all the challenges faced by Black individuals in the UK throughout history. However, it is notable that Black people and other people of colour have always resisted and fought against the problems caused by racial inequality and discrimination. Most recently, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has emerged as a powerful force in the continuing fight for racial equality and justice worldwide. Born out of the need to address systemic racism and police violence against Black individuals, the BLM has provoked dialogues, protests, and debates on racial discrimination, inequality, and social justice concerns. [3]

1.5.2 Human Trafficking and the "White Slave Trade"

Human trafficking as a term arose from the panics surrounding the highly gendered and racialised "white slave trade", a period between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, regarding the

[3] See Khan-Cullors & Bandele (2020) on more on the history and genesis of the BLM.

alleged “procurement, by force, deceit, or drugs, of a white woman or girl against her will, for prostitution” (Doezema, 1999, p. 25). However, trafficking is not new; it is the understanding that it is a severe social concern that is new (Weitzer, 2014), and there now exists an internationally agreed-upon definition of trafficking in persons. Before delving into the internationally accepted definition, it is crucial to briefly examine the history of the term “human trafficking” and how it has been primarily applied to women. Women’s relationships with trafficking and their historical influence on the development of MSHT, specifically the understanding of the “origins of the regime of human trafficking: the birthing process of the white slave traffic” (Allain, 2017, p.5), which immensely influenced anti-trafficking work, policies, and legislation to date (Faulkner, 2018) is vital.

It was on account of White European and American women and girls that the term “trafficking” was constructed, specifically for those believed to be trafficked during the “white slave trade”. A typical image of a “white slave” was that of a young and naïve, innocent female (Doezema, 2010; Lammasniemi, 2017), frequently described as forced, duped, lured, trapped, abducted, and coerced into prostitution (Kempadoo et al., 2012). The prevailing image of the trafficker was always that of an evil immigrant non-White male (Doezema, 2010; Kempadoo et al., 2012; Lammasniemi, 2017). Therefore, the idea of human trafficking has strong racialised, anti-migration, and anti-prostitution foundations, and its emergence is primarily located in concerns in the “white slave trade” that, in actual effect, was about cross-border migrations by women (Sanghera, 2012). It was also racialised in that the victims were White European women, excluding Black or other women and girls of colour and their alleged perpetrators were non-White immigrant men – the narrative incapable of coming to grips with White European or American women being voluntarily involved with foreign, non-White males (Doezema, 1999). The only workable explanation was that these White girls were being coerced, drugged, tricked, or trapped (Doezema, 1999).

“White slavery” narratives contribute to how women’s victimisation is understood by emphasising innocence and coercion as vital aspects of who a victim should be, which became the dominant image and narrative of a trafficked woman, which resonates today, with scholars drawing parallels with the past to present approaches, policies, and laws towards the treatment of survivors (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Bernstein, 2007, 2010, 2018;

Chapkis, 2004; Doezema, 1999, 2001; Faulkner, 2018; Kempadoo et al., 2005; Lammasniemi, 2017; Loyens & Paraciani, 2021).

In causing moral panics surrounding prostitution, “white slavery” also has, besides formulating a dominant image of a victim of trafficking, contributing to sexual exploitation, overshadowing all other forms of trafficking. Thus, for a long time, there has been a tendency to conflate trafficking with sex work, subsuming all trafficking into trafficking for sexual exploitation and associating all sex work with trafficking (Bernstein, 2007, 2010, 2018; Brennan, 2008, 2014; Sanghera, 2012). This was the case even though women can be trafficked for various reasons, including but not limited to sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced industrial and agricultural work, and others (Bernstein, 2018; Brennan, 2014; Palumbo, 2015; Suchland, 2015).

The moral panics surrounding “white slavery” led to the enforcement of international Conventions to combat “white slavery”, and those conventions set the foundation for anti-human trafficking legislation today (Doezema, 2001; Faulkner, 2018; Lammasniemi, 2017). The Conventions predominantly focused on “protecting” and “rescuing” women and girls from prostitution through criminalisation (Faulkner, 2018). They hold particular significance as they have shaped contemporary policies and agreements concerning trafficking. They serve as a testament to how international instruments can be driven by a fear of safeguarding the well-being of women and children by sometimes curbing their freedom of movement (Faulkner, 2018). None of these agreements provided a formal definition for the term “human trafficking,” however they provided foundations rooted in concerns regarding the “sexual slavery” of women and girls; they also reflect racial tensions and prevailing attitudes towards the roles and vulnerabilities of these individuals (Faulkner, 2018). Notably, these Conventions underscore the inherent need to safeguard a specific category of women from “sexual slavery”, emphasising that the well-being of White women was of paramount concern to the international community.

The resemblances of “white slavery” with contemporary anti-trafficking rhetoric are remarkable (Doezema, 1998). “Both narratives, particularly in popular culture and the media, toy with details of innocence and ruin of the victim, coupled with the demonisation of foreign men” (Lammasniemi, 2017, p. 65). While numerous legal measures have been enacted at both national and international levels to address “trafficking,” the legal

frameworks have exhibited a notable degree of stability. The legal responses to trafficking could be considered even more intrusive than during the peak of the "white slavery" hysteria in the early twentieth century (Lammasniemi, 2017). Although the idea behind the passing of legislation was to curb the "white slave trade", eventually "trafficking", and "protect" women and girls, this was not the result. Instead, these laws had negative implications on women's right to freedom of movement, resulting primarily from how victimhood was constructed, implications that permeate anti-trafficking efforts today.

The "white slavery" panic on trafficking died down, but narratives of sex trafficking suddenly re-emerged after almost a century of dormancy, reviving narratives of the horrors of the "white slave trade" (Bernstein, 2018). The revival of the debate on trafficking in persons, specifically surrounding the "new slavery" in the mid-1990s, again predominantly centred on women, mainly focusing on sexual exploitation. Debates were powered by patriarchal assumptions of the extent of women's capacities to decide what they do with their bodies and prostitution became part of the "sexual slavery" narrative, portraying women as incapable and choice-less (Bernstein, 2018; Suchland, 2015). Global issues that lead to migration and why some women choose to or were driven by "social circumstances rather than brute force or organised crime" to engage in specific career paths or migrate were ignored (Bernstein, 2018, p. 4). The response to frame women and girls in this way created a "veritable rescue industry" (Agustín, 2007, p. 4) that hurt more than it protected whilst advancing paternalistic and moralistic control impositions on women's and girls' lives. The framework of trafficking thus became more suited to the aims of NGOs and governments and less so to the needs of the women it purports to protect (Bernstein, 2018). Therefore, besides the falsehoods of the dominant image of the trafficked victim, the denial of the agency of those exploited is also severely criticised (Agustín, 2006; Andrijasevic, 2014; Doezema, 2010; Kempadoo et al., 2012; O'Connell Davidson, 2013; Soderlund, 2005).

To facilitate a perceived need for international cooperation between states, the United Nations established the Convention on Transnational Organised Crime of 2000, the leading international instrument in the fight against transnational organised crime. It is supplemented by three protocols collectively referred to as the Palermo Protocols, named after the city they were concluded in, dealing with international crime - the Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the

Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air and The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition. For this thesis, only the first Protocol has relevance, and it will be referred to as the Trafficking Protocol within the context of this thesis to distinguish it from the other two Palermo Protocols. Until this protocol, there was no comprehensive international definition of trafficking whose key components were satisfactory. A commonly agreed-upon definition of trafficking is now contained in the Trafficking Protocol, which defines trafficking in persons in Article 3 (a):

> "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation…

Even as understanding of trafficking and its definitions broadens, discussions about trafficking frequently remain centred on its most sensational aspects (O'Connell Davidson, 2006; Ditmore, 2012; Kapur, 2012). The Trafficking Protocol underscored a criminal justice perspective, which various states readily embraced, but protections for migrant and labour rights were neglected (Thibos, 2020).

Therefore, the definition of trafficking in persons provided by the Trafficking Protocol, though lauded for certain aspects, has been criticised. For example, O'Connell Davidson (2006, 2015) contends that the definition is adaptable. It defines trafficking not as a single, isolated event but as a multifaceted process involving recruitment, transportation, and control, organised with the aim of exploitation. This process unfolds over time and can manifest in various ways, lacking a specific, singular outcome. Trafficking becomes a somewhat ambiguous and flexible concept, further complicated because it describes a process rather than a discrete event (O'Connell Davidson, 2015).

One challenge arising from the understanding of trafficking as a process is that trafficking is only legally defined at the far end of the spectrum, which occurs after the trafficked person has been recruited and/or transported (Sanghera, 2012). Further, the Trafficking Protocol explicitly singles out women and children, clear primarily in its title, emphasising that they are vulnerable and that they need protection, designating women as inherently vulnerable (Ditmore, 2012; Faulkner, 2018). The drafters' choice to overtly label women and

children as vulnerable generates a link to the idea that those categorised as vulnerable should be discouraged from migrating for their safety, significantly infringing upon women's right to freedom of movement and personal agency (Faulkner, 2018). Therefore, some scholars call for the dismantling of the term "human trafficking" due to many of the challenges that follow it, not to ignore the existence of the crimes and experiences described under the term, but because the term reinforces the "culturally transmitted stereotypical images that provide for the continuation of funding and policy approaches that fail to understand the multi-layered nature of the problem and that sustain law enforcement agencies" (Spencer & Broad, 2012, p. 279).

Finally, the Trafficking Protocol does not define exploitation. Instead, it lists out what exploitation may comprise: "the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs" (Article 3(a)). It is crucial to note that this list is not exhaustive and may comprise additional forms of exploitation (Scarpa, 2008), and a list of examples does not constitute a definition.

Subsequently, attempts to combat trafficking in persons have varied over the years, and these attempts have also included reimagining trafficking as a form of "modern slavery" (O'Connell Davidson, 2016b).

1.5.3 Modern Slavery

The term modern slavery was amalgamated into law in the UK only in 2015, following the enactment of the MSA, which does not directly define it. Instead, it lists criminal offences understood as falling under the umbrella of modern slavery, such as slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking (Sections 1 and 2). There is also no internationally recognised legal definition of modern slavery (Gallagher, 2017a), unlike human trafficking, as discussed above. The enmeshing of various experiences of exploitation and employing a single term to capture them has been the bone of contention in debates.

Some problematise the use of the term "slavery" in modern slavery. Some argue that the phrase "modern slavery" carries with it imperialistic and racist connotations (Dottridge, 2017). Some scholars and practitioners believe this terminology reduces the significance of historical slavery experiences and their continued effects on people's lives (Beutin, 2017, 2023; Dottridge, 2017; O'Connell Davidson, 2017). A substantial assertion of

this discussion is the insufficient recognition of how earlier anti-slavery efforts were intertwined with Western imperialism (Quirk & Richardson, 2009). The continuous presence of Western imperialistic notions in contemporary anti-modern slavery initiatives is said to be often ignored (Kempadoo, 2015). It has also been argued that modern slavery can be viewed as an insidious form of exploitation that preserves prevailing tactics for anti-trafficking initiatives, disregarding the demands for improved labour protection and changed migration policies (Chuang, 2014; Quirk, 2011). This broad strategy has also given rise to complex intersections between modern slavery and other political priorities, such as attitudes toward the sex industry and the controversial matter of "border protection and immigration" (Quirk, 2011, p. 240).

Some scholars, however, acknowledge some positive aspects of using the term modern slavery. Murphy (2014), for instance, emphasises the importance of employing "slavery" to pay tribute to those who came before us. Some view the expansive nature of modern slavery positively because it ensures that more experiences of exploitation are recognised, extending statutory support to more people who would have previously fallen outside the limits of such support (Barlow et al., 2021).

The extensive debates regarding the use of terminology cannot be fully covered here. However, for consistency, the abbreviation "MSHT" will be utilised throughout this thesis when referring to modern slavery and human trafficking. This choice acknowledges the ongoing debates and recognises that the experiences of women addressed in this thesis have occurred in the UK, where the term modern slavery is prevalent, particularly in law and policy in England and Wales, but also that the term trafficking is still in use.

1.5.4 Exploitation

The notion of exploitation within the framework of MSHT remains debatable despite being a pivotal element of the experiences covered by MSHT. No universally or nationally established definition exists for exploitation in MSHT, leading to a considerable challenge, resulting in a lack of clarity and consistency in how it is understood and implemented. While the third section of the MSA is titled "meaning of exploitation," it primarily enumerates the offences that qualify an individual as a victim of exploitation under the MSA. These include slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour, sexual exploitation, organ removal, and offences relating to securing certain services from specific individuals. The lack of a definition for exploitation has

consequences for those vulnerable to exploitation, individuals whom policymakers strive to protect but seldom include in the discussions where such definitions are constructed (Howard, 2020). This absence of a distinct definition also stresses severe forms of exploitation, such as those mentioned in section three of the MSA.

In this thesis, mainly because the primary focus is not on women's experiences of exploitation, the term exploitation will encompass any potential (or revealed) lived experiences of exploitation by the women, keeping in mind that the precise form of exploitation may remain unidentified. For instance, as demonstrated by the UK's National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the UK government's mechanism for identifying, counting, and supporting survivors of MSHT, where people are sometimes categorised as victims of unknown exploitation (Burland, 2021).

1.5.5 Victims and Survivors

People subjected to MSHT are identified as victims of crime. Thus, victims are at the centre of MSHT, as they are the evidence of those crimes (Pickering et al., 2017). The victim narrative has been understood as the narrative of ongoing suffering (Hunter, 2010), and within MSHT, a victim is a highly gendered "innocent" or "naïve victim" who is pardoned of fault because she lacks agency (Russell, 2014). There is an international understanding that victims should be protected no matter what, whether they see themselves as victims (Broad & Gadd, 2022). This leads to narratives that a victim should be "rescued" and "returned." This approach has led to the passing of laws and policies that have been described as carceral (Bernstein, 2010), particularly affecting women and leading to their further disenfranchisement, ignoring their agency by emphasising their victimhood as discussed in Section 1.4 above and making them "gendered subjects of care" (Stolic, 2023, p. 1366). The victim label has thus been problematised by various scholars, as it is a simplistic representation of the trafficking experience and silences the voices of those who lived this experience, denying their independence and strength. Numerous women, particularly those in the sex industry, rarely regard themselves as victims; this is a term they learn from strangers (Agustín, 2004). In contrast to the label of "victim," the term "survivor" is more optimistic, yet it also comes with challenges.

The survivor narrative can be "described as a heroic quest narrative, in the course of which the phoenix rises from the ashes", and it is preferred "in part because it offers the survivor a sense of power that was missing from the victim discourse" (Hunter, 2010, p. 186). Survivor labels paint a picture of agentic individuals who do not passively experience abuse (Williamson & Serna, 2018), and the term survivor evokes the image of a person who possesses characteristics which are perceived as positive, such as strength and recovery (Thompson, 2000). Williamson and Serna (2018) assert that survivor narratives project an image of opposition and reacquisition of power. Framing victims as survivors constructs a different, less pathetic, and more reasonable battered woman embodying the cultural values of strength rather than weakness and agency instead of passivity (Dunn, 2005; Papendick & Bohner, 2017). However, emphasising either people being victims or survivors is problematic. Stringer (2014) provides that doing so can be blinding in two ways: one – highlighting the negativity of the victim prevents us from seeing cases in which victim recognition is progressive, and two – emphasising the positivity of the agent blinds us to the workings of victim blame, in particular, how victim-blame in sexual harm draws upon constructions of women as self-responsible agents.

The term survivor, while preferred, is also ascribed by other people – who attach it to those with lived experience, and it is generously used within the MSHT discourse in the UK, often by non-survivors (Hutchison & Esiovwa, 2021). Those affected are sometimes left in a dilemma of how to act or identify. Some learn that to get specific outcomes, they must behave accordingly, depending on who they speak to. For instance, securing sympathy and accessing MSHT support often require them to present as victims instead of agents (Okyere & Olayowola, 2023). For those in sex work, being identified as an agent quickly leads to arrest, detention, and deportation, whereas being recognised as a victim leads to rights and possibly secure migration status. Therefore, fitting into the victim trope may carry benefits, such as qualifying for state support and protection (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Hua & Nigorizawa, 2010). However, it may also cause women to relinquish their agency and autonomy to get this support. Women must fit into the trauma story (De Angelis, 2016) by "twisting their lives into a narrative of 'worthy' victims" (Volpp, 2002, p. 509) as this may be the only way to access state-offered support services and in the meantime, ultimately giving up their autonomy and agency to repeat the dominant narrative, whether it fits their experiences (De Angelis, 2016; Jobe, 2008).

There is a move towards embracing more neutral and inclusive terms such as "people with lived experience" - terms which recognise people's divergent, complex lived experiences and agency (De Angelis, 2016). Others use the term "trafficked persons", which ascribes agency, subjectivity, and humanity to those affected (Kempadoo et al., 2005, p. xxiv). While nomenclature is significant, the ultimate decision regarding what to call people should be based on the preferences of those in question. For example, when developing research, policies, laws, or any initiatives related to people with lived experience of MSHT, it is essential to engage in a dialogue about the language to use with those directly affected rather than imposing terminology upon them (Hutchison & Esiovwa, 2021). Finally, yes, language is essential, but what is more important is to question whether we need new labels or whether we need to reform our practices and treatment of people.

The survivor women interviewed in this research were asked to share their views on labels and self-identification, as outlined in Chapter Four. Their responses varied, with the majority self-identifying as survivors. Throughout this thesis, the term survivor will be utilised not to dismiss those who dis-identified from that label but to merely use the term most women identify with. The term victim/s will only be employed in alignment with legal frameworks or where authors adopt that language. However, as much as possible, the women's pseudonyms or the term "the women" will be used when referring to the women throughout the thesis.

1.5.6 Freedom

The definition of Freedom varies depending on the individual and can evolve (Brace, 2004; Miers, 2003). However, Antislavery literature rarely deeply explores the idea of freedom (Dang, 2021), and there is limited writing about freedom after slavery and how formerly enslaved people define it (Nicholson et al., 2018). In this thesis, which aims to understand the lives of the women who participated in the study while emphasising their voices, it was appropriate to invite them to define what freedom means to them. Nineteen women were interviewed, and some, provided what freedom means to them; their views on freedom are reflected below. These reflections will remain unabridged and uninterpreted here, as they represent deeply personal definitions rooted in the women's subjective experiences, and any attempt to condense or interpret them might diminish the legitimacy of their voices.

Freedom, for me personally, is when you can sleep and wake up when you want. At least you can sleep after your work hours, you can do what you want, there is no one to tell you to do this and to do that, it's like you are free from that cage that you are in, and you can have the right to speak up. And freedom is like in the humanity, no racism, that's what freedom for me is, and respect for the workers. **Paloma**.

Being free at that time was nobody coming to ask you how you use your money, not living in the house where a lot of people have the key to the house, and anybody can walk into your room anytime. Being free is not having to share a kitchen or anything, there's no living room, there's nowhere to play, so just being in one circle for me was bondage, really being in a house where immigration can come and knock anytime… **Naomi**.

Freedom is when you are able to sleep. You are not thinking about anything. You don't think about, oh, somebody is going to tap you… somebody will call you, you know? That is freedom from me. You want to go to where you want to go. You can eat when you want to eat. You can talk when you want to talk. That, to me, is freedom. **Mary**.

Freedom means peace; your mind is healthy, your mental health even though it's I'm saying as I say this, there's no recovery after trafficking or sexual exploitation there's no recovery because you'll be having trauma after trauma, but at least you will have a freedom to start thinking like doing things according to your plans if you want to do something like I want to go to the shop you don't need any permission from anyone you'll be doing it yourself… **Nelao**.

Personally, freedom is knowing you are free to do what you want to do. You are not afraid, and like when I was going to sign at the Home Office, I wasn't free because anything could happen… But now I am free to be anything I want to be because I have gotten my papers, I am free to go to school, I am free to work, I am free to do anything… **Chosen**.

Freedom means a lot to me. A lot, a lot to me. You know, when you are free… I don't think any man will be able to tear you down. When you are free, you will be able to do things on your own. When you are free, you are able to talk. When you are free, you are able to walk freely. When you are free, you are able to do things by yourself. When you are free, you will be happy. When you are free, you will be able to interact with others. When you are free, you are able to be yourself… **Chioma**.

For me, freedom is the ability to live like everyone else without your nationality getting into play. And for me now, freedom is not here because my nationality or the place that I was born is still counting against me. So that's not true freedom. **Abebi**.

Freedom was a big relief. It limits the spirit of fear in you. It limits the worry in you. If you don't have that freedom, you can be living in any other type of any places it makes you get scared. You worry that you don't know what will happen in life. You don't know something that comes in, you know, but when you have freedom, you feel more relieved, you have that small boldness in you, you start encouraging yourself. It's like waking up from your weakness. You see yourself strong, you start giving yourself hope, you start planning, but when you don't have that freedom, you don't have plans, it's like you don't have any hope, it's like everything shatter, everything is blurry… It's like you start giving yourself encouragement that, oh, this is what I am going through, and I will do this and that to realise my dream to come true. So, without that freedom, you can't walk towards your dream. Freedom will make you walk towards your dream. Freedom will make you have hope. Freedom will make you think about people around you. It will make you do something amazing. That is how I understand freedom… **Khanyi**.

> Freedom means if you are free from the T [Trafficker], that is a big relief and again freedom to breathe actually. You can live your normal life. You don't have any control remote who can lead your life the way you want. You don't have to do that anymore… **Parisha**.

> I guess like the freedom to like to move around and do what you wanna do, and I don't know… being free in your mind will be good as well. And I am not there yet. **Naita**.

1.5.7 Remodelling Lives and Remodelling Work

In this research, the term remodelling life describes the process women undergo, as understood from their accounts and supplemented by insights from practitioners. It involves altering the structures of their lives and reshaping them (Das et al., 2001; Merriam-Webster, n.d.a) rather than erasing or fully restoring their former lives, as the standard term rebuilding lives usually implies. The women's diverse experiences will show that certain aspects of their pre-exploitation lives remain intact. These include their faith in a higher power and cultural preferences. Many are now modifying the structure of their lives to better align with life in the UK, especially for non-British nationals, or to adapt to motherhood for those who became mothers through exploitation, and to harness the empowerment gained through education for those who pursued education after exiting exploitation, among other adjustments.

The women in this study are recognised as distinct individuals whose lives were temporarily interrupted by their experiences of exploitation. In this context, their exploitation is perceived as incidental—a phase they have gone through, not who they are. As a result, they are not starting their lives from scratch, as exploitation was an interruption (Brennan, 2014). They are remodelling them with some materials from their pre-exploitation lives.

A related term is "moving-on processes. " In the context of this thesis, "moving-on" refers to the processes surrounding women's move-on from MSHT, asylum support, and other formal support systems into independent living. It is not used to imply that the women have completely forgotten about their experiences of exploitation or that they are no longer dealing with residual effects from those experiences. It is also not used in this context to mean that the women are independent of any formal support systems.

1.5.8 Liberation and Resilience

Many anti-MSHT approaches today are criticised for offering oversimplified solutions to intricate problems without addressing inequality's underlying structural and causal factors (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Hoyle et al., 2011). To challenge these simplistic notions that do not always align with people's lived experiences and often overlook broader structural considerations, this thesis employs the term liberation rather than "rescue" to signify the complexity of exiting exploitation. The term liberation acknowledges that leaving exploitation can take various forms, including those facilitated by assistance from others and those not. It also means leaving exploitation extends beyond the physical act of exiting exploitation, as it involves what happens after one physically leaves exploitation, including achieving what they perceive as freedom, autonomy, or independence, whether physical, political, social, or psychological.

The concept of resilience is generally positive; however, it has been used problematically in some contexts, making it challenging to embrace the concept of resilience uncritically (Walklate et al., 2014). For instance, focusing on individual responsibility instead of state responsibility to address structural aspects of life that lock people in structural hopelessness is problematic (Cooper, 2018). Additionally, resilience is problematic when addressing MSHT, particularly in how the "new abolitionists," as termed by O'Connell Davidson (2015, 2022), approach the issue. O'Connell Davidson criticises these abolitionists for romanticising the notion of freedom with fairy-tale narratives that depict formerly enslaved individuals seamlessly integrating into a perfectly functioning world for everyone. Such stories fail to tackle the "social structures that limit the options open to people, thereby generating unenviable choices and cramping the space for self-expression" (O'Connell Davidson, 2015, p. 205). This oversight is compounded by contemporary policies rooted in neoliberal assumptions, which naively assume that survivors can return to their communities, make viable choices, and reintegrate into caring families and societies, an approach Choi-Fitzpatrick (2012, p. 21) describes as overly simplistic and misleading.

Resilience is therefore employed throughout this thesis to refer to the women's capacity to endure, overcome, and navigate the intersecting challenges they face after MSHT. The women's resilience is recognised with the acknowledgement that they face systematic challenges. Thus, resilience in this context involves not only the

women’s ability to withstand adversity but also the strength to challenge and transform oppressive structures. The importance of understanding and celebrating the women’s resilience, highlighting their agency, contributions, and the ways they resist and persist in the face of adversity goes beyond an individual’s ability to bounce back from adversity (Masten et al., 1990). It encompasses collective efforts to challenge and change the effects of systems that perpetuate victimisation and marginalisation.

1.6 Thesis Outline

Following the introduction and overview of the thesis in this chapter, the subsequent chapters are structured as follows:

Chapter Two encompasses the literature review, delving into the existing knowledge concerning survivor journeys in the UK. It sheds light on the slow progress of the UK government in implementing protective and supportive measures for survivors. It exposes critical gaps in the literature, as it is rare to find a detailed examination of survivors’ journeys post-exploitation in the UK, which often results in overlooking their agency and innovation. **Chapter Three** provides a comprehensive account of the research process, emphasising the relevance of critical research methodologies for this study. It outlines the data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six present the research findings in a three-stage format. Chapter Four explores the women’s liberation from exploitation and their subsequent experiences. Key findings in Chapter Four include the women’s active roles in their liberation and the critical part their social connections and communities play in the immediate aftermath of their liberation. Chapter Five delves into the women’s experiences through support systems, highlighting their struggles, agency, and navigation strategies. Chapter Six concludes the findings by exploring the women’s transition into independent living (for those who did), finding that transitioning from support to independent living is also marred by challenges, especially for women doing it independently. It also examines the women’s private lives in light of their relationships - finding that they take extreme caution in managing their relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and romantic partners.

Chapter Seven situates the findings within existing literature and highlights the research's contribution to understanding survivors' lives after exploitation. **Chapter Eight** concludes the thesis by presenting policy recommendations, addressing certain limitations of the study, and proposing potential avenues for future research to expand upon these findings.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the thesis, outlining the research objectives, questions, methodology, findings, and theoretical foundations. It also articulated the rationale behind this research's exclusive focus on women. The chapter also examined various terminological elements that hold significance within this study. The subsequent chapter explores the existing knowledge on survivor journeys after MSHT in the UK.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines survivors' journeys after leaving exploitation in the UK, drawing from literature to discover gaps that this thesis seeks to address. It is crucial to note that the studies included in this chapter do not all only focus on women; some involve men and children uncovering shared experiences. The discussion of survivors' journeys is mainly within the modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) support provided by the UK government in this chapter. The chapter begins with a synopsis of the UK's policy development in supporting survivors and then examines early support provisions. Afterwards, it explores the formal identification process and its obstacles before considering survivors' long-term trajectories before concluding. The results of this literature review highlight a significant knowledge gap regarding the experiences of survivors in the immediate aftermath of leaving exploitation. Specifically, there is a lack of insight into survivors' subjective experiences of interacting with authorities, their subjective everyday experiences with support systems, and their strategies to overcome challenges within those systems. Additionally, there is limited understanding of how survivors manage their relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners.

2.2 International Obligations and National Protections

It has been recognised that survivors need to be supported in several ways after leaving exploitation to give them the best chance after MSHT, as they usually have long-term needs that may leave them vulnerable to re-exploitation or other harm (ASI, 2021; ATMG, 2010, 2013; Hodges & Burch, 2019; IASC, 2017; Jobe, 2010). Supporting survivors by providing them access to culturally competent care and services that consider the whole journey and intersecting realities of women's lives is apposite (Hodges et al., 2023). Such a holistic approach benefits survivors and the broader society, carrying significant economic and other benefits for survivors and their communities (Nicholson et al., 2019). A holistic approach resonates strongly with Black feminist theories, which advocate for a holistic understanding of how various aspects of a woman's life intersect to influence their life outcomes and choices (Crenshaw, 1990).

The UK Government often proclaims that it is leading the world in the fight against MSHT and protecting victims (Home Office, 2021a; May, 2016); however, its policy has developed in a “piecemeal, uneven and inconsistent” manner (Van Dyke, 2019, p. 47). The process of identifying victims is marked by inconsistencies (Murphy, 2018), and the quality of support provided to those identified raises questions. The UK has been slow to develop support services for survivors (Skrivánková, 2006; Young & Quick, 2006). Arguably, the crime and security focus during the early periods of response to MSHT in the UK delayed the development of human rights-based policies prioritising survivors (Broad & Turnbull, 2019).

The UK government has been slow in signing up to international and regional instruments, enacting legislation, and formulating its national policy in supporting and protecting survivors of MSHT (Jobe, 2008; Munro, 2005). Unwillingness to sign international and regional human rights instruments that aim to advance identification and support survivors of MSHT has been marked by worries that doing so will be a “pull factor” to encourage human trafficking (Balch & Geddes, 2011; Craig et al., 2019; Van Dyke, 2019). The UK only included trafficking provisions in its legislation in response to intense pressure from human rights NGOs who criticised the government for failing to incorporate provisions tackling victims’ needs and rights and continuing to prioritise MSHT as a problem of organised crime rather than a human rights issue (Craig, 2007; Munro, 2005; Van Dyke, 2019).

Some claim the UK government’s efforts to protect victims have never been a primary focus (Craig, 2007). Instead, the UK’s approach to addressing MSHT has emphasised criminalisation and immigration control rather than upholding the rights of survivors (Taran, 2001; The Future Group, 2006; Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2006). Some survivors are treated as criminals and are not recognised as victims to access government support (Lazzarino et al., 2023), and those acknowledged are frequently overlooked (After Exploitation, 2020; Schwarz & Williams-Woods, 2022).

Prioritising criminalisation over survivor protection harms the people it aims to protect (Kempadoo et al., 2012). It serves to put survivors’ needs as secondary, which means support services for survivors have been lacking or subpar, placing them at risk of re-exploitation and other harm (Jobe, 2010). The criminalisation approach also contributed to missed opportunities for the identification of survivors and led to their

criminalisation, detention, imprisonment, and removal from the UK over the years (Hales, 2017; Hales & Gelsthorpe, 2013; Hynes et al., 2019) and thus affected survivor's ability to access support after leaving exploitation. States that prioritise prosecutions rarely prioritise survivors' well-being, and survivors are often only offered protection conditional to help prosecute perpetrators (Haynes, 2004).

The human rights approach, which advocates for the identification, protection, and support of survivors of MSHT, was lagging behind the criminal justice approach. Despite the repeated recognition by the UK government that MSHT is a serious offence that infringes upon fundamental human rights, the government's response has been to criminalise and prosecute, continuing to do so despite prosecution rates remaining significantly low (Broad & Gadd, 2022; Gren-Jardan & Gleich, 2022; UNODC, 2018, 2022; UNSEEN, 2021). Notably, women are more likely than men to be convicted for MSHT offences (UNODC, 2022). Women engage in lower-level roles within trafficking operations, making them more susceptible to detection (Broad, 2015).

However, it is essential to examine the criminalisation and human rights approaches through the lens of postcolonial theory, a task that this thesis has accomplished in Chapter 7. Postcolonial theory scrutinises how colonial legacies persist in shaping social, political, and economic structures, including systems of criminalisation and human rights (Samson, 2020). The criminalisation framework primarily aims to protect states from individuals perceived as threats to their security (Schaeffer-Grabiel, 2010). In contrast, the human rights discourse originates from a system of state sovereignty where rights claims are based on national citizenship criteria, thereby excluding "non-citizens" like refugees and undocumented migrants, who often lose their rights and are dehumanised (Kempadoo et al., 2012 p. xvii).

The initial stage of policy development was chiefly prompted by international and regional pressure to act (Broad & Turnbull, 2019; Van Dyke, 2019) and reinforced by pressure from international and national organisations, which resulted in the UK Government responding with top-down political action (Broad & Turnbull, 2019). On the international level, the Trafficking Protocol, which the UK ratified in 2006, and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights drove the UK response (Van Dyke, 2019).

The Trafficking Protocol requires state parties to assist and protect victims of MSHT, guarding their privacy and identity and providing them with relevant information. It directs states to assist survivors in criminal

proceedings, provide housing, medical attention, access to employment, education, and training opportunities etc. However, the framing of the Trafficking Protocol as a problem of transnational crime led to state parties prioritising crime and prosecutions while diverting attention away from survivor protection and support (Kanics, 2017). The UK is also obligated to protect persons by mainstream United Nations instruments. On the regional level, the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings 2005 (ECAT) played a pivotal role in the UK's development of anti-human trafficking efforts. The UK Government ratified the ECAT in 2008, which commenced on 1 April 2009. The ECAT increased pressure on states to provide support and assistance to survivors of MSHT by imposing obligations concerning identification mechanisms, service and support for victims, and residency.

It is worth noting, however, that the UK government was initially reluctant to endorse all the provisions of both the Trafficking Protocol and the ECAT, allegedly owing primarily to a lack of understanding of human trafficking (Craig, 2017) and fears that granting reflection periods and permission to remain in the UK for victims will act as a "pull factor" for illegal migration (Home Office, 2006). At the national level, campaigning by civil society groups, courts and research-informed evidence and reports brought about substantial policy development (Van Dyke, 2019). Other significant regional instruments that required the UK to support and protect survivors of MSHT are the European Union directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (EU directive/trafficking directive) (2011/36)[4] and the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 4) (ECHR).

Before national legislation specific to MSHT was enacted, the UK responses were through various pieces of legislation that were not explicitly intended to deal with human trafficking yet included provisions of human trafficking. These comprised the Sexual Offences Act of 1956, which primarily focused on criminal law relating to sexual offences. This Act was repealed mainly by the Sexual Offences Act of 2003 (sections 57, 58 and 59), which made new provisions about sexual offences, their prevention, and the protection of children from harm

[4] In terms of section 68 of the Nationalities and Borders Act 2022, rights, powers, liabilities, obligations, restrictions, remedies, and procedures derived from the Trafficking Directive so far as their continued existence would otherwise be incompatible with provision made by or under that Act.

from other sexual acts and contained offences related to trafficking for sexual exploitation, emphasising the element of travel.

Immigration and asylum legislation also incorporated provisions of trafficking historically, and these are trends emerging again through the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (NABA) and the Illegal Migration Act 2023 (IMA), which will be discussed further in Chapter Seven. Thus, the tendency to associate MSHT with immigration is not new. In the UK, the Immigration Act of 1971 and the Asylum and Immigration Act of 2004 were also utilised to deal with some issues relating to human trafficking. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 contained section 145, which made facilitating and transporting a person into, out of, or within the UK to control them in prostitution an offence. Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act 2004 also contained provisions for trafficking activity, including organ and labour trafficking (sections 2 and 4). The Coroners and Justice Act of 2009 (Section 71) also established offences related to holding someone in slavery or servitude and compelling them to engage in forced or compulsory labour.

However, policy framing around MSHT was “problem structuring” instead of “problem-solving”, and this eventually divided trafficking into two distinct issues: sexual exploitation and labour exploitation (Broad & Turnbull, 2019, p. 121). Labour exploitation only became recognised as a problem after a considerable focus on sexual exploitation. Trafficking for labour exploitation thus received scant attention during the early stages of policy development in the UK, leading to policy responses focusing on trafficking for sexual exploitation (Broad & Turnbull, 2019). Therefore, forced labour was not legislated for and could not be prosecuted in the UK at that time unless it was proven to be associated with human trafficking (Craig, 2017). This resulted in the first stages of policy action, seeking ways to rescue young women who were usually sex workers (Agustín, 2007).

2.2.1 The Modern Slavery Strategy and the Modern Slavery Act (MSA)

In November 2014, the UK government launched its modern slavery strategy (MSS) 2014, setting out an approach to tackling MSHT in the UK (Home Office, 2014). Finally, in 2015, the UK enacted legislation specific to MSHT – the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (MSA) and consolidated all relevant legislation pertaining to MSHT into a single Act (Broad, 2015). The government has hailed the MSA as a prideful achievement for the UK,

which is said to be leading the world in combating MSHT and protecting victims (Gov.UK, 2021a). The MSA received Royal Assent on March 26, 2015, and came into force on October 29, 2015. In a paradoxical turn of events, 2015 marked the year when British taxpayers finished paying off the debt incurred by the British government in 1835 to compensate British enslavers following the abolition of slavery, with nothing given to those enslaved or their descendants (Fowler, 2020).

Nevertheless, the MSA aims to “make provision about slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking, including provision for the protection of victims; to make provision for an independent anti-slavery commissioner; and for connected purposes” (MSA introductory note). It also aims to increase transparency, accountability, and action in preventing and addressing modern slavery throughout the supply chains of businesses operating in the UK.

While the MSA is hailed to be world-leading (Home Office, 2015) by the UK Conservative government, it has and continues to fail survivors of MSHT, and its world-leading status has been subject to debate (Broad & Gadd, 2022). There are various criticisms of the MSA, such as that it is a core element of the hostile environment policy (Broad & Gadd, 2022). The Hostile Environment Policy was put forth by Theresa May, then Conservative Home Secretary in 2012, to create “a hostile environment for illegal immigrants” (Goodfellow, 2019, p. 2) and make it extremely difficult for people with insecure immigration status to stay in the UK. Notably, hostility towards those seeking refuge in the UK, especially non-Europeans, has always existed (Mayblin, 2014). The MSA is also said to be providing false claims of tackling exploitation (Mantouvalou, 2023), and it has failed to deliver adequate survivor protection and support (ATMG, 2016a; Mantouvalou, 2018; Mellon, 2018). In fact, the MSA has been said to be lagging behind similar legislation in Northern Ireland and Scotland in terms of victim protection and support (ATMG, 2016a).

Reviews have been done on the MSA, paying particular attention to protecting survivors and how the Act is enforced. Haughey (2016) reviewed the Act just one year after its enactment and found that translating the MSA to operate in real life was challenged by issues such as a lack of training of those who were to enforce its provisions on the ground, a lack of clear understanding and knowledge of MSHT across the board and challenges regarding identification of survivors and protection of survivors during court cases.

A core component of the Act is that it established the position of an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), to be appointed by the UK Home Secretary and operate independently from the government. This independence is crucial to ensure that the IASC can effectively hold government agencies and other entities accountable for their anti-slavery efforts. However, the very first IASC resigned from his position, citing concerns of interference with his independence by the government (Dearden, 2018). The potential conflict of the Home Office's role in making the IASC's appointment has also been questioned (Fox, 2023), seeing as the Home Office "is the lead government department for immigration and passports, drugs policy, crime, fire, counterterrorism and police" (Gov.UK. n.d. a).

The IASC is tasked to monitor and evaluate the efficiency of the UK's response to MSHT, including examining the policies and practices of authorities and advising to improve anti-slavery efforts. The IASC also ensures that survivors receive the necessary support, research MSHT in the UK and collaborate with various organisations to develop approaches for combating MSHT. The IASC raises public awareness about MSHT and engages with civil society, non-governmental organisations, and others to create a more informed community. The IASC thus occupies a critical role established by the MSA and has "proved an effective proponent in enhancing the response from local government and civil society" (ATMG, 2018. p. 5); therefore, the IASC's importance for survivors cannot be underrated. However, this position was left vacant from April 2022 and only filled in October 2023, at such a crucial time in the landscape of legal and policy changes regarding MSHT and immigration in the UK (as discussed in Chapter Seven), thus leaving the UK government effectively unchecked during that time by its own appointed watchdog (Dearden, 2023). Eleanor Lyons' new appointment as IASC has received mixed reception. Key figures in the UK's anti-slavery sector have endorsed her selection (Hewitt, 2023), while other stakeholders have voiced criticisms. Some critics label her as an inexperienced "Conservative patsy" who is overly compliant with government directives (Syal & Taylor, 2023, para. 1).

The previous trends recognised earlier of scattering provisions relating to MSHT in various legislative pieces have begun to re-emerge. While there is a dedicated Act for MSHT, provisions affecting survivors have been placed in the NABA and the IMA. This is to continue the fight against irregular migration as displayed in the

UK's New Plan for Immigration released on May 24, 2021, which is aimed at revamping the UK immigration system through three key objectives (Gov.UK, 2021b, para 8):

> To increase the fairness and efficacy of our system so that we can better protect and support those in genuine need of asylum;
>
> To deter illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of people smuggling networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger and
>
> To remove more easily from the UK those with no right to be here.

The above will be achieved through substantive policy and legislative measures, some of which will be discussed further in section 7.2.2. However, this is regressive, undermines survivor support and protection, and continues the age-old trend of emphasising migration and criminality and relegating survivor support and protection. These provisions have been said to have been put in place deliberately to dismantle protections already in place and to undermine the MSA (Thibos, 2023).

The law and policy development on trafficking in the UK, therefore, took a scattered fashion; it started to become stabilised after the MSA but has now begun to be scattered again, being attributed once more to legislation meant for immigration. Although the UK government started gradually putting legislative provisions to criminalise trafficking in place, there were no such or similar provisions for protecting trafficked persons in the early years before the Modern Slavery Strategy (MSS) and the MSA. Only those willing to assist with trafficking investigations were provided temporary protections (Burgoyne & Darwin, 2006). The following section, thus, takes a brief turn back to earlier years of MSHT provision in the UK, retracing how early efforts to support survivors manifested despite a lack of dedicated legislation or policy.

2.3 Initial Attempts at Assistance

Early efforts to support survivors in the UK were based on women trafficked for sexual exploitation. Government-backed efforts to support women exploited for sexual exploitation were unavailable until 2003 (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005). The POPPY project was thus founded in 2003 to provide high-quality support, advocacy, and accommodation to women with various support needs, some of whom were trafficked for sexual exploitation (Sachrajda, 2008). Besides housing, POPPY supported women

with financial assistance, health services and treatment, specialist counselling, criminal and immigration-related legal advice, education and employment opportunities and other support as needed (Eaves, n.d.a). The POPPY project was carried out by the charity Eaves, which provides support and supplementary services for women who have experienced violence to enable them to recover and regain independence (Eaves, n.d.b).

The POPPY project was, however, tied to the Home Office (HO), as the Home Office Victims and Confidence Unit funded it. The HO instituted criteria outlining how women could qualify for support under the POPPY project. These were stringent, exclusionary, and tied to criminal investigations. To qualify for support, a woman was supposed to have been trafficked for prostitution in the UK; she must have left said trafficking situation within 30 days before coming to the programme, come forward to the authorities, and be willing to cooperate with police investigations (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2006).

However, coming forward was problematic, making the requirements to access support through POPPY difficult. First, leaving exploitation is challenging; it is not merely walking away, as people are often not locked up and may physically leave at any point. However, they stay because of factors such as manipulation, coercion, the threat of destitution, homelessness, lack of knowledge of where to go and the fear of authorities, and there is usually no incentive for people to come forward to authorities (Kelly & Regan, 2000; Skrivánková, 2006). Housing has mainly been problematic, and it has been found that homelessness acted as a vulnerability to women's exploitation and a barrier to exiting exploitation (Bindel et al., 2012). These concerns are still prevalent, with women often lacking the knowledge of where to go for assistance (Broad & Muraszkiewicz, 2019; Nightingale et al., 2020), and even when they do access support services, support is often inadequate. For instance, housing remains a significant concern, with women in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) constantly not receiving safe housing options (Hibiscus, 2020). There was no survivor protection, and deportation or removal was always impending (Skrivánková, 2006; Young & Quick, 2006).

During these early stages of support, the HO consistently disregarded women's claims, including asylum claims based on torture and persecution, as often, these claims were dismissed for reasons such as having taken too long to come forward or through various means aimed at undermining the women's credibility (Ceneda, 2003; Dorling et al., 2012; Dudhia, 2020; Hales & Gelsthorpe, 2013; Hales, 2017; Muggeridge & Maman, 2011). As an

illustration, the Home Office might employ general knowledge about countries to discredit the credibility of women. For instance, reports of torture and sexual violence by women from Kenya were disregarded because the Home Office interpreted Kenya's involvement in discussions on human rights violations as a reason to doubt their assertions (Cenada, 2003). In other instances, women who base their claims on sexual orientation are sometimes tasked with providing impossible proof, such as evidence of their orientation, with corroborative evidence often disregarded as self-serving. (Dhudia, 2020). Nevertheless, failure to provide evidence undermines the credibility of their claim, while providing too much evidence may lead to it being labelled as fabricated (Dhudia, 2020).

This further rooted the fears that prevented women from coming forward, as they believed their stories would go unheard. Those accepted and granted asylum were often perceived as “respectable women” who had been victimised during their trafficking experiences (Jobe, 2008, p. 186). It is contradictory that the HO would dismiss claims of torture and persecution, especially considering that trafficked women were typically only seen as credible when recounting extreme stories of force and violence (O’Connell Davidson, 2006), which often align with the characteristics of persecution and torture. Black feminist theory, serving as both a theoretical framework and a political stance, is instrumental in analysing these narratives. It not only validates the personal stories of women that the HO may dismiss but also recognises their efforts to liberate themselves by seeking asylum away from environments of exploitation. For these women, applying for asylum in the UK represents a fight for their humanity—a struggle that black feminist theory acknowledges as a revolutionary political act and understands the pursuit of humanity as a transformative action, envisioning a world beyond the exploitation, plunder, and expropriation that underpin liberal democracies (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019).The only protection the HO provided was temporary protection for those willing to cooperate with the authorities to prosecute traffickers (Burgoyne & Darwin, 2006); however, early research indicated that sometimes women come out of trafficking in physical and psychological pain (Zimmerman et al., 2008). They may not recall information about their trafficking immediately when interrogated by the police - they may not be in a good position to take the bureaucratic steps involved in asylum processes and cooperate with authorities (Zimmerman et al., 2008). The trauma of MSHT can lead to dissociation and complex trauma responses, resulting in memory instabilities - research with trafficked women has shown that those who have post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may experience memory loss, which may impact investigations (Zimmerman et al., 2003; Zimmerman, & Pocock, 2013). Thus, early research has shown that there was a need for some women to be given adequate time after leaving trafficking to reorient themselves, and some may (or may not) need time to recover (Dickson, 2004; Hossain et al., 2010; Stephen-Smith, 2008b; Zimmerman et al., 2008, 2011).

Eaves, however, eventually lost HO funding and had to discontinue the POPPY project. Some observers opined that the project “rocked the boat” and lost HO funding after eight years of delivering specialist support. The Salvation Army (TSA), a religious organisation whose effectiveness and capability for non-discrimination and acceptance of those who fell outside its religious remit was questioned at the time (The Guardian, 2011; Robinson & Hodgson, 2011) since held the government contract for survivor support provision, the Modern Slavery and Victim Care Contract (MSVCC), taking over from POPPY (discussed in further detail in the following section).

While much focus was placed on sexual exploitation, there was growing concern about forced labour and what was needed to protect persons subjected to it (Home Office, 2007), and the HO eventually conceded that there was a need to acknowledge and protect people trafficked for other purposes, including forced labour. In response to the Morecambe Bay disaster on February 5, 2004, involving the deaths of 23 Chinese, mostly undocumented immigrant cockle pickers who were harvesting cockles in dangerous conditions on the shores of Morecambe Bay in northwest England, the UK government created the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) in 2005 (Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority, 2022). The government enacted two pieces of legislation. The Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004 established a system for registering labour providers in the agricultural and shellfish gathering industries. The licensing system came into effect in 2006. All forced labour was made a criminal offence in the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004. However, the element of protection was likewise lagging. The legislation and the formation of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) happened relatively quickly after the Morecambe Bay disaster, with the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act being passed in 2004, just a year after the tragic event. This rapid response may have prioritised regulatory measures over a deeper understanding of the needs of the victims and the broader issues

surrounding migrant labour exploitation. No time was taken to understand the needs of victims, with the legislation and GLA being formed just the year following the disaster. There were thus no specialised support services for people subjected to forced labour then because, as stated above, the focus was on supporting women trafficked for sexual exploitation, leaving others vulnerable to exploitation and re-exploitation (Skrivánková, 2006).

Meanwhile, as discussed in the preceding section, pressure for the UK to support survivors of MSHT was ongoing. However, adopting the ECAT was the most significant development in the UK's policy on identifying and supporting survivors of MSHT, following which the NRM was established in 2009. The NRM forms an integral part of the survivor journey and is thus discussed below.

2.4 Formal Identification: The NRM

Identifying survivors of MSHT should be a critical component of their journey and any comprehensive strategy to combat MSHT. It is essential to protect survivors' human rights, prosecute perpetrators, and address the root causes of MSHT. Formal identification is, therefore, necessary to women's journeys after exploitation, as it is the gateway through which they can receive support from the government. The NRM is the only government mechanism through which survivors can formally be identified and receive support from the UK government related to MSHT.

It is important to note that the NRM has come a long way since its inception in 2009. It has been reviewed and reformed over the years. The most recent at the time of writing (2023) is the changes made to the Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance (the Guidance), which has been updated to be on par with legislation introduced to bring the UK government's New Plan for Immigration into fruition. The Guidance was updated in January 2023 and July 2023 concerning the first NRM decision-making threshold, the reasonable grounds decision (RG), as discussed in section 2.4.3 below. Nonetheless, identification has proven challenging due to various factors, which will be discussed in this section. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) has faced significant criticism for several reasons, including issues related to identification, as highlighted in section 2.4.1 below. For some survivors, however, the support offered under the NRM can be the only lifeline available to them as the NRM

can be “an improvement from nothing” (Roberts, 2019, p. 154) and NRM support can be the difference between a life-changing intervention or slipping through the net (After Exploitation, 2020).

The NRM also keeps the UK government’s statistics on MSHT. Opportunities for social change may sometimes be missed when the scale of the problem is unknown. Statistics and indexes can be helpful in specific contexts as they offer evidence or indicate what support needs to be secured to respond to phenomena affecting people’s lives. They also aid in justifying decision-making while hopefully helping obtain more realistic policies and effective interventions (Gallagher, 2017b).

While the NRM keeps statistics of potential victims of modern slavery, it has been criticised for failing to comprehensively understand MSHT in the UK (Burland, 2017). Nevertheless, it has been found to provide the “most comprehensive, non-estimated set of statistics” of MSHT in the UK (Heys et al., 2022, p. 9), which has steadily been increasing over the years (ATMG, 2013). It is not within the scope of this research to discuss the politics of the numbers of survivors of MSHT. However, the reliability and accuracy of estimates in the UK (through the NRM) and the broader global context, for instance, through estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Walk Free Foundation’s Global Slavery Index, has been the subject of much debate and criticism.[5] Understanding the exact number of individuals affected by MSHT is challenging for several reasons. The hidden nature of this phenomenon, the difficulties in defining it, and the absence of precise measurement criteria all contribute to this complexity (Andrijasevic, 2010; Broome & Quirk, 2015; Cusick et al., 2009; Gallagher, 2014; Goodey, 2008; O’Connell Davidson, 2015, 2022).

Identifying individuals who have experienced exploitation under the umbrella of MSHT poses a significant challenge. This difficulty stems from various factors. Some people who have experienced exploitation may not recognise themselves as victims, particularly when subjected to grooming (Heys et al., 2022). There may also be a lack of trust in authorities and a failure to see the benefits of engaging with the NRM (ATMG, 2013; Gren-Jardan, 2020; Heys et al., 2022).

[5] See, Bales et al., 2015; 2022; Datta et al., 2019; Gallagher, 2014, 2017b; McGrath & Mieres, 2014; Mügge, 2017.

A lack of trust has been significant in how survivors engage with authorities and access support, and methods to bridge the gap have been formulated in various ways, depending on the stage in which the survivors find themselves after exiting exploitation. The police are particularly feared and distrusted by survivors, and NGOs that support survivors are in a better position to help reduce survivors' fear and mistrust of the police by working with both the police and the survivor (Van Dyke & Brachou, 2021). Some police forces now have victim navigators attached to them from the charity Justice and Care, some of whose primary responsibilities are to engage with victims in a humane, meaningful and long-term fashion, build trust, provide them with sufficient information about the processes in place, what to expect on their journeys, their entitlements, working with the police, giving advice, training and more (Justice & Care, 2021).

Women in MSHT situations may also not come forth because of restrictions by perpetrators, including limitations on accessing health services (Westwood et al., 2016) and a lack of knowledge of entitlements; for instance, women who need health services whilst in exploitation may not seek such services for fear of being charged for said services and they may encounter problems with GP registration owing to a lack of identity documents and residential addresses (Bick et al., 2017), as further articulated in section 2.5.3. The studies referenced above focused on women only. However, charging affects all survivors who have insecure immigration status. In this thesis, "insecure immigration status" applies to the immigration status of non-British nationals lacking legal permission to live or work in the UK, having no access to public funds, and being at risk of probable removal from the UK. The confusion around charging for health care for people with insecure immigration status is not unfounded; as part of the UK government's never-ending fight against (irregular) migration, there was a time when people who were refused asylum were required to pay for health services "in a bid to tackle apparent health tourism and abuse of the UK's National Health Service (NHS)" (Hargreaves et al., 2005, p. 732).

For women to access services and support, they need to know about that support and how to access it. However, women may not conceptualise their experiences as constituting needs that should be met, which reduces their opportunity to discover services and assistance (Hodges & Burch, 2019). However, "needs", as often defined in law and policy, do not always meet women's actual needs. In this way, women's experiences

that are not considered “needs” as described in law and policy will have no support (Hodges & Burch, 2019). Asylum seekers are often unsure if they are entitled to services, often lacking the knowledge of where to go, who to ask and so on, which hinders their access to services (Fang et al., 2015) and potential identification as victims of MSHT. When services are inadequately provided, women may choose not to utilise them even when they know about them (Hodges & Burch, 2019).

The processes within the NRM itself also hinder identification at times. The NRM operates in a two-step process, the first of which comprises organisations designated as first responders referring people to the NRM. The second step is then through the HO, wherein two authorities, called Competent Authorities (Cas), make decisions based on the evidence before them to confirm whether someone is a victim of MSHT. The following sections break these steps down, starting with the first responders and moving- on to the Cas to reveal the workings of the NRM and how the NRM and its associated processes impact the survivor women’s journeys after MSHT.

2.4.1 Step One: The First Responders

The first step starts outside the NRM, where the preliminary decision is made, and consent is given by the survivor concerned, where the survivor is an adult. Adults must provide informed consent, meaning the first responder must give the survivor all the information they need to make an informed decision to accept or refuse entry into the NRM. An individual is connected, or they reach out themselves to a first responder organisation- in England and Wales, this is an authority authorised to refer a potential victim of MSHT to the NRM, and there is a designated first responder list comprising certain governmental authorities and non-governmental organisations - these are the only bodies with authority to refer potential adult victims of MSHT to the NRM upon receiving consent (Home Office, 2023b).

First responders are understood to be the professionals most likely to encounter trafficked persons (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2019), although in the UK, the National Health Service (NHS) often meet victims and survivors (Hemmings et al., 2016; Metcalf & Selous, 2019; NHS England, 2016a; Oram, 2015; Westwood et al., 2016) and can play a significant role in fighting MSHT (Helle & Steele, 2019) however, the NHS is not a first responder.

There is no clarity surrounding why the NHS is not a first responder. However, suggestions have been made that this may be due to confidentiality issues (IASC, 2021). Confidentiality is essential, and this applies to all organisations dealing with survivors. However, there are ways through which arrangements for sharing confidential information can be made between professionals involved in supporting survivors. Confidentiality should thus not be a barrier to the NHS being permitted to play the vital role it can in identifying survivors as first responders. Omitting NHS professionals is a significant obstacle to the identification of survivors. As Such et al. (2020) found, the public health sector can significantly address broader determinants of MSHT. It should be given more of an opportunity to participate in identifying and supporting survivors.

The first responder role is significant as it is the port of entry for survivors into the NRM, and information gathered at this stage is crucial as it has a bearing on the first decision in the NRM itself, the RG discussed below. However, various opportunities for identification have been missed at this stage (Garbers, 2021) because of several shortcomings and the questionable nature of those tasked to perform this role.

This role has been conducted by insufficiently trained individuals who lack the training to perform their role in identifying survivors appropriately, who, many times, do not know what the NRM is and often end up making impromptu and improper referrals for those they identify as potential victims, such as referrals missing pertinent information for the RG (Gren-Jardan & Gleich, 2022; Kalayaan, 2023; Murphy, 2020). It has also been found that information about what happens to survivors within 24-48 hours of being referred to or self-referral to first responder organisations is patchy and unclear (Wilson, 2020). A lack of resources sometimes affects the first responder role (Kalayaan, 2023). Calls for strengthening the first responder role have thus been made to improve the identification of survivors (Gren-Jardan & Gleich, 2022; Haughey, 2016; Kalayaan, 2023), including a suggestion to increase the number of first responder organisations. However, the HO has been slow to act despite calls to action (ATMG, n.d; Kalayaan, 2023).

Many people have refused to consent to enter the NRM (ATMG, 2010; Guilbert, 2021) because of various negative factors, such as ill-treatment by authorities, fear of detention, and removal from the UK (Oram et al., 2016), and the denial of work for some, where numerous survivors are primarily interested in securing work with decent working conditions (Shamir, 2012). For various survivors, work was the reason for migrating

(Kalayaan, 2019), and non-UK survivors may express a greater and more urgent need for employment, resulting from their desire to send remittances back home to support their families (Clawson & Dutch, 2008).

Therefore, a significant challenge both the asylum and NRM systems pose, directly affecting survivors' journeys, is denying economic agency to those without secure immigration status. In the asylum system, for instance, asylum seekers rarely have the legal right to work while awaiting their asylum decisions, even though it has been found that protecting people's economic agency is pivotal to addressing MSHT (Cockayne, 2021) and permitting survivors to work while waiting in the NRM provides structure, reduces uncertainty, facilitates reintegration, and promotes independence and dignity (ASI et al., 2021; Kalayaan, 2019).

People may also hear of the long wait in the NRM and decide against it (ASI et al., 2021; Beddoe et al., 2015; Bulman, 2022; Guilbert, 2021). There are no incentives for going through the process. For instance, a favourable conclusive grounds decision (CG), the final decision made in the NRM regarding a survivor solidifying that the person is believed to be a victim of MSHT, does not carry status for those with insecure immigration status, nor does it put victims in priority positions for housing and, thus, when granted, may mean little to them. It has also been common for people to not be given sufficient information and specialist advice regarding the NRM, as the British Red Cross (2020) found in their study on reception centres of survivors of MSHT in the UK.

Introducing the places of safety initiative in the reforms to the NRM was a positive step. This introduction commits the government to put government-funded places of safety in place to facilitate adult survivors leaving immediate situations of exploitation. Survivors could be given assistance and advice for up to three days before deciding whether to enter the NRM (Gov.UK, 2017). However, no funding was allocated for these places of safety to operate by 2020 (After Exploitation, 2020), and by December 2023, the HO had pronounced itself on this issue. In a letter to stakeholders, the HO announced that "funding is unavailable to introduce and efficiently implement" "places of safety" and thus will not be moving forward with them in the existing MSVCC (Home Office, 2023h, p. 2).

As specified in section 52 of the MSA, public authorities in England and Wales have a statutory duty to notify the HO (DtN) when they come across potential victims of MSHT who refuse to consent to enter the NRM. First

responders must still note them, and report said numbers to the HO via a Modern Slavery MS1 form (Home Office, 2019). It is worth mentioning that DtN statistics cannot be said to be accurate for certain, bearing in mind the problems identified regarding some first responder organisations, such as the lack of knowledge on how to perform their duties as first responders. Moreover, various first responders provide these statistics, some of whom provide inconsistent data, incomplete referrals (such as those with no dates) and duplicate referrals (Home Office, 2023a). The implication is that some referrals are left out of the official statistics (Home Office, 2023a), and the number of individuals counted multiple times remains unknown. The first step of the NRM is pivotal to the survivor's journey after MSHT; however, this is already compromised by leaving decisions in this crucial stage to be made by professionals lacking in training and information on how to perform their duties. Recognising first responders' pivotal role in survivors' journeys is essential in the ongoing efforts to eradicate MSHT, protect survivors, and hold perpetrators accountable. Thus, sustained investment in training, resources, and support for these organisations is imperative to ensure the comprehensive and practical combatting of MSHT within the UK.

Once a first responder refers a survivor to enter the NRM, the survivor's journey will follow the second step, as discussed below.

2.4.1.1 The Competent Authorities (CAs)

Once a person has been referred to the NRM, they enter the second stage, the decision-making stage, where two CAs within the HO determine whether people are "genuine" victims of MSHT. They are currently the Single Competent Authority (SCA) and the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority (IECA). The SCA decides whether everyone not covered by the IECA, including children, is a victim of MSHT. The IECA was created as part of the Immigration Enforcement Department of the HO. The core vision of the IECA is to reduce the size of the "illegal" population and the perceived harm it causes in the UK (Gov.UK, n.d.b). It identifies adults subjected to specific aspects of immigration control, including those facing deportation and held in administrative immigration detention.

Before 2019, decisions involving survivors from outside the EU/UK were processed by the UK Border Agency, now known as UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). The participation of UKVI in the decision-making process met

criticism for being contradictory and posing a conflict of interest, given its principal role in immigration control (CSJ, 2013; Demetriou, 2015). It was thus not surprising that non-EU/UK survivors were less likely to get positive conclusive grounds (CG) decisions within the NRM (ATM, 2010, 2014a; Heys, 2023; IASC, 2017) and prejudices towards people with certain nationalities, such as Nigerian and Vietnamese survivors, became apparent (Boff, 2013; CSJ, 2013).

EU/UK nationals had their cases handled by the National Crime Agency. However, this approach raised concerns since the National Crime Agency's primary mission is to cut serious and organised crime, protecting the public by targeting and pursuing those criminals who pose the most considerable risk to the UK (NCA, 2022). It is unsuitable for a law enforcement agency to identify potential survivors, as this approach further underpins the understanding of MSHT as principally a criminal and state security issue, diverting attention away from the importance of survivor protection and support.

The separation between EU/UK and non-EU/UK survivors was eliminated in 2019 as part of NRM reforms. Decisions were merged under a Single Competent Authority (SCA) within the HO. However, the SCA was positioned within the Serious and Organised Crime Unit of the HO. This placement raised concerns about SCA decisions concerning non-EU/UK survivors, as it continues to emphasise MSHT as a problem linked to crime, immigration, and national security, potentially at the expense of prioritising the well-being of survivors. In November 2021, the government resorted to a separation of survivors again by reverting to the abovementioned two CAs.[6]

The UK's continued inclination towards a criminal justice and irregular migration control approach to MSHT is evident in the structure, placement, and divisions of the CAs. This approach perpetuates discrimination based on where survivors come from. The persistent entanglement of MSHT with crime and immigration control aligns with Findlay's (2022) argument that the way the NRM operates is not just a consequence of the hostile environment policy but a contributing factor to it, serving as a part of immigration control measures. The hostile environment policy, therefore, forms a wider aspect of the modern slavery agenda (Broad & Gadd, 2022). It exacerbated the vulnerability of individuals already living in precarious conditions, presenting them

[6] The IECA does not deal with all non-UK national survivors.

with difficult choices: endure ongoing exploitation, face destitution by fleeing or seeking assistance from authorities, risking potential criminalisation (Kenway, 2021). The following section gives insight into how NRM decisions are made for survivors who ultimately agree to go into it.

2.4.2 Step Two: NRM Decisions

After a survivor has been referred to the NRM, they should expect two main decisions to be made to determine whether they are deemed to meet the criteria of being a victim of MSHT. The first of these decisions is the reasonable grounds decision (RG). The threshold for satisfying the RG is met "when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an individual is a victim of slavery or human trafficking" (Home Office, 2023d, para. 14.50). However, the threshold for the RG has changed considerably with changes to the Modern Slavery statutory guidance (the Guidance) in January and July 2023, respectively. Previously, the threshold for an RG could be met by a mere suspicion that the CA suspects but cannot prove that someone may be a victim of MSHT (Home Office, 2022b). In January 2023, the UK Government released the updated Guidance, which required potential victims to provide "objective" or concrete evidence of their trafficking during the RG decision-making stage. CAs were then called upon to consider whether "there are reasonable grounds to believe, based on all available general and specific evidence but falling short of conclusive proof, that a person is a victim" of MSHT (Home Office, 2023b, para. 7.4). Survivors' narration of their own experience would no longer have been acceptable on their own to receive a favourable RG. This requirement would have firmly legitimised the culture of disbelief in policy because the relevant CA was directed to discount survivors' stories of exploitation if that was all they had and further delegitimise survivors as knowers, agents, and legitimate authors and protagonists of their own lives and experiences.

The government revised this provision in July 2023, having agreed to reconsider and modify parts of the Guidance, which required people to produce "objective" evidence corroborating a credible account of human trafficking to receive a positive (RG) following the case of R (on the application of AAA and others) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (2023). In that case, two survivors who received negative RGs, notwithstanding giving credible accounts, challenged the January 2023 amendments. The survivors requested judicial review, arguing that the amendments were breaches of their human rights as per Article 42 of the

European Convention on Human Rights; they were irrational at common law and undermined the MSA (Duncan Lewis Solicitors, 2023). Considering this, the Secretary of State agreed to withdraw, reconsider, and revise this provision (Duncan Lewis Solicitors, 2023). Upon alteration, the RG decision is now made considering:

> All of the information available, including the victim's account and any other relevant information that supports or undermines it, including but not limited to: eyewitness testimony, medical or expert reports, travel records, police investigations, general evidence such as Country Reports, or supporting evidence of the person's exploitation the First Responder provides, such as observed modern slavery indicators. (Home Office, 2023d, para. 14.53).

It remains that a survivor's account alone is generally unsatisfactory, although para. 14.64 provided that the requirement for giving evidence depends on the nature of the account, and the CA has the right to examine various types of evidence to reach their conclusion; it is not limited to objective evidence for validating or refuting an account. If a survivor only has their story to tell and not much else, they may still be in an unfavourable position. The implications of these changes are further discussed in Chapter Seven.

RG decisions are to be made within five working days after a person's referral (Home Office, 2023d). If the RG is negative, the person will not enter NRM support and must exit any support they were granted, including emergency accommodation, within nine working days (Home Office, 2023d). If the RG is positive, a survivor will be eligible to receive support during the "recovery and reflection" period. The "recovery and reflection" period permits essential time and support for survivors to access services so that they may "recover and reflect", a period deemed crucial as it offers a necessary break, allowing survivors to gradually experience a sense of safety and begin the process of recovery to a certain extent (OSCE, 2022, p. 195). The survivor receives 30 calendar days to "recover and reflect". This was also an outcome of the changes to the Guidance, whereas previously, the "recovery and reflection" period was 45 days. It has now been brought to 30 days to match the time frame provided in the ECAT (see Article 13 ECAT).

After the "recovery and reflection" period, survivors will receive the second decision, namely the conclusive grounds decision (CG). The threshold for making a CG is higher than that of the RG but lower than the criminal standard of proof. The test to be passed for the CG is whether "on the balance of probabilities, there are sufficient grounds to decide that the individual..." is a victim of MSHT (Home Office, 2023d, para. 7.10).

Notably, while the "recovery and reflection" period is at a minimum of 30 days, the Guidance provides that making a CG is not bound by a specific timeframe, as a fair and reasonable decision can only be achieved when the CA has been provided with sufficient information to decide (para. 14.124). ECAT also provides that survivors may not be removed from a territory (state party) during their "recovery and reflection period" (Article 13).

Studies have shown that CGs can take months and sometimes even years to be made (Kalayaan, 2019; EOG v Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2020; IASC, 2022). The NRM also keeps records of how long CGs took over the years, as shown in Table 1 below, indicating the average number of days taken to make CG decisions from 2014 to 2022 (Home Office, 2023a).

Table 1: Average Number of Days to CG

Year	Number of days to decision	
	Median	Mean
2014	105	177
2015	97	167
2016	172	222
2017	238	353
2018	356	480
2019	343	456
2020	338	465
2021	449	569
2022	543	680

The average (median) time from referral to conclusive grounds decisions made from April to June 2023 across the CAs was 451 days (Home Office, 2023a). The table above shows that the wait has significantly increased over the years, except for a decrease from 2022 to 2023. The lengthy waiting for the CG leaves survivors in a state of limbo, affecting their "recovery and reflection" and exacerbating their trauma and their abilities to plan for the future, leaving survivors feeling as though they have no control over their lives (Gren-Jardan, 2020; Gren-Jardan & Gleich, 2022; Heys et al., 2022; Hynes et al., 2019; Murphy, 2020; Roberts, 2019; Schwarz & Williams-Woods, 2022).

The IOM (2022) highlighted significant gender disparities in the waiting times within the NRM for survivors of MSHT. According to NRM statistics from April to June 2022, women experienced much longer wait times than men. On average, women waited an astonishing 1,113 days for a CG, while men had an average waiting period of 481 days. Despite this substantial gap, there has been limited reporting on the extended waiting times for women. There has been little discussion about the potential factors contributing to why women typically had to wait over three years for a CG. In contrast, men, boys, and girls experienced significantly shorter waiting periods of less than 18 months (IOM, 2022).

When a CG decision is unfavourable, the individual in question is given a nine-working-day period to exit any support they may have received. However, a positive CG decision signifies that the survivor is recognised as a "genuine" victim of MSHT. They enter a 45-day "move-on" period during which they receive additional support and are exited from MSVCC support only when it is deemed appropriate to do so (Home Office, 2023d, para. 7.12). This practice of not immediately discontinuing MSVCC support post "move-on" is a relatively recent policy shift introduced through the Recovery Needs Assessment (RNA) policy in 2019. The RNA is conducted after a positive CG to evaluate the transition process, including identifying ongoing recovery needs that may require continued MSVCC support (Home Office, 2023d, para. 7.12). Further details about the RNA will be discussed in the next section.

The threshold for a CG decision remained unchanged following the 2023 changes to the Guidance. However, a new and potentially beneficial change for those with insecure immigration status has been introduced. It is important to note that being identified as a victim of MSHT does not guarantee an automatic grant of secure immigration status. While survivors could previously still apply for secure immigration status, the policy now ensures that this consideration is automatic. Non-UK nationals will now automatically be considered for Temporary Permission to Stay for Victims of Human Trafficking or Slavery (VTS) (Home Office, 2023e). This change aligns with Article 14 of the ECAT, which mandates states to issue a residence permit to victims in specific circumstances, such as when required to assist authorities with investigations or due to the victim's circumstances. The policy also aligns with section 65(2)(c) of the NABA, which outlines the conditions for

granting leave to remain to positively identified victims. This is not an automatic grant of leave to remain; instead, it is an automatic consideration for leave to remain, which may still be declined.

The decision depends on particular qualifying criteria, such as the person not being considered a threat to public order or having claimed to be a victim of MSHT in bad faith as per section 63 of the NABA; needs to recover from physical or psychological harm caused by their exploitation; is seeking compensation related to their exploitation (may receive up to 12 months in this case), or the person is co-operating with authorities with investigations related to their exploitation (may receive up to 30 months in this case) (Home Office, 2023e). Given the historically unfavourable outcomes for leave-to-remain applications, the positive impact of this VTS provision on survivors' journeys remains uncertain. HO data shows that, between April 2016 and June 2021, only seven per cent of confirmed victims of MSHT were granted leave to remain in the UK (Taylor, 2022). On the issuance of automatic leave to remain, the HO stated:

> Providing 12 months of support outright to all victims with a positive CG decision where it is not necessary would risk creating a longer-term dependency on the NRM, counter to its purpose to provide a short-term bridge to broader state services and specialist support, or where applicable, to help a victim return home, or to a safe third country (Home Office, 2023h, p. 1).

There is an evident reluctance to grant survivors of MSHT secure immigration status by the UK government. However, there is also a recognition that secure immigration status is essential to moving forward after leaving exploitation for those who need it. It provides access to various rights and entitlements, such as work and access to housing (Mullan-Feroze et al., 2023). The UK government has consistently rejected the idea of automatically granting leave to remain for survivors, citing concerns that such a provision could incentivise false claims of exploitation to stay in the country. As a result, non-UK survivors often turn to the asylum system, further complicating their journeys, as detailed in section 2.5.2.

Concerning non-UK survivors, the Modern Slavery Strategy (MSS) (2014, p. 65), which serves as the primary policy framework for addressing MSHT in the UK, initially outlines that survivors who cooperate with police investigations can remain in the UK until those investigations are concluded, after which they will be assisted in their return to their home countries. It has been nearly a decade since the MSS was introduced. Significant changes in MSHT in the UK have occurred since the original passing of the MSS. Nevertheless, the emphasis on

sending people "home" or away from the UK remains unchanged, as is evident in recent legal and policy developments primarily centred around the New Plan for Immigration.

Supporting people to "go home"[7] can have harmful consequences, as people leave their "homes" for various reasons. Assuming that "home" is always a safe option simplifies the complicated realities survivors face (Segrave et al., 2009). Sending survivors "back home" only benefits those wishing to return or regard "home" as safe. Even for those who want to return, being "home" is not always easy; it often includes substantial challenges and complications (Surtees, 2017). For those who do not view returning "home" as safe, forcing them to go back may cause them to return to the same oppressive or exploitative conditions they left in the first place (Chuang, 2010; Plambech, 2022). "Home" can be a place of abuse, unemployment, and violence for some women (Plambech, 2014). Returning to their families can be detrimental, especially if the family was involved in their initial victimisation (Ramaj, 2023). Those who return may also face rejection from various members of their family and the broader community, subjecting them to social stigmatisation and blame related to what many perceive as a failed migration (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2012; GFEMS Media, 2022; Yea, 2020a).

Having discussed the NRM's decision-making processes, it is essential to delve into a critical aspect of the NRM for survivors: the support they receive, as addressed in the following section.

2.4.3 Support Through the NRM

As previously mentioned, support through the NRM is provided through a government-issued contract, the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC). The MSVCC is:

> The tailored UK government response to its international obligations laid out in the European Convention Against Trafficking (ECAT). It provides accommodation and tailored support, advocacy and signposting to adult victims of human trafficking and modern slavery who have entered the National Referral Mechanism and consent to support. The aim is to assist in the physical, psychological and social recovery of modern slavery victims. The support provided is tailored to the needs of the potential victim through needs-based assessments at the point of entry and through ongoing engagement with a support worker. This can include but is not limited to: - Safehouse accommodation - Subsistence payments - A dedicated support worker - Advocacy - Private Counselling -Translation and Interpretation - Support to return to their home country - Assistance with getting to appointments including; transport and childcare -Support to access:

[7] The concept of "home" is highly contested but in the context of this thesis, home refers to the country of origin.

> Medical treatment, legal aid, addiction support services, education, mental health services, housing and other alternative services (Home Office, 2023f, para.1).

The Salvation Army (TSA) has held the MSVCC since 2011 and provides the support mentioned above to adult survivors in collaboration with other organisations known as MSVCC subcontractors (The Salvation Army, 2022). The MSVCC is, by design, meant to be a short-term bridge to access additional support (Home Office, 2023a). Long-term support, where available from elsewhere, should be sought from mainstream support provision, which is support and services already integrated into existing societal structures. Notably, in 2021, the "Reach-in Support" service was incorporated into the MSVCC, "designed to keep a survivor's transition to independence on track if they have any emerging or reactive requirements for support or advice. It can include links to activities and places where they can get help, including finding a job, counselling and other therapies, ESOL classes and translation services" (The Salvation Army, n.d.). This provision is, however, minimal and leaves out many other survivors due to its requirements of only being available to those with a positive CG made on or after the fourth of January 2021, and the referral for this service must be provided by a support worker, not the survivor themselves (Balch & Williams-Woods, 2021). The existing MSVCC will expire in June 2025. It is uncertain whether the implementation will remain with the TSA or be handed to another entity, as the decision will be determined through a competitive tender process (UK Parliament, 2023a).

For many years after its inception in 2009, the NRM focused support on survivors' immediate needs and neglected long-term support needs, leaving survivors susceptible to re-exploitation after leaving support (Gren-Jardan, 2020; Murphy, 2018; Stanworth, 2022). However, long-term comprehensive, tailored support for survivors has been long recognised as paramount to preventing re-exploitation and aiding survivors build lives after exploitation (Balch, 2017; Dickson, 2004; Hemmings et al., 2016; Murphy, 2018; Roberts, 2018; Stephen-Smith, 2008b; The British Red Cross, 2018, 2019).

There has been no clear indication of what happened to survivors after they left government support in the UK (Beddoe et al., 2015; Roberts, 2018, 2019); what has been clear, however, is that once a survivor left the NRM, support ended, which left people in vulnerable situations (The British Red Cross, 2018, 2019). The consequences of this abrupt end with no provision for longer-term support have been well documented, as it

has been found that survivors struggled to navigate the transition from support to mainstream services such as local authority housing (The British Red Cross, 2018).

Research findings indicate that survivors should receive support tailored to their individual needs, emphasising flexibility to adapt to changing requirements (Beddoe et al., 2015; Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, 2016; Hynes et al., 2019; The British Red Cross, 2018, 2019). This approach should be comprehensive, considering people's circumstances before, during, and after exploitation for maximum effectiveness (Hynes et al., 2019). It must consider culturally relevant factors to ensure cultural sensitivity and competence in addressing survivors' intersecting experiences (Hodges et al., 2023).

The UK government then conceded that longer-term support should be provided where survivors needed it. This followed the case of NN & LP v Secretary of State for the Home Department (2019). The RNA process was introduced to counter the "cliff-edge" narrative where people previously timed out of NRM support without the examination of or any plan of ongoing support if they needed it (Balch, 2017, p. 7; Murphy, 2018, 2020; Roberts, 2018). In line with the RNA policy, survivors will only transition from NRM support after decisions are made through the RNA, incorporating a personalised transition plan for each confirmed victim (Home Office, 2021b). The initial independent review, authored by individuals who have experienced the NRM and RNA processes, has already found that the RNA process is not meeting survivors' needs. As a result, it recommended a comprehensive review of the entire process (Hutchison et al., 2022).

Support provided under the RNA is solely determined by the recovery needs arising from a person's experiences of MSHT (Home Office, 2021b). However, this approach presents a problem because, as previously mentioned, their complex and intersecting realities must be considered as offering comprehensive support to women who have left exploitation (Hodes et al., 2023). This means that survivors' ongoing support requirements after receiving a favourable CG may not be directly linked to their exploitation experiences. Many survivors may find themselves without the necessary support because, under the RNA policy, anything unrelated to their exploitation experience is not categorised as a "need." This observation aligns with Hodges and Burch's (2019) findings, which suggest that aspects falling outside the defined "needs" as per policy and legal definitions often remain unaddressed.

Hutchison et al. (2022, p. 21) noted that childcare costs for therapy, legal, and support worker meetings are not covered because they do not fit into the category of "needs arising out of trafficking experience" or are considered "not current needs." However, mothers may require training to enhance their employability, and they need reliable and affordable childcare to attend this training, pursue employment opportunities, or engage in other activities that necessitate childcare. Unfortunately, because childcare is not considered a "need" within the parameters of the RNA policy, women are left without support. The ATMG already highlighted problems with childcare in 2016, finding that a lack of childcare was a pressing issue for those who participated in their research, some of whom faced difficulties with a lack of childcare when attending NRM and asylum interviews (ATMG, 2016b). However, the NRM itself has also been subject to much criticism, as discussed in the following section.

2.4.4 Criticisms of the NRM

The NRM had the potential to serve as a beacon of hope after a struggle or reluctance to establish adequate support services for survivors. However, it has fallen short of this, presenting more challenges than solutions, leading to significant criticism for its consistent failure to support survivors. One of the primary criticisms is that the NRM extends the hostile environment policy (Findlay, 2022). This has been a recurring issue, with immigration status representing a significant hurdle for non-UK national survivors, even within the NRM.

There are frequent failures to refer people to the NRM (Burland, 2021). When referred, the NRM has been described as operating on a rescue and release law enforcement-based approach of rescuing victims and placing them in the NRM without focusing on their recovery needs (Roberts, 2019). Some say the NRM does not work in the best interests of survivors, and those who go through it feel "punished by a system meant to protect them" (ASI et al., 2021, p. 5; Kalayaan, 2019, p. 6). Overall, it has been found that "the system and its processes are not fit for purpose and have the potential to cause harm to survivors through re-traumatisation, falling through gaps in service provision and potential re-exploitation" (Murphy, 2018, p. 3). It has been described as a "system that finds victims of modern-day slavery, only to abandon them" (Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, 2016, p. 2), allowing victims to disappear (Beddoe et al., 2015) and an all-around "'broken' system" (Murphy, 2020, p. 16) which is near a breaking point (Kalayaan, 2023).

Additional criticisms of the NRM emphasise that the system can exacerbate survivors' existing trauma because of prolonged decision delays, restrictions on work, the absence of secure immigration status with positive CGs not carrying that status, decisions are based on insufficient evidence and thus untrustworthy, and a host of other issues (ATMG, 2010, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2021; Burland, 2017, 2021; Elliott & Garbers, 2016; Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX) 2019; Field et al., 2019; Findlay, 2022; Gren-Jardan & Gleich, 2022; Oppenheim, 2014; Sobik, 2020). Survivors are subjected to waiting with no end date in systems that remove survivors' control of their lives and mirror their previous exploitation experiences (Browne et al., 2019; Hynes et al., 2019; Murphy, 2020).

A lack of awareness, knowledge, and understanding of MSHT and the resulting confusion among statutory and other service providers have been significant impediments (ATMG, 2010, 2013; CSJ, 2013; Barlow, 2023; Bick et al., 2017; Field et al., 2019; Gren-Jardan, 2020; Heys et al., 2022; Kelly & Regan, 2000; Muggeridge & Maman, 2011; Murphy, 2018, 2020; Richards et al., 2008; Schwarz & Williams-Woods, 2022; Skrivánková, 2006; Stanworth, 2022). Additionally, survivors' lack of awareness and knowledge about MSHT and the asylum system, including their entitlements and where to seek information and assistance, has also hindered identification and support (Bick et al., 2017; Heys, 2023; Kalayaan, 2019). While there has been some improvement in awareness, particularly among statutory service providers (ATMG, 2013; Gren-Jardan, 2020; Haughey, 2016), evidenced by the increased NRM statistics with record high referrals in 2021 and 2022, there is still a long way to go in addressing these issues.

The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG), a group of various non-governmental organisations working to support survivors of MSHT in the UK, was established in 2009 with the mandate to monitor the UK's compliance with and implementation of the ECAT, as well as the EU Directive. ATMG has conducted valuable research in this area, which has shed light on survivors' journeys in the UK as impacted by the UK government's continued failure to comply with the ECAT and other international human rights obligations towards all survivors. Over the years, the ATMG has monitored and reported on the NRM (See ATMG, 2010, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2021). In 2014, the ATMG recommended that the NRM system, continuing to be flawed and discriminatory and falling short of the UK's obligations to protect and promote the human rights of all

trafficked persons in the UK, be replaced entirely with two models: one for adults and the other for children, that "are victim-centred and adopt a human rights-based approach, drawing on the OHCHR [The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights] Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking" (ATMG 2014a. 4). The ATMG has not been the only organisation suggesting an overhaul of the NRM (see Kalayaan, 2023).

Several factors have impeded survivors' journeys, obstructing their access to support and services and creating obstacles along the way. Many of these stumbling blocks, as evidenced in the literature, are closely tied to immigration status. It is, therefore, apt to recognise the extent of the immense focus on immigration status - even UK nationals who are not directly impacted by immigration status issues have inadvertently been marginalised, unidentified, and unsupported over the years (Heys et al., 2022; Human Trafficking Foundation, 2021) because of this focus on immigration and non-UK nationals. The following section identifies and discusses the main facets of insecure immigration status affecting survivors' journeys in the UK.

2.5 The Impediment of Insecure Immigration Status

The most significant impediment to receiving assistance for survivors is immigration status (Balch, 2017). Non-UK survivors consistently encounter varying outcomes (IASC, 2017; Murphy, 2020) because of their insecure immigration status, which impacts not only different avenues for assistance but also creates additional obstacles to support, as the following subsections will illustrate. Immigration status has thus become an essential determinant of victim status and who deserves what kind of support, with debates ongoing about the confusion and often conflation between victims and people working without legal permission to do so in the UK (Morgan, 2017).

An insecure immigration status creates stress, can cause homelessness and other harms, and can bar integration (The British Red Cross, 2018, 2019). Conflating migration and MSHT has been described as a damaging and "dangerous mistake" as it hinders identification (CSJ, 2013, p. 83), yet it persists. Strengthening measures to address unauthorised migration have resulted in passing laws over the years that have a direct and detrimental impact on survivors of MSHT. These policies affect how people with insecure immigration status are treated, impacting their journeys after leaving exploitation. For instance, survivors who are also

asylum seekers are often subjected to reporting conditions, are not provided with safe accommodation, and are exposed to increased risks of destitution and homelessness (Stanworth, 2022). Housing for survivors of MSHT and human trafficking is often unsuitable, dirty, and unsanitary (Murphy, 2020).

Survivors with insecure immigration status often find themselves in circumstances equivalent to their past exploitation with equally distressing realities. For example, survivors who are not UK nationals may encounter policies such as “no recourse to public funds.” This policy entails that individuals categorised as “subject to immigration control” under section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 are generally ineligible to claim various benefits, including income support, child benefit, disability allowance, and housing support, unless specific exemptions apply. Implementing the no recourse to public funds policy can force survivors into precarious situations, mirroring the hardships they experienced during their exploitation (De Angelis, 2014).

Additionally, detention poses a real threat to individuals grappling with insecure immigration status, and it has been an integral part of the journeys of many survivors. This includes those who experienced detention in the UK and were later removed from the country or released. The following section briefly explores the prevalence of detention in the UK and its adverse impact on identification. The subsequent section will also address two other critical aspects affected by insecure immigration status: the asylum system and access to healthcare.

2.5.1 A Preponderance Towards Detention

The UK maintains a strict stance on immigration, viewing MSHT as a danger to the nation, its borders, and its citizens (Sharapov, 2017). This emphasis on immigration has affected support for survivors in several ways. Predominantly, the fundamental focus has been on the voluntary or involuntary removal of individuals from the UK. This aspect has consistently been an essential component of the UK’s immigration system, and the UK government has clearly expressed a preference for detention and deportation (Balch, 2017).

The UK and Europe have increasingly adopted a deportation-oriented approach (Gibney, 2008), with the UK standing out as one of the leading users of immigration detention in Europe (O’Connell Davidson, 2022). The UK has consistently expressed its position on immigration and its clear intention to remove people with no legal right to be in its territory. For instance, in 2013, it used incendiary approaches toward people with

insecure immigration status, employing “Go Home or Face Arrest” deportation vans as a component of “Operation Vaken” (Home Office, 2013) as displayed below:

Figure 1: The HO’s Go Home Immigration Vans Campaign (Hope, 2013).

The HO also frequently showcases its achievements in removing people from its territory on social media, as evidenced by the image below, which was shared on the HO’s official Twitter (now known as X) page:

Figure 2: The HO’s post on Twitter (X) (Home Office, 2023g).

The HO has a history of disregarding its policies when it comes to identifying and supporting people who have been exploited. For example, in 2016, The HO introduced the Adults at Risk policy in compliance with section 59 of the Immigration Act 2016, aiming to protect and support vulnerable people and lower the number of vulnerable people in detention (Home Office, 2016b). Conversely, regardless of mounting evidence that more survivors of various forms of violence, including MSHT, meet the criteria under this policy, the HO has openly breached its guidelines to prevent extending essential support (Lousley et al., 2019).

Consequently, survivors with insecure immigration status have often faced detention rather than support. Notably, a significant number of trafficked women who received assistance through the POPPY project arrived in the UK through irregular means and were regularly placed under immigration detention or imprisoned (Stephen-Smith, 2008a; Hales & Gelsthorpe, 2013). While in detention, women often went unidentified as victims of MSHT, mainly because the interview processes did not permit them to disclose their experiences of MSHT (Hales & Gelsthorpe, 2013).

The preponderance to detain continues. Criminalisation, arrest, and detention of survivors still prevail (CSJ, 2013; Labour Exploitation Advisory Group, 2019; Mullan-Feroze & Dorling, 2022). After Exploitation (2023) found that the detention of survivors of MSHT has increased significantly between 2017 and 2019, where people have been detained either for offences committed whilst in exploitation or for immigration offences. However, not everyone with insecure immigration status entered the UK through irregular means. Skriváňková (2006) found that people subjected to forced labour often entered the UK through regular means; however, when they become victimised, perpetrators manipulated them into thinking they needed to rely on the perpetrators for everything, often until their documentation expired, rendering them no legal right to stay in the UK and thus more susceptible to exploitation.

For people with insecure immigration status, the fear of detention is therefore valid and validated through how the UK has used detention and removal. The threat of detention is one that perpetrators weaponise against their victims whilst in exploitation (Brennan, 2014). The Government cements the fear of detention, deportation, and removal by continuously detaining survivors once they come out of exploitation who do not

have secure immigration status, causing them further harm even in cases where there are indications of exploitation (Lousley et al., 2019). Another aspect associated with insecure immigration status as a stumbling block is the asylum system that some survivors navigate as part of their journeys following MSHT, as expanded upon in the following section.

2.5.2 The Asylum System

The UK ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention) and its 1967 Protocol. These instruments establish refugee rights and protections. Nevertheless, obtaining asylum in the UK has proven challenging. Non-UK national survivors are often only left with the option of applying for asylum with the hope of staying in the UK and receiving some support (Mullan-Feroze et al., 2023; Murphy, 2020; Young & Quick, 2006), despite the reality that the process of claiming asylum is extremely tough and complex and success is improbable (Dorling et al., 2012; Dudhia, 2020; Girma & Lousley, 2017; Girma et al., 2014; Lousley & Cope, 2019; Lousley et al., 2019), especially on the initial application (Muggeridge & Maman, 2011; Dorling et al., 2012).

Survivors often must navigate several systems and service providers at once, including government and non-governmental service providers, after leaving exploitation, such as care, immigration, and the criminal justice system, which all present various challenges (Hynes et al., 2019). This means some women will be undergoing the NRM and the asylum processes simultaneously, as well as other systems. Those who are in the NRM and apply for asylum would usually be moved into asylum support, where they encounter various challenges, including housing and access to other forms of support. Women who apply for asylum are typically refused despite having fled some harrowing circumstances such as persecution and other severe forms of violence; their stories are often not believed, and they are detained instead and sometimes removed from the UK (Dorling, 2012; Girma et al., 2014; Girma & Lousley, 2017; Jobe, 2008; Lousley & Cope, 2017). Dorling et al. (2012) found that 93% of the women they interviewed for their study on asylum refusal were refused asylum, with no record kept of what happened to them after such refusal. Therefore, migrant women seeking humanitarian protection and refugee status are often subjected to a pervasive culture of dismissal, disbelief, and criminalisation (Dorling et al., 2012; Hales & Gelsthorpe, 2013; Hales, 2017; Muggeridge & Maman, 2011;

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005), which is particularly inherent in the adversarial system utilised when processing asylum claims (Murphy, 2020). Their asylum claims were more likely to be refused on arbitrary and subjective grounds on the first application (Muggeridge & Maman, 2011). However, most refusals have frequently been overturned upon appeal (Muggeridge & Maman, 2011; Richards et al., 2008; Young & Quick, 2006), a practice that has been ongoing for many years even before the NRM came into effect, and this same practice became transposed into NRM decision making where erroneous negative decisions are often made and are similarly often overturned upon appeal (The British Red Cross, 2019).

The NRM and the asylum systems are complicated and can cause further obstacles for survivors (Murphy, 2020). Difficulties faced by those experiencing the double bind of being survivors of MSHT and asylum seekers include being screened as "deserving or underserving" twice - for eligibility as asylum seekers (Malloch & Stanley, 2005) and for eligibility as a "genuine" victim of MSHT, whether deserving of support and protection under the MSHT system (Faulkner, 2018; O'Connell Davidson, 2010).

Additionally, MSHT survivors who are also asylum seekers frequently encounter constant rejections from both the NRM and the asylum systems. NRM decisions have been found to influence asylum applications, whereby delays in the NRM delay asylum applications, and rejections in the NRM result in denials in the asylum system (ATMG, 2010, 2012, 2013; Murphy, 2020; Stanworth, 2022). This mirroring of decisions is not a surprise, seeing as the NRM and the asylum systems, even though separate, are administered by the HO (Hynes, 2022). Therefore, few trafficked women have been granted refugee status and humanitarian protection in the UK (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005). Those accepted or deemed credible typically fit a popular story of sexual trafficking or are supported in their applications by organisations such as the POPPY Project (Jobe, 2008). The POPPY project has ceased since the closure of Eaves in 2015; however, other non-governmental organisations continue to support women in these situations across the UK. However, even those who receive positive decisions are regularly unaware of what to do afterwards, as they lack sufficient information on the way forward (Heys, 2023).

The situation of asylum-seeking survivors is exacerbated by the frequent and sometimes oversimplified alterations made to the asylum system through legal measures, which complicate the credibility of survivors' asylum claims and continually diminish the entitlements of asylum seekers, making their circumstances increasingly challenging. For brief context, the Asylum and Immigration Act of 1996 curtailed access to housing and restricted employment, removed benefit entitlements and introduced rigid timelines for appeals for some applicants. Applicants transitioning through "safe third countries" were not permitted to claim asylum. Welfare benefits were disallowed for all asylum claimants under the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, where a national system of compulsory dispersal was introduced.

The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) system was introduced through the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999 as a system where asylum seekers who faced destitution could be granted support, including a weekly allowance and housing offered on a no-choice dispersal basis where people were dispersed to various zones across the UK, usually outside London and the Southeast of England. Asylum-seeking survivors supported under the MSVCC are typically referred to the Asylum Support Service and thus moved into NASS accommodation to any given dispersal zone, where they will receive outreach support. NASS accommodation was not designed for trafficked persons and is therefore inconsistent with the ECAT and EU directive requirements for the protection of All trafficked persons (ATMG, 2010; ATMG, 2016b; Hibiscus, 2020).

New restrictions for asylum applications were imposed in 2002 when the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 was passed. These included reporting requirements, restrictions on the number of appeals an asylum seeker could make, deportation before decision-making for certain applicants, and establishing a "safe countries" list. Accordingly, this Act was described as having been designed not to fulfil the human rights obligations guaranteed by international human rights law (Obokata, 2003). Two years after the controversial 2002 Act was passed, the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004 introduced even more restrictions on asylum seekers in the UK. The UK has continued to stifle asylum seekers' entitlements under international human rights law to date, visible in the NABA and the IMA, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

Therefore, applying for asylum presents numerous challenges and adds to challenges already shown in the NRM as survivors going through the NRM and seeking asylum bear dual identities; being a survivor of MSHT

and an asylum seeker subjects them to further complications and burdens. One of these challenges is the refusal of economic agency. Nevertheless, permission to work may be granted under limited circumstances, such as when an asylum seeker has been waiting for 12 months for a decision, which is not due to any fault of their own (UK Visas & Immigration, 2022). However, in 2010, asylum seekers' right to work was further restricted; it was determined that those permitted to work could only perform jobs on the UK Shortage Occupation List (SOL) (UK Visas & Immigration, 2022). The SOL lists highly skilled or specialist positions, detailing work roles the UK Government deemed in short supply in the UK resident labour market. The SOL has been described as a "de facto barrier to legal employment, leaving those in the asylum system completely dependent upon the support provided by the Home Office" (Saunders, 2022, p. 249). Therefore, people either refuse to work while waiting for decisions or are restricted from working when they get permission, which impedes a crucial aspect of the survivor journey.

The right to work affects asylum seekers and every survivor subject to the UK's restrictive immigration laws and policies. Consequently, survivors with insecure immigration status, whether seeking asylum or not, are not permitted to work whilst in the NRM. This forces them into destitution, leaving them dependent on the state, non-governmental organisations, and the broader communities for sustenance (Hestia, 2022; Kalayaan, 2019), which can make them vulnerable to further harm. Refusing survivors the right to work "de-skills" them and undermines their recovery (Allsopp et al., 2014; Hart, 2018; Hestia, 2022, p. 2). Additionally, being prevented from working is also one of the aspects of being cast away and speaks to the differential treatment of people in the same space (Mbembe, 2019). As such, calls to have all migrants with insecure immigration status be granted full legal rights to reside, work and claim benefits in the UK have been advanced (Hodkinson et al., 2021). Related to immigration status and other factors are survivors' health and access to health services, as reflected below.

2.5.3 Access to Health Services

While survivors' support needs are multifaceted, support has especially been recognised as crucial concerning survivors' physical and mental health, as it has been asserted that MSHT usually has dire physical and psychological health consequences for survivors (ATMG, 2016b; Dickson, 2004; Hemmings et al., 2016; Hossain

et al., 2010; Hynes et al., 2019; Lazzarino et al., 2021; Oram et al., 2016; Such et al., 2020; Westwood et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2021; Zimmerman et al., 2003, 2006, 2011). Furthermore, many survivors still battle mental health challenges after leaving exploitation, thus warranting ongoing support (The British Red Cross, 2018, 2019; Zimmerman et al., 2003, 2006, 2011). Survivors' mental health is also affected by what comes after leaving situations of MSHT, as they encounter difficult circumstances to navigate. Ongoing social stressors such as insecure immigration status, the risk of deportation or removal, unstable housing, low levels of social support and unemployment have a bearing on their mental health (ASI et al., 2021; Domoney et al., 2015; Kalayaan, 2019).

The UK government has recognised that addressing survivors' mental health needs is essential to responding to MSHT. It has accordingly introduced measures to do so, such as providing therapy as part of the support offered to survivors under the MSVCC during their time in the NRM. However, even though survivors' health is said to be a significant concern and a proven outcome of MSHT, survivors have been and are still battling to have access to health services owing to multiple barriers (Egbe, 2022). In 2003, Zimmerman and colleagues found that several factors kept women from seeking health services even when confronted with pressing health complications, and service providers were impeded from reaching women by practical, policy and resource limitations. The fear of detention and deportation also impacts survivors' access to health services (Fang et al., 2015). Much of this has continued over the years, and women with insecure immigration status, especially those seeking asylum, have encountered hindrances to accessing health services. Mental health service providers also face various challenges, such as the social and legal instability that survivors are subjected to, a lack of engagement and challenges with other agencies, which impact not only service provision but also the identification of survivors within health settings (Domoney et al., 2015).

Requirements for identity documents or proof of address, poor access to interpreters, and cultural differences are some barriers non-UK national survivors face in accessing healthcare services after leaving MSHT (Fang et al., 2015; Westwood et al., 2016; Williamson et al., 2020). General practitioner (GP) offices also create obstacles in accessing healthcare services. Noteworthy is that survivors of MSHT are not required to pay for medical assistance (Gov.UK, 2014), and in the UK, anyone can register with a GP without having to present any

documentation (Murwill, 2018). However, GP practices have been known to turn away people who could not provide identity documents or proof of address (Murwill, 2018). As a result, in 2016, the National Health Service (NHS), upon recognising the challenges with patient registration at GPs' offices, issued and circulated guidelines for GP practices. These guidelines clarified that patients were not legally obligated "to prove identity, address, immigration status or the provision of an NHS number to register." - while providing these details may have been practically and functionally beneficial for the GPs, the guidelines also emphasised that people who could not provide such document must be registered (NHS England, 2016b, p. 154).

Despite this, GPs still turned people away because of a lack of identification and other documentation (ATMG, 2016b; Murwill, 2018; Williamson et al., 2020), which prevented some survivors from accessing healthcare. Women were routinely turned away from healthcare services even when pregnant (ATMG, 2016b). In their study on maternity care, Bick et al. (2017) found that barriers included poor knowledge of access and entitlements and issues around NHS charging, for example, being asked to pay for maternity care even when this was not required. Training healthcare professionals has been recognised as a crucial step in addressing this challenge, given the inevitability of their interaction with survivors or individuals still in situations of (MSHT). For instance, pregnancy is prevalent among trafficked women (Bick et al., 2017; Nightingale et al., 2020), and at one point or another, some women seek maternity care while still in MSHT situations or after they exit such situations. Maternity and other healthcare providers lack training and the knowledge to deal with potential victims of MSHT (Bick et al., 2017; Oram, 2015; Oram et al., 2016). Due to a lack of training and awareness, healthcare professionals usually do not know what to do when encountering survivors (Collins & Skarparis, 2020; Garbers, 2021).

Another limitation to support concerning healthcare not necessarily affected by immigration status is that significant focus has been paid to survivors' mental health. However, mental health services have been difficult to access, plagued with long waiting lists and a lack of specialist services for complex needs (Domoney et al., 2015; Egbe, 2022; Fang et al., 2015; Hynes et al., 2019; The British Red Cross, 2019; Williamson et al., 2020). Sessions are at times limited, which sometimes means that mental health support becomes incomplete

(Egbe, 2022). A lack of cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed approaches to mental health support services have also been identified as challenges (Egbe, 2022; Hemmings et al., 2016).

Physical health needs are also generally ill-met, with access to health and dental care often disrupted, especially when survivors are frequently moved around (Cagney et al., 2019). Disruption to health care is prevalent as survivors are frequently relocated during their time in the NRM or the asylum system and end up having to deal with new health professional settings, starting all over again to build trust in those settings and recount their narratives all over again (De Angelis, 2016). Survivors, however, value the continuation of their healthcare provision not only for the familiarity of healthcare professionals and healthcare settings but a continuation in the same place also enhances their ability to build relationships within communities and strengthen their sense of belonging (De Angelis, 2016).

The issue of healthcare, especially mental healthcare for survivors of MSHT, has received considerable attention in the literature, particularly how mental health is affected by experiences of MSHT. Consequently, a robust public health approach to MSHT has developed, guided by a human rights-based, survivor-centred, and trauma-informed approach (Such et al., 2020). Thus, it is apt to address some of these issues from that approach briefly below.

2.5.4 Other Factors Related to Healthcare

There is a predominant emphasis on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that tends to overshadow the recognition of other types of mental illnesses, which could easily be disregarded (Wright et al., 2021). While acknowledging the significance of mental health services for those in need, it is crucial to recognise that not all survivors may require these services immediately, at all, or throughout the initial stages of their post-MSHT journeys. The IOM (2009, p. 4) found that “not all trafficking cases involve extreme abuse, and not all trafficked persons experience profound post-trauma reactions”. Not all people “need to ‘recover’ or to heal’”; some want to move-on (Brennan, 2014, p. 116).

Nevertheless, there is an overwhelming emphasis on the mental health impact of exploitation, which can have several detrimental effects. For women, emphasising how they are affected mentally may also promote ongoing pathologising. There is a historical and deliberate systematic pathologising of women, especially

marginalised, Black, lesbian, bisexual, poor or gender non-conforming women within the psychiatry, psychology, and mental health services (Taylor, 2022).

Further, mental illness is usually only one of the issues that women face, and an overwhelming focus on it may cause pathologisation in people subjected to severe uncertainty and hardship (Brennan, 2014). For instance, housing is a pressing need for survivors that may impact their mental and physical health. Safe and secure housing is crucial for survivors after leaving exploitation (Hodges & Burch, 2019; Matthews et al., 2014). Survivors have emphasised that safety at the place where they live is significant (Cagney et al., 2019). However, survivors experience accommodation difficulties, and as such, secure accommodation has been identified as a standard primary need for survivors from the time they come out of these situations to the time they time out of support (Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, 2016; Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023). Secure and stable housing is thus essential, but it is usually affected by various administrative factors, especially when people leave the NRM (The British Red Cross, 2019).

Therefore, overly focusing on mental illness may misrepresent survivors' needs (Dang, 2021) while neglecting other factors, such as structural factors (O'Connell Davidson, 2015, 2022). A one-dimensional approach to survivors' mental health and overall lives after leaving exploitation is unhelpful, and radical interdisciplinary approaches are more apposite (Lazzarino, 2020). Dang (2021, p. 2) found that it is vital to consider survivors' well-being, which she defined from her research with survivors as:

> A relational process that enables and sustains practices for answering existential questions about meaning and purpose: the practices are activities and behaviours used to manage the impact of trauma, build a life worth living, and learn about freedom from slavery.

This section identified that insecure immigration status is a significant factor in the journeys of survivors who are non-UK nationals, affecting their ability to access services. Insecure immigration status introduces barriers such as those presented by the UK's emphasis on detention, deportation, and removal. It also exposes survivors to the asylum system, which presents further challenges. Other factors affected are issues related to survivors' health and their access to health services.

The challenges faced by individuals with lived experiences of MSHT, often migrants and non-citizens, can be understood as a perpetuation of exploitative structures that were established during colonial periods.

Postcolonial theory critically assesses constructs developed during these times, particularly the notion of "citizenship" as a crucial marker of identity and privilege (Said, 1978). In the context of MSHT, citizenship creates a stark boundary of inclusion and exclusion— echoing colonial practices where the 'coloniser' determined who was 'civilised' and thus entitled to rights (Fanon, 1952). This dichotomy still informs and justifies the disparate treatment of non-citizens today, often echoing colonial views towards colonised peoples (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1952; Spivak, 1988). Postcolonial theory urges a deeper exploration of how dignity and self-determination are conferred solely within the confines of recognised statehood and citizenship, reflecting the civilising missions where autonomy was conditionally granted, as discussed further in Chapter 7. Additionally, the treatment of survivors with insecure immigration status before, during, and after identification exemplifies the weathering processes articulated by Geronimus (2023). The restrictive and often exclusionary policies surrounding citizenship can be seen as a significant source of chronic stress for non-citizens. This aligns with the postcolonial critique, where the constructs of citizenship and national belonging continue to perpetuate inequalities rooted in colonial histories (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1952). These constructs often marginalise those deemed 'outside' of citizenship status, leading to a lack of access to healthcare, social services, and legal protections, which are essential for maintaining health and well-being.

So far, the chapter has focused on survivors’ engagement with service provision and other factors encountered after leaving exploitation. The following section looks at the possibilities of survivors’ long-term trajectories.

2.6 Beyond Support: Survivors’ Long-Term Trajectories

The UK needs to ensure that its support systems provide meaningful options that assist survivors in their recovery, including, but not limited to, opportunities to build independence and sustainable freedom through work, education, mental health services and access to legal justice (ASI, 2021). Long-term support is also essential for preventing re-exploitation (IASC, 2021) and is particularly urgent now that the number of survivors exiting the NRM is growing (Balch & Williams-Woods, 2023). However, what is known about the survivor journey in the UK currently continues to resonate with how Murphy (2018, p. 3) described:

> From referral processes into the NRM to accessing support services in the immediate and longer term, the recovery 'journey' is fraught with challenges for many, likened to a game of chance in which outcomes are variable, inconsistent, and uneven.

To this end, knowing how survivors fare in the long run has been difficult. Accessing support after leaving exploitation has often been a prolonged and challenging process, especially for individuals with insecure immigration status. They may face the added risk of being held in detention facilities resembling prisons, even when there are signs of them being potential victims of MSHT (After Exploitation, 2021). In some cases, survivors have been detained before being assessed and referred to the NRM and are therefore not guided towards receiving the support they need (After Exploitation, 2021).

The British Red Cross (2019) conducted a study that encompassed a more comprehensive range of challenges faced by survivors after leaving exploitation. They explored the experiences of survivors beyond their time in the NRM. They highlighted the significance of providing sustained, personalised, needs-oriented, and flexible support for survivors as they navigate life after the NRM. They further found that support tailored as described above met survivors' particular needs better, reducing "the specific vulnerability of women survivors to gender-related violence, abuse, exploitation and disempowerment" (p. 45), aided in rebuilding trust through safe relationships, agency, and resilience. The project also identified problems with aspects such as building communities, the impact of regular moves and the effects of insecure immigration status on survivors' trajectories. This study was based on male and female survivors. However, it did not provide in-depth insight into how survivors navigate these problems but focused instead on the usual shortcomings of the systems, which have been identified in previous studies, thus still leaving a gap of knowledge in what survivors do to cope with the issues they experienced with the shortcomings emanating from the systems.

Nevertheless, this study has highlighted significant aspects of black feminist theory and weathering. For instance, by identifying challenges posed by broader structures that survivors face, the study made a vast analysis of the violence of survivors' daily lives (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019). Black feminism emphasises the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups, highlighting the need for an intersectional approach that considers how race, class, and gender (Crenshaw, 1991) collectively impact survivors' experiences and

recovery needs. In terms of weathering, systemic shortcomings, as highlighted, contribute to ongoing stress and instability (Geronimus, 2023).

Much of the literature reviewed in this chapter also revealed that the long-term trajectories of survivors are unknown. Instead, the emphasis is on system failures and shortcomings. From the initial stages of support provision discussed in section 2.3, disturbing, unchanged, and seemingly worsening trends reoccur. Immigration status has, for instance, been and still is a significant barrier for non-UK nationals, reproducing the same challenges already identified in the early 2000s.

Another recent study on survivors' journeys in the UK is the collection brought together by Murphy and Lazzarino (2023), where various authors collaborated to shed light on the victim/survivor journey in the UK. The volume offered a critical overview of the victim/survivor journey, further uncovering various ways that the victim/survivor journey is tragic and primarily looking at broader systems, including recruitment, businesses, and other tools. The collection also looks at the experience of being a victim, as addressed through the media and the judicial system, including the interplay of race and racism as it affects victims/survivors. Additionally, it addressed caring in the anti-MSHT system in the UK, calling upon the decolonisation of practice. While identifying and emphasising the importance of survivors' voices, the collection has not predominantly involved survivors' voices. However, it has included the input of two survivors. Crucially, this collection supports Black feminist theory, the weathering hypothesis, and postcolonial theory by critically examining the victim/survivor journey in the UK, including systemic issues and the interplay of race and racism within media and judicial systems. It calls for the decolonisation of anti-MSHT practices, aligning with the push to dismantle colonial legacies and biases that shape contemporary institutions and policies.

Some organisations provide long-term support to survivors after the NRM to address issues pertaining to survivors' long-term journeys. LifeLine, which began in 2012 and was run by the organisation City Hearts and is now run by Causeway, is one such service (Balch & Williams-Woods, 2023). However, reading about such programmes still does not paint a clear picture of survivors' journeys.

Consequently, the literature reviewed in this chapter only revealed that the aspects of survivors' journeys predominantly addressed in literature have been relatively focused on people's circumstances during the

initial stages after leaving exploitation (Dickson, 2004; Kelly & Regan, 2000; Sachrajda, 2008; Skriváncková, 2006), especially surrounding the failure of statutory service providers and other stakeholders to protect people (Heys et al., 2022; Murphy, 2020). How the available support systems have been dismally failing survivors, primarily via the NRM, has also received substantial attention.

Recent years have seen more research focusing on survivors' experiences of the processes in place, such as experiences with service providers, first responders and their wait in the NRM, revealing missed opportunities of identification of both UK and non-UK nationals because of a persisting severe lack of knowledge, understanding and awareness of MSHT across the board (CSJ, 2013; Heys et al., 2022; Murphy, 2018; 2020). Even though some improvement, especially with professionals, has been attained over the years (Gren-Jardan, 2020), this is still a problem.

2.7 Conclusion

Lazzarino et al. (2023) argued that the current MSHT system reveals little of the experiences and context of victims/survivors. What is clear is that the survivor journey in the UK is tragic (Murphy & Lazzarino, 2023). The literature examined in this chapter has echoed the same findings. Therefore, the knowledge gap discovered in this literature review generally encompasses how there is no clear indication in the UK literature of how survivors, in general, and, more specifically, in this research, women survivors navigate the support systems in place. More specifically, there is a lack of insight into the:

1. Survivors' perspectives on how they find their way in the initial aftermath of leaving exploitation.
2. Their experiences with the authorities after leaving exploitation.
3. How they experience and navigate support systems.
4. How survivors experience and navigate moving into independent living.
5. How survivors navigate their relationships with family, friendships and romantic partners.

This thesis aims to fill these identified knowledge gaps and make crucial contributions to knowledge by investigating what happens to women after leaving exploitation in the UK to fully explore their journeys from exiting exploitation to moving into independent living. Visibilising the shortcomings of the broader systems in

place is inevitable and crucial to continue until change occurs. Nonetheless, recognising and understanding women's role in their journeys is also vital. It must be the core basis upon which policy, action and support for women survivors are anchored, as meaningful change only occurs when survivors' voices and experiences are placed in the centre as they are the experts by lived experience, which will be discussed further in the following chapter.

This chapter was fundamental in shaping the direction of this research, specifically in determining the methods for data collection to attend to the above-identified gaps in knowledge. The following chapter reveals the methodology utilised for this research and provides an overview of the research journey.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the current literature on survivors in the UK. It shed light on the UK government's early slow pace in putting in place protection and support measures for survivors of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) and some of the challenges survivors encountered when accessing support after exiting exploitation.

This chapter focuses on my research journey and the methodology I employed, how I collected data and how I subsequently analysed that data. As it centres my research journey, I write it in the first person. To start, I begin the chapter by exploring the development of the research questions and then the research methods. I then delve into the research journey, detailing the initial phase, which involved decisions concerning participant recruitment and ethical considerations. I then describe my data collection process. I interviewed survivor women and practitioners who support survivors to address the knowledge gaps identified in Chapter Two. I will conclude the chapter with reflexivity and the research limitations.

3.2 The Research Questions and Methods

As I revealed in section 1.2, these were the research questions I aimed to answer:

1. What happens to women after leaving situations of MSHT in the UK?
2. How do women navigate life after leaving situations of MSHT in the UK?
3. How do women remodel their lives after MSHT in the UK?

I sought to answer these questions using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods are designed to reveal the complexity and richness of human experiences, providing insights into intricate and multi-layered aspects of human experience (Tracy, 2019). Qualitative research methods seek to comprehend the particular meaning people ascribe to their experiences and the context in which these experiences occur (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and provide a practical and holistic engagement with those researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as they permit the interviewee's multifaceted perspectives to be heard without the restrictions of scripted questions (Tracy, 2019). Semi-structured interviews also strike a balance between structured and unstructured approaches and provide a unique opportunity to delve into the complexities of human experiences, perceptions, and behaviours (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Unlike structured interviews with fixed questions or unstructured interviews with limited direction, semi-structured interviews offer a framework of pre-determined questions while allowing for the fluidity of conversational interactions and, in turn, the collection of richer data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers design a set of open-ended questions that guide the conversation, which also permits follow-up questions and probes for deeper insights where relevant. Appendix E of this thesis shows the pre-determined questions I designed. These were used to guide discussions but were not strictly followed as the conversations with participants often took a life of their own.

To fully engage with the women's narratives and adhere to my aim of ensuring their voices take prominence, I followed alternative ways of expression that critical methodologies such as feminist and decolonial methodologies and work have emphasised (de Jong et al., 2018). Such alternative forms of expression generate space for sidelined voices by dislocating the hegemonic (Arashiro & Barahona, 2015). I do this in this research by humanising the women - involving them in the research process as much as possible, giving them choices, connecting with them as individuals, and highlighting their voices following their varied narratives - and ensuring that I draw attention to women's "political and social struggles" (Small, 1995, p. 946) because this research is not only about women but also for women (DeVault, 1990; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Critical research is rooted in the desire to question, challenge, and deconstruct prevailing norms and assumptions, nurturing a deeper understanding of complex issues and the potential for social change (Torres & Nyaga, 2021). Feminist approaches, Black and decolonial, to be specific, are the critical methodologies of choice in this research.

Feminists mainly concern themselves with uncovering hidden experiences; thus, feminist methodologies aim to expose and challenge gender-based inequalities and stereotypes and emphasise inclusivity, intersectionality, and the perspectives of marginalised groups. While feminism has been subdivided into

different forms over the years, different types of feminism are underpinned by similar ideas, such as the idea that women have been excluded from dominant knowledge production (Hesse-Biber, 2007). In anti-slavery, people who have experienced exploitation are often left outside the margins of the knowledge produced in the field. Knowledge is regularly created by people who have never been unfree, including the knowledge upon which the definitions of concepts that fundamentally affect how people are treated, such as victims, survivors, slavery, freedom and so on (Dang, 2021). Therefore, feelings of exclusion exist in the research process, and feminist methodologies seek to alleviate those feelings (Hesse-Biber, 2007) by creating opportunities for the excluded to take up space and participate. Thus, feminist epistemology recognises and emphasises that women's lived experiences are vital, and the ultimate goal of feminist methods is to empower women, not only to recognise that women are in the margins but to bring them out of those margins to take up space in the centre of social inquiry (Sprague, 2005).

Traditional research methods typically take a mechanical style, accentuating the technical aspects of research, such as how the study was carried out, how decisions were taken, the methods used for data collection and codings, and the steps followed for data analysis (Sprague, 2005). These approaches are essential, and I have incorporated them into my research. However, lived experience is not as technical and investigating it requires acknowledgement that unexpected factors can emerge, leading to necessary adjustments in our research approach, which can disrupt our initial plans for data collection and reporting. Additionally, feminist and other critical methodologies aim to uncover what has been overlooked, silenced, and repressed, as well as to reveal complex and rich realities to offer a more precise portrayal of society (DeVault, 1996). Achieving this goal necessitates a departure from established traditions. Accordingly, I intentionally use some of the findings from the research that pertains to the methodology in this chapter, quoting the women who participated herein and discussing what I found in terms of methods to give depth to this chapter. This is an intentional deviation from the conventional format of reporting and recording findings, which are usually only reserved for findings chapters. While a departure, it is necessary if I am to truly live up to my intention of letting the women who participated in this research speak for themselves as much as possible, as their narratives are at the core of this research.

As Nicholson (2022) aptly provided, the tendency to look for linear stories and happy endings in survivors' narratives must be resisted, as this obscures an authentic examination of survivors' stories. I posit that taking the time and creating the space and willingness to understand the actual conditions of survivors' lives is the most appropriate way to dislodge the idea of fairytales and happy endings while also making room to understand the real state of survivors' lives that is not in isolation of the broader structures and systems in place. Humanising research is work predicated on nurturing relationships of care and dignity among researchers and participants (Paris, 2011). I have applied a humanising perspective to the entire research process by ensuring survivors' voices in this research are reflected from the very beginning to the end.

Rose, one of the survivor women who participated in this research, astutely encouraged me to "Go for it, make some noise; you know you can make more noise than we can because we are restricted…" but I also recognise that efforts should be directed towards not restricting survivors in this sense so that they can make the necessary "noise" themselves about their own lives and those of other survivors. As stated above, survivors' voices have historically been absent from research in MSHT. When their stories are used, they are often depicted as sensationalist, incredible accounts of suffering to garner attention and funding (Nicholson, 2022; Quirk, 2023). Earlier research about survivors focused on professional voices, and little primary research has previously been done with survivors (Albanese et al., 2022; Agustín, 2006). However, this is slowly changing in recent years with studies including more survivor voices (see De Angelis, 2016; Dang, 2021; IASC, 2021; Heys et al., 2022; Hulland, 2020; Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023). Some studies involve survivors as co-authors (Hutchison et al., 2022; Hutchison & Esiovwa, 2021; Lazzarino et al., 2023; Rana & Bales, 2023). Survivors are also writing memoirs about their experiences (See, for instance, Anonymous (Girl A), 2013; Phillips, 2022; Woodhouse, 2018).

Bringing survivor voices to the fore and striving for improved collaborative knowledge production and service design is critical in MSHT studies (Lazzarino et al., 2023). Dang (2021) asserts that survivor scholarship is a necessity in the field of MSHT studies and must be supported to grow because, at present, survivor scholars are a minority in the area. She defines it as "a scholarship that can shape and urge the field to pry itself away

from being a field of academics who have always known continuous freedom to a field that includes survivors of slavery as scholars" (p. 39).

Accordingly, due to their ostracisation in MSHT knowledge production, survivors' voices have largely been excluded from laws and policies concerning MSHT (Hutchison & Esiovwa, 2021; Nicholson, 2019, 2022), and as such, the knowledge generated about them has been incomplete, for as Dang (2021) aptly provides, knowledge is insufficient when it excludes those with lived experience of the phenomena we are attempting to understand. However, only recently have survivors' voices been included in policy reviews or the literature involving their current policy experiences (see Hutchison et al., 2022). Survivor voices are authorities and sources of knowledge (Kempadoo & Shih, 2023), and as experts through experience, involving survivors in research will result in research outcomes that are meaningful for survivors (Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023). Taking all the above into account, therefore, survivors' voices are paramount in this research.

Below, I introduce the participants in this research before delving into the rest of the research process, starting with the women and followed by the practitioners. It is important to note that the women interviewed in this study do not and were not intended to serve as comprehensive representations of survivors' experiences in the UK. The narratives they provided are specific to their individual experiences, yet they offer insights into how broader perceptions of MSHT and existing systems impact survivors. This also holds true for the perspectives shared by the practitioners.

3.3 The Participants

To differentiate between the participants who were survivor women and those who were practitioners, the survivor women's names (pseudonyms) will be in **bold text,** and the names of the practitioners will be underlined with an abbreviation of their roles in brackets. All the survivors' names have been anonymised, while only some of the practitioners' names were anonymised as some preferred to use their real names.

3.3.1 The Women

I conducted interviews with 19 women; among them, three, namely **Selma**, **Chioma**, and **Ruby**, were interviewed twice to gain more insight into how they were doing a year after our initial interviews. Regarding

sociodemographics, the women in this study had diverse backgrounds, including two UK nationals, twelve from Africa, four from Asia, and one from Oceania. To protect their confidentiality, references will be made to continents of origin rather than specific countries, except for UK nationals. This distinction is created because the immigration status of non-UK citizens can significantly impact their experiences, and it is helpful to see how UK nationals fare without the immigration barrier. The age range of the participants ranged from 28 to 60 years. All of them self-identified as having experienced MSHT, with many explicitly stating that they were exploited in ways falling under the MSHT umbrella. Some women had undergone the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and the asylum system in parallel. Others went through the NRM but not the asylum system. Some of the women who went through either of these systems had already exited said systems by the time I interviewed them. Others were still going through them.

Throughout this work, I have reproduced verbatim what the women have said to me. In doing so, I have not copy-edited their accounts. I have, however, inserted clarifying details in their speech in square brackets [] were apposite. Reproducing the women's voices verbatim is an intentional decision, as most women do not speak English as a first language. Furthermore, this is also a statement on decoloniality, which again is one of the themes of this work, to challenge what we know and how we know, how we learn and from whom (Rhee, 2021). Table 2 below provides more information on the women.

Table 2: About the Women

NO	Name	Age	From	Immigration status	Years out (At interview)	NRM
1	Mary	44	Africa	Discretionary leave to remain	>10	No
2	Nelao	33	Africa	Awaiting asylum decision	4	Yes
3	Selma	32	Africa	Refugee status	6	Yes
4	Ruby	31	Britain	British citizen	5	Yes
5	Tiwa	32	Africa	Refugee status	15	Yes
6	Anna	32	Africa	Refugee status	7	Yes
7	Abebi	33	Africa	Awaiting asylum decision	17	Yes
8	Caitlin	47	Britain	British citizen	>20	Yes
9	Paloma	45	Asia	Overseas domestic worker visa	4	Yes
10	Chioma	60	Africa	Awaiting asylum decision	5	Yes
11	Tara	46	Asia	Overseas domestic worker visa	8	Yes
12	Ginger	52	Africa	Awaiting asylum decision	1 ½	Yes
13	Khanyi	38	Africa	Awaiting asylum decision	2	Yes
14	Parisha	37	Asia	Refugee status	6	Yes
15	Chosen	40	Africa	Indefinite leave to remain	>10	Yes
16	Naita	36	Africa	Indefinite leave to remain	>10	No
17	Naomi	28	Africa	Refugee status	3	Yes
18	Rose	29	Oceania	Discretionary leave to remain	3	Yes
19	Diwata	52	Asia	Refugee status	6	Yes

3.3.2 The Practitioners

I employ the term practitioners to refer to anyone who works with or supports women and other survivors in the UK. I conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with practitioners ranging from psychologists, police officers, victim navigators, Safehouse managers, charity managers and council/local authority staff. Table 3 below summarises the practitioners involved in this research, providing a reference for practitioners' positions and their role abbreviations. Furthermore, and as I will explain in further detail in section 3.4.2 below, I initially intended to interview women and young people as well as practitioners. However, I was not able to gain access to young people for interviews. The focus then solely rested on women and practitioners. In the table

below, I have indicated two practitioners at the bottom; however, I did not include their accounts in the research as they solely work with young people.

Table 3: About the Practitioners

No.	Name/pseudonym	Organisation	Position & Abbreviation
Interviews utilised			
1	Andrew	Homelessness Charity	Charity Manager (CM)
2	Ava	Homelessness Charity	Modern Slavery Coordinator (MSC)
3	Mia	Human Rights Charity	Clinical Psychologist (CP)
4	Mercia	Modern Slavery Charity	Safehouse manager/Caseworker (SM/CW)
5	Olivia	Modern Slavery Charity	Safehouse Manager/Caseworker (SM/CW)
6	Steve	Local Authority	Adult Safeguarding Board Manager (ASBM)
7	Lara	Migrant Domestic Worker Charity	Policy and Casework Officer (PCW)
8	Constance	Modern Slavery Charity	Victim Navigator (VN)
9	Amelia	Private Psychological Practice	Clinical Psychologist (CP)
10	Colin	Police	Detective Constable (DC)
11	Enola	Human Rights Charity	Clinical Psychologist (CP)
Interviews not utilised			
1	Bill	Modern Slavery Charity (Children)	
2	Leonie	Local Authority (Children)	

Lara (PCO) informed me that her organisation's policy did not allow clients to be interviewed unaccompanied by a staff member. I interviewed **Diwata** this way - in the presence of Lara, who set up the interview and sat in but did not say anything during the interview. This approach may prove beneficial because the survivor might feel more at ease to talk, especially in the absence of extensive rapport building with the researcher. Nonetheless, it is uncertain whether **Diwata** was ultimately open and transparent about her experiences or was selective in what she said due to Lara's presence. **Diwata** did not seem to hold back; however, I noted that she constantly praised Lara's organisation. She repeatedly said, "If it wasn't for (organisation), I don't know what I would do." It is impossible to know whether the same response would have been given had she not been accompanied.

In this section, I have introduced the participants and elucidated the rationale behind my selections. The subsequent discussion in the following section will delve into my research journey, commencing with an exploration of ethical considerations.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Professionals seeking to obtain information from persons, such as trafficked women, may inadvertently put both the women and themselves at risk of physical or psychological harm, even if their intentions are good (Zimmerman & Watts, 2004). After a comprehensive ethical approval application process that included secure data management and risk assessment, among other ethical considerations, this research received ethical approval from the University of Hull in September 2021 (Appendix A). Below, I discuss the ethical considerations I made regarding the participants and myself.

3.4.1 Ethical Considerations for the Participants

The most critical ethical consideration was informed consent. I ensured that I explained everything to do with the research to the participants in an information sheet (Appendix C) that I gave them several days before the interviews, accompanied by a consent form (Appendix D). Before the interviews, these two documents were still explained to ensure the women understood them. The second aspect is privacy and confidentiality regarding the sensitive nature of the topics in discussion. Respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the women was paramount to protect them from potential harm. I gave the women pseudonyms, and I retracted or altered all data that might render them identifiable. As per the data protection plan that formed part of the ethical approval application, I further ensured that collected data was stored securely and accessed only by me.

The third aspect I considered was the participants' safety and well-being. The data collection in this research took part amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which was an exceptional consideration. I included all measures taken in this and other safety and wellbeing issues in a risk assessment submitted to the ethical committee for approval of ethics in this study. Re-traumatisation and distress are risks when interviewing survivors of MSHT (Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023). The topic was profoundly personal and emotive,

and many women's experiences were highly negative, which meant the potential for emotional distress was very high. I implemented strategies to mitigate this, such as offering a change of topic or terminating the interview altogether, being patient and giving them time to talk. I also made it clear that they did not have to speak about their experiences of exploitation. Some agreed not to talk about specific topics or to change the direction of the conversation.

Some women responded with "I cannot remember" when I asked them specific questions. This can be attributed to various aspects, such as memory loss or a deliberate attempt not to delve into a painful subject. The human drive to evade negative emotions is acknowledged (Hayes et al., 1996). For instance, **Chosen** did not want to talk about the first few days after leaving her situation. Notably, most women were more eager to speak about navigating the NRM and their experiences with immigration, living in Safehouses and so forth. Most women would not offer much information on aspects such as relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. Family "back home" questions often obtained a single-line answer or no answer. Even though I consistently showed the women my awareness of how complex these topics are to discuss (Kelly, 2002), some chose to say very little. The silence here was not regarded as meaningless or simplistic. There are various reasons women choose not to disclose specific experiences, including but not limited to the context within which women find themselves (Kelly, 2002). Many of the women I conversed with are still finding their feet, still rooting themselves in their communities, and as such, many of their relationships suffered. Some women were still in the NRM, which may impact their readiness to speak about specific experiences. Equally, this could also be attributed to trauma and revisiting these details could be too painful. According to Levi (2013/1988), people who have been subjected to injustice or injury may alter their memories, and many survivors of complex and traumatic experiences are known to be inclined to filter their memory without even realising it.

Expanding on this point, Brison (2002, p. 31) further emphasised that traumatic memories can be "articulated, selective, even malleable". Additionally, a disparity exists between the experience and one's recollection. How an individual experiences trauma is contingent upon how they categorise the event; for example, whether they perceive it as life-threatening, caused by human actions, or an inescapable situation. This categorisation

influences the emotions one might experience, such as fear, anger, hopelessness, or other seemingly unmediated feelings.

While recognising the impact that PTSD has on memory (Grégoire et al., 2020), and while some of the women's silences might as well be due to PTSD, it is also essential to recognise that silence could also mean other ways of expression, because survivors have varied experiences during exploitation. It would be inaccurate to assume that they are all traumatised. The PTSD diagnosis has been overused and misapplied over the years (Summerfield, 2001). While not minimising the experience of those who had or have a genuine diagnosis of PTSD, I am cautious not to use it to explain why people take specific actions. Silence by way of saying they don't remember or giving one-word answers could be a woman's way of declaring she does not want to go there, or it could be a form of self-preservation and protection – the woman may not desire to revisit anything to do with family or talk about relationships due to various reasons. Silence, in the context of feminism, represents not only the suppression of women's voices but also the multiple ways women have navigated this silence to bring about change. Feminists have further often interrogated the relationship between voice, silence, and power, revealing the complexities that lie within those interconnections, and indeed, silence can be a site of reform and, in fact, agency, disrupting the articulation that silence equals powerlessness (Malhotra & Rowe, 2013). Feminists have explored silence as not merely a sign of weakness; rather, it is a potent force that can be harnessed in various ways, such as in thinking of implications for feminist security studies in a postcolonial world (Parpart, 2020). Silence carries its own communicative power, often as impactful as speech - it offers solace and encouragement while also serving as a space for planning and resistance (Parpart, 2020). Silence has been found to be a space of possibility, a deep way of communicating and a space to breathe (Malhotra et al., 2013). Thus, while the impact of PTSD may play a role, it is also possible that the silences, short answers and the "I don't remember" are reflective of the women's agency, taking control of their narratives, only sharing what they want to communicate, not necessarily because they are too traumatised to speak.

Other women, however, insisted on continuing. Some people also believe that what is important to them must be "spoken, made verbal and shared" (Lorde, 2019/1984, p. 29) and that it is essential to talk about it

repeatedly (Brison, 2002). **Anna**, for instance, broke down crying on two occasions during the interview, and on both times, she refused to change the topic. The first occasion was when she reflected on how she wanted to provide the best for her children but could not because of impediments beyond her control, and the second was how she attempted again and again to secure employment but could not do so. **Tara** chose to tell me everything from before she decided to leave her country of origin and her children behind to find work overseas. This was despite me gently reminding her that she did not have to go back that far, and she said she wanted to, so I listened because, to her, that was the most natural way for her to tell her story, and it was not traumatising to her. Giving her the space to do so was important because this is her story, and it is only appropriate for her to tell it how it felt right for her. I respected her agency and her control in telling her story. **Parisha** also insisted on going into her experience of trafficking, not so much into how she was exploited, but rather into the intricacies of living with her trafficker and how that made her feel.

Lastly, another critical ethical aspect was to empower women as proactive contributors to the research process, where I afforded the participants the agency to select interview locations, times, and so on. Additionally, I encouraged their engagement in verification processes, such as reviewing the transcripts I had generated for accuracy, even though only one woman, **Rose**, chose to take me up on this.

Ethical considerations extend to researchers themselves, not solely focusing on participants. In the following section, I delve into the specific considerations for me during the research process. Section 3.7 addresses certain aspects related to my health and well-being, extending beyond the data collection phase.

3.4.2 Ethical Considerations for the Researcher

The initial phase that began even before the data collection was the recruitment process. This crucial element can significantly impact a researcher’s emotional well-being, particularly in the field of MSHT, where access to participants is not readily available. The challenges associated with the recruitment process, including the difficulties and rejections encountered while seeking participants, were demanding. While I was ultimately fortunate to gain access to a substantial number of women survivors and practitioners, the initial stages involved approaching practitioners and others to assist in participant recruitment and the emotional distress

stemming from rejections was taxing. Regular debriefings and reassurances from my supervisors were pivotal in providing support during this process.

The topic at hand may also lead to emotional distress for the researcher. Accordingly, Knudsen (1995, pp. 29-30) cautions researchers to understand their roles "as gatekeepers to landscapes of emotions" and urges us to be cognisant that: "our roles may become complicated if a person is attempting to deal with unprocessed trauma". To address the potential effects of these challenges, I implemented a system of regular debriefing sessions with my supervisors throughout the data collection phase. If anything was concerning or challenging to process, for instance, **Anna** broke down crying at several points during our interview, which affected me emotionally; talking about it with my supervisors and getting advice on ways to deal with those emotions helped tremendously.

Ensuring the well-being of both participants and myself during online interviews was also a priority. Given that this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, I ran these interviews from my own home. After an online interview, there were limited physical actions to undertake to separate myself from the interview. It simply involved closing the laptop and remaining in the same room or proceeding with transcription and related work. To address potential emotional challenges, I maintained regular contact with my supervisors, who encouraged me to engage in activities to decompress after each interview, such as taking a walk or participating in enjoyable activities unrelated to the research. Additionally, creating breaks between interviews to prioritise my health and well-being was strongly recommended.

Physical safety was of utmost importance throughout the research process. I carried out both in-person (five with survivors and two with practitioners) and online (14 with survivors and 11 with practitioners) interviews. When attending face-to-face interviews, I took the necessary steps to inform my supervisors in advance about the location and timing of each interview. We also created a WhatsApp group, which I used to keep them updated when I was about to begin an interview and when I had completed it. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, additional safety measures were implemented to protect myself and the participants, including wearing a mask and practising regular handwashing or using hand sanitiser to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

In the next section, I expound on the initial phases of the data collection process, outlining the decisions I made and reconsidered and the reasoning behind these choices.

3.4.3 First Stages

The initial concept for this research was centred around interviewing women aged 18 and above, as well as young people between the ages of 15 and 17, who were in the UK after exiting situations of MSHT. Whether these experiences occurred in the UK was insignificant; however, the initial idea was to engage with people who left these situations, had been formally identified or self-identified as victims of MSHT, had exited those situations at least three years before our engagement and who were living in the UK at that time. This decision was influenced by the fact that, as revealed in Chapter One, the prevailing image of a victim of MSHT was that of a female and young individual. However, there was limited understanding of their experiences after leaving MSHT in the UK and how they fared in post-MSHT life. This decision aligned with my expertise and background in women's and children's rights. I believed focusing on women and young people in this context was a natural fit. I initially opted for three years after leaving exploitation with the hope at this early stage to provide for two reasons:

1. Not only because having former victims as a target population is a valuable distinction in studying formerly exploited persons (Pedersen & Sommerfelt, 2007; Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005), as they are associated with the likelihood of success for data collection, production and analysis (Tyldum, 2010), but that I will not be subjecting the participants to talking about their experiences too soon after having exited their situations of exploitation.
2. My research aims to understand the participants' journeys from the time of exit to, hopefully, the time of independent living. This period of three years was hoped to give them some time to go through some of the processes involved in this journey, even though, as the literature has shown, it can take longer than three years to do this for most survivors.

Nevertheless, some women reached out to me after learning about my research through their networks, resulting in cases where they did not meet the three-year criterion. In these instances, I chose to adopt a flexible approach regarding the three-year post-exploitation guideline for those who initiated contact

independently to honour their agency. Two women exited their situation less than three years prior to our interview – **Ginger** and **Khanyi**. However, as they contacted me, this showed a willingness to engage, so I did not turn them away. Interviewing both women gave a new perspective on our assumptions on placing a period on or trying to calculate the time that one can potentially be ready to talk about their experiences. I planned to include at least forty-five participants, of which approximately fifteen would be women, about fifteen young persons and about fifteen practitioners.

The initial idea was also to ensure that out of the approximated number of 30 survivors, at least half of this number should be with people who have chosen not to or who have not gone through the NRM. This is mainly because much of the knowledge on survivors has come from those who have been assisted in shelters or other assistance programmes (Tyldum, 2010), such as the NRM. While that knowledge is equally crucial, the experiences of those who have been assisted through such programmes are not representative of the entire population of survivors (Tyldum, 2010), and as such, having voices of those who chose to forego assistance programmes and systems such as the NRM would bring further value and diversity to the research outcomes. However, it is essential to note that whether women have gone through assistance programmes or not, no one woman's story is identical to another. Thus, there can never really be a representation of the entire population of survivors.

Nonetheless, the initial plan underwent a swift alteration when I realised that gaining access to young people would not be feasible. The practitioners I spoke to informed me that it would not be in the best interest of their young clients to participate in additional research projects. Bill (indicated in Table 3 above) explicitly conveyed that he exclusively worked with a limited number of young people and could not accommodate more interviews due to high requests as the young people he supported were research fatigued. I accepted the reasons advanced as I would not have liked to cause any harm to survivors in conducting this research. I did wonder, however, whether this decision should have been left to the young persons in question to decide for themselves whether they wanted to participate in research or not, to respect their agency. I did interview two practitioners who exclusively worked with young individuals when I still thought I would get some access to young people. However, I ultimately decided to exclude these interviews from this thesis. Consequently, I

resolved to narrow my focus to women and practitioners for this study, leaving the consideration of young people for future research endeavours. This choice stemmed from my reluctance to deviate from my research objectives, which primarily revolved around collecting first-hand data from survivors themselves and complementing this with the practitioners' perspectives.

Having detailed the initial thoughts, ideas, and decisions in the initial phase of the research, I proceed to the second phase of the study in the following section, which details how I collected data.

3.5 Data Collection: Participant Recruitment and Interviewing

At the outset, I had concerns about my limited access to survivors. However, I soon realised that various factors, which I will elaborate on in the following section, played critical roles in addressing this issue. The challenges of accessing survivors are well documented (Yea, 2021; Brennan, 2005; Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005; Tyldum, 2010). Formerly exploited women are understood to be "hard to reach" partly because they "are vulnerable populations, controlled by gatekeepers, who usually do not consider research to be a priority, or are restricted concerning resources available to provide research support" (Albanese et al., 2022, p. 14), as demonstrated by the discussion on Bill above. However, referring to people as "hard to reach" has been challenged because people are, in fact, not "hard to reach"; researchers must have specific skills and mindsets to get to them (Van der Ven et al., 2022). Effective communication and the utilisation of snowball sampling were key among these factors.

While the involvement of practitioners and organisations supporting survivors of MSHT is undoubtedly crucial for facilitating access, it is worth noting that this role can sometimes have the opposite effect. Albanese et al. (2022) pointed out that practitioners often serve as "gatekeepers" for survivors. However, my research has revealed that some of the practitioners I interviewed expressed a strong desire to assist me in connecting with adult survivors. Some were successful in their attempts, and others were not. They presented the research opportunity to their clients, allowing them to make the final decision. Lara (PCO) played a crucial role in arranging my interview with **Diwata**.

Conversely, Ava (MSC) attempted to connect me with a survivor she had been supporting, but the survivor ultimately declined. “Organisation A” in my snowball sample below shared my call for participants (Appendix B) with the women it supports, some of whom ended up contacting me directly. Below, I explain the survivor women recruitment in more detail through snowball sampling.

3.5.1 Snowball Sampling

Feminist qualitative researchers have increasingly found that snowball sampling increases the opportunities for accessing groups of people who are not usually accessible (Woodley & Lockard, 2016). Snowball sampling is a purposive sampling technique used primarily when traditional probabilistic sampling methods are impractical or ineffective. Thus, traditionally, snowball sampling has been employed as a “solution to overcome data sampling problems in the study of hidden populations” (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997, p. 792). It is thus often employed when researchers aim to study populations that are elusive, stigmatised, or difficult to access for various reasons, such as sensitive topics or marginalised communities (Heckathorn, 1997). The method derives its name from the snowball effect, where the initial participant identifies and refers to additional participants. These new participants, in turn, refer others, thus building up the snowball.

As described above, I aimed to speak to women at least three years post-exit exploitation before the interview. This may mean, in some cases, that women are no longer connected to practitioners, and the only way to reach them is through social networks. Without these social networks, these women may become silenced and marginalised. Thus, snowball sampling provides a way to reach these women by “harnessing the power of social networking and personal connections, which allows for the more thorough analysis of individuals and groups that may otherwise remain inaccessible” (Woodley & Lockard, 2016, p. 323). Below, I show how social networks and organisational support created the snowball effect in my research.

3.5.1.1 My Snowball Sample

I connected with an organisation (organisation A) supporting survivors in the UK while volunteering for them in the first year of my research. I met **Ruby**, who introduced me to the first couple of women who participated in this research once my ethical application was approved. Two of the women initially introduced to me by **Ruby** opted not to participate in the study. Some of those who participated introduced me to others after our conversations. For instance, **Ruby** introduced **Caitlin**, who introduced **Rose** and so on. A sample of this sequence is reflected in Figure 3 below.

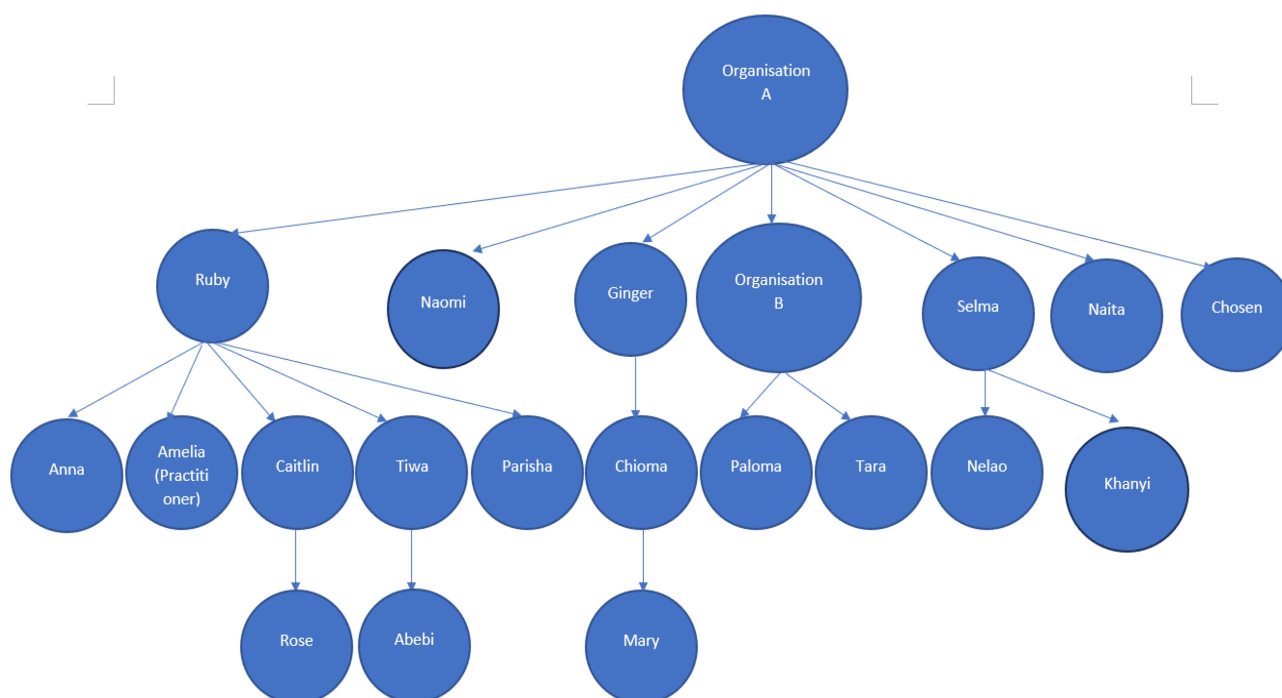

Figure 3: My Snowball Sample

Diwata was the only woman referred to me by an organisation not connected to Organisation A above, and I thus left her out of the snowball sample. Once I contacted them and they agreed to participate, we planned for interviewing, as detailed below.

3.5.2 The Interviews[8]

I conducted semi-structured interviews with both the practitioners and women survivors. Semi-structured interviews are a valuable research method when researchers seek to explore and understand complex, multifaceted phenomena, gather rich qualitative data, and engage with participants to gain a deeper insight into their experiences and perspectives (Galletta & Cross, 2013). Interviews also make it possible for women's individual voices to be heard, a central tenet of feminism that seeks to amplify the voices of those who have been historically marginalised (Maynard & Purvis, 1994). Interviews thus provide the women in this research a platform to express their experiences and perspectives. I conducted two cycles of interviews. The first cycle was where all the women were interviewed, and the second cycle only focused on three women (**Ruby**, **Chioma** and **Selma**).

3.5.2.1 The First Cycle of Interviews

I began the interview with each woman with questions about the information sheet and whether it was understood. I also informed the women that they could withdraw up to eight weeks after the interview. However, I also offered the women the option of sending them the transcripts to read over, but only one (**Rose**) took me up on this offer. After this and ensuring that the woman concerned was comfortable, I began the interview with general questions about the women and what they do during the day.

The interview site is a significant aspect of data collection. Collecting data in this manner is about engaging in conversation and gathering information, observing body language, and dealing with power relations (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009) between the interviewee and interviewer. Therefore, choosing a location for the interview is not a matter of mere technicalities (Herzog, 2005). It was thus crucial that the women felt safe, secure, and comfortable during the interview in an environment that was private and free from interruptions (Dempsey et al., 2016). I had to consider the abovementioned factors while also factoring in the fact that these interviews were conducted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, as I deliberated on what was optimal and secure for me and the interviewees, and the pandemic provided various interview location possibilities.

[8] Some of the information in the section was published in a blog I wrote for the Wilberforce Institute Blog: Collecting qualitative data during the Covid-19 pandemic: Reflections from the field.

Consequently, I gave the participants the option to choose between in-person and online interviews. Most women (14) and practitioners (11) opted for online discussions, while I interviewed five women and two practitioners in person.

Establishing rapport is a crucial aspect of interviews (Thwaites, 2017) since it can influence the extent of information a participant shares and directly impact the quality and depth of the collected data (De La Fuente Vilar et al., 2020). Initially, I harboured reservations about conducting online interviews, as I believed that meeting women in person presented a superior opportunity for rapport-building. The art of rapport-building is a fundamental skill in research, given its pivotal role in cultivating trust, nurturing positive working relationships, and improving communication between researchers and participants (Gabbert et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2013). However, connecting with most women was not challenging, except for a few instances. Some women later explained that their positive interactions with me were influenced by both who I am - a young Black African woman and a mother, as most of the women I interviewed were African women (12) and mothers (10) (see section 3.7) - as well as how I communicated with them. For instance, **Ruby** pointed out that she found it easy to relate to me because I did not speak complex English words; instead, I spoke in a manner that resonated with a “normal person” rather than adopting an academic tone.

I asked the women why they chose this method over face-to-face at the end of each interview. The first prominent reason the women gave was the freedom to express themselves. Because the women were in a private space of their own, an area they felt comfortable in and could control, with no fear of being overheard, this provided confidence to speak freely. **Ginger** expressed:

> It was more convenient, and I could be free to speak my mind in my own space where I know that no one can hear me. I felt free to speak with you and also be vulnerable in my telling you of everything that happened.

Naomi brought out a potentially overlooked aspect, the consideration for those who are introverted and those who may be afflicted by anxiety, when she said:

> I prefer Zoom. No travelling and it depends on the area anyway where I’m going. I’m a very, very quiet person on a normal day, so when I’m around people that I don’t know, or I’m not used to, I’m very, very uncomfortable. I have anxiety, so I’m always conscious when I’m outside.

Furthermore, several women told me the screen was a significant emotional shield. They highlighted that expressing their feelings and vulnerabilities online was more manageable than via in-person interviews. The screen, in this context, acted as a safety cushion. **Selma**, for example, mentioned that while she initially had no preference between online and face-to-face interviews, she acknowledged that “It was better seeing me upset over the cam than physically.” In addition to comfort behind the screen, some women indicated that minimal body visibility, which placed body language out of view, was significant because sometimes the listener’s body language can inadvertently discourage the speaker from sharing certain information out of concern for causing discomfort. **Abebi** elaborated on this as follows:

> No hassle of travelling, and to be frank, I would not be as open to speaking with you as I am now. I think for me, the things probably we discussed I will find it harder to discuss face-to-face because you wouldn’t want to break down, and online kind of like allows me to speak. That’s my own personal opinion. To speak quite bluntly about a lot of things, let’s say if we were sitting face-to-face, I would start watching your body language and say maybe I’m making her uncomfortable…

Convenience was another prominent reason among those who opted for online interviews. **Tiwa** indicated, “It’s only because of my busy schedule. I can only afford to do Zoom at the moment, which made the interview faster than waiting for a day that I’ll be free”.

As the researcher, interviewing online provided me with various benefits. As mentioned by some of the women above, the cost, time and other travel-related aspects were eliminated, which made getting to the interview easier. Nevertheless, online interviews had specific constraints. I was disadvantaged in not seeing much body language in the online interviews. Although I could note facial expressions, long pauses, laughter, tears, and sighs, I could not see what the women were doing with their hands, for instance, and found it hard to notice when they shifted in their seats, which could have been indicators of discomfort.

In one case, all body language, including facial expressions, was eliminated. I had given all the women the option to keep their cameras off during the interview, and one woman opted to have her camera off. Nonetheless, her ability to see me while I could not see her was an interesting experience. I asked her at the end why she did not feel comfortable having her camera on; she said, “I don’t know you,” which was a valid response.

The women I interviewed in person contacted me directly through snowball sampling, not through organisations. Interviews conducted in person took place in public spaces the women themselves chose. During the discussions in those spaces, I noticed women frequently scanned the area or expressed their awareness of the recorder on the table. For instance, my field notes on the interview conducted with **Anna** and **Parisha** in shopping centres (locations both women chose) demonstrated the uneasiness this location brought on. I noted this in my fieldnotes as follows:

> She [**Anna**] was very aware of the recorder being on; she kept eyeing it during the whole time that she was talking, and although she gave consent for me to record, she didn't seem very comfortable being recorded. I told her I could switch the recorder off and stick to handwritten notes, but she declined this. A significant change occurred, however, as soon as the interview stopped, and she watched me switch the recorder off. She seemed really, really relaxed and became very chatty, asking me a lot of questions about myself, where I come from, about my daughter and about how I got here [in the UK] [Field notes: 01/11/2021].

Parisha, on the other hand, was constantly scanning the place and whispered almost everything she told me. I recorded her demeanour as follows in my fieldnotes:

> **Parisha** was very aware of the environment that we're in because we sat in a public place, a very open place, and there was traffic because it's a shopping centre and people were walking around... I suggested that we look for a more private space, but she said she was fine where we were. She started speaking in code: for instance, certain words like her trafficker became "my T". She also spoke in a really low voice. This was all understandable, of course, because we were in a public place, and I could see that **Parisha** was very alert to our surroundings. She kept looking around at the people who were passing by. She kept refusing to relocate, and this made me wonder why. All in all, I don't feel like she kept anything away from me… [fieldnotes: 20/11/2021].

Ruby did the same – she chose to be interviewed in a restaurant but was vigilant and whispered much of the conversation. However, I did not feel she held back any information because of this. **Caitlin** did not exhibit any uneasiness – she chose a soft play area as she had to bring her son, who played while we conversed. This place was not as unduly crowded, and social distancing was observed. On the other hand, **Rose** initially chose a restaurant she frequented and said she felt safe there, but unfortunately, this was closed on the interview day. She decided on another one – a coffee shop, but it was too full upon arriving there, and the tables were too close together. She ended up settling on another location which was quieter and more private.

At the end of each interview, I offered each woman a ten-pound voucher for Amazon. **Selma** queried me on this, saying Amazon is restrictive and expensive, and some women do not have Amazon Prime, which would

enable free delivery. She suggested considering supermarket vouchers. I went back to the ethics committee with this information, and I was approved to include supermarket vouchers, which most of the women ended up opting for. I did not offer additional vouchers for follow-up interviews, which I address below.

3.5.2.2 The Second Cycle of Interviews

I had concerns about not having sufficient time to establish a strong rapport with the women I interviewed. I wished I could have known them better before delving into the interviews, as the questions touched upon personal aspects of their lives. Therefore, I was worried about extractivism - merely collecting their stories and moving-on without further interaction. To address this, I encouraged the women to feel comfortable contacting me to connect after the interviews, whether to say hello or catch up. I clarified that I would not initiate contact with them, leaving the choice to them. While many chose not to maintain contact, some did. This extended relationship-building resulted in follow-up interviews with **Chioma**, **Selma**, and **Ruby**, occurring almost a year after the initial discussions. These follow-up interviews brought forth new methodological insights, particularly in the context of building rapport.

In **Chioma**’s case, additional insights emerged regarding the impact of trauma, memory, and rapport building. When I initially interviewed her in November 2021, **Chioma** had left exploitation approximately five years earlier and had entered the NRM at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which took a toll on her mental health. I was initially unaware of these details, as **Chioma** had contacted me in response to my call for participants from Organisation A. Once I realised she might need more time to address her mental health, I offered to postpone the interview, but **Chioma** insisted on proceeding, considering the discussion therapeutic. She stressed the importance of speaking with me because:

> At times, when someone goes through something, and you voice it out, you say it out, you know you are relieved. Yeah, you are relieved because you have told somebody, and maybe, in return, that person will now say something back to you that will pull the pressure down. **Chioma**.

I allowed her to have a significant degree of control during the interview. I asked only a few general questions that permitted her to share only what she felt comfortable discussing. This initial interview lasted a mere 20 minutes. After this interview, we engaged in a 30-minute conversation about her music and other interests. Based on the circumstances of the first interview, I decided to do a follow-up interview with her in September

2022, ten months after the initial interview. The follow-up interview was significantly different in that **Chioma** spoke longer, more confidently and was forthcoming with more information. There are various contributors to this. Her mental health was in a much better state, visible in how she spoke with me and something to which she attested as she said her case workers have been supportive, especially in ensuring she received the counselling she needed. **Chioma** was also granted the right to work by the second interview, which she also attributed to her improved mental state. In the second interview, she also revealed that she has six children, not only three, as she previously mentioned in the first interview. She explained that she only noted the three children she was worried about at the time, as she had no contact with them.

A learning experience arose during the follow-up interview with **Ruby**, who expressed concerns about the nature of my study, focusing on long-term trajectories. It had been nearly a year since our initial interview in November 2021, and **Ruby** felt the need to provide an update on her progress. During our first conversation, she shared her aspirations of being in a relationship, getting married, having children, moving out of her shared accommodation, and achieving financial stability. However, by September 2022, despite securing a job she had always desired, **Ruby** was still living in a shared house with ten other people and was not in a relationship.

Although the primary purpose of our follow-up interview was to understand her experiences in her new job and how that has affected her life in general, **Ruby** still felt compelled to demonstrate her progress and update me on her journey. This impacted the interview itself, and because of the relationship we had built over the past couple of months, she informed me of her worries, which we discussed openly. The takeaway from this follow-up conversation is that as researchers, we should approach cautiously and be clear about our intentions of contacting participants. Again, rapport is also important, as I am doubtful that **Ruby** would have opened up about her feelings had we not had a friendly relationship.

The third follow-up conversation was with **Selma**, with whom I had also been in regular contact. We discussed our lives in the diaspora, issues related to child-rearing, and the importance of balancing cultural differences between British culture and our respective cultures. We spoke about issues surrounding childcare as well as the general difficulties surrounding rooting oneself in a new place. There was a marked difference between

the initial interview, which was rather bleak and felt hopeless and this one, where, in her own words, "things are looking up" because she now has a part-time job that allows her to care for her son, she has trusted informal childcare. She is also in college studying towards her dream job in early childhood education.

The fourth follow-up interview was to be with **Nelao**; however, due to some personal challenges she was facing at the time, **Nelao** opted to cancel it. Having described the interview process and some valuable outcomes from both the first and second cycle of the interviews conducted with the women, I delve into data analysis in the next section.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis is an essential aspect of social research as it aids the researcher in making sense of the data collected. It forms part of the entire process; it is not left to the end of data collection, but it is embedded into the data collection period and continues after data collection is completed. In social research, data analysis refers to the process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modelling data to discover useful information, draw conclusions and support decision-making while remaining true to participants' accounts (Noble & Smith, 2014).

Research rooted in feminist praxis utilises research techniques, including narrative inquiry or analysis. Narrative inquiry is most often employed for understanding human experience(s) (Lal et al., 2012). The stories that people tell are the vehicles through which experiences are studied. I used narrative inquiry to analyse the women's and practitioners' stories in this research because narratives hold the power to humanise, serving as more than just records of lived experiences; they are potent tools for resistance, disruption, and the forging of change (Nicholson, 2022). Narrative inquiry disrupts traditional social scientific research, which has a realist assumption and a focus on information collection (Earthy & Cronin, 2008, p. 423); instead, and as I have done in this research, narrative inquiry emphasises stories as symbolic interactions and political process, allowing marginalised groups or people who have a discreditable or stigmatised identity to be heard as the narrative is interested in representation (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). Further, "narrative allows researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness" while attempting to capture the whole story (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 10).

Contemporary representations of survivor narratives, especially on NGO websites, are strategically edited, shortened and retold in ways aimed at achieving specific aims such as funding, awareness raising and so on and thus do not always capture the whole story, especially survivors' subjective experiences (Nicholson, 2022), but instead are used as spectacles of suffering, often sought out to drive attention and investment (Quirk, 2023). To accurately and fairly represent the women's stories, I used detailed and frequent quotes from the participants to allow a complete narration of their stories as far as possible.

I do not intend to take over the telling of the women's stories in this research, as the women I have spoken to are all capable of doing that. As Brennan (2005) noted, researchers are tasked with telling survivors' stories until survivors are ready and safe enough to do so for themselves. I posit that the women I spoke to in this research can tell their stories, and I am only a vehicle through which those stories are told (Knudsen, 1995). Being this vehicle, I will not usurp their voices and will quote them in as much length as possible to let them tell their stories. Knowing that survivors of MSHT have long been left in the margins of knowledge production (Dang, 2021) has also influenced my decision to report women's journeys the way I have.

Further, survivors have often been depicted as broken, helpless, traumatised, and suffering, but this is a one-dimensional depiction of their lives. As Tuck and Yang (2014, p. 231) stated, "Pain narratives are always incomplete", and I seek to tell complete narratives here. I am mindful of the plea for qualitative researchers to stop conducting research that focuses only on the damage, suffering, and negative aspects of experiences and actively work towards rectifying research methodologies and practices that perpetuate dehumanisation and marginalisation (Savage et al., 2021). As a feminist qualitative researcher, I must widen my work. This involves capturing not only the challenges but also the aspirations, ambitions, agency, and strength of MSHT survivors to acquire a more complete and authentic portrayal of their lived experiences. Finally, an essential aspect of narrative inquiry is that researcher-participant relationships are a crucial focus of the narrative inquiry (Lal et al., 2012, p. 11). In narrative inquiry, relational aspects are central in every stage of the process. This includes negotiating entry into participants' lives, discussing consent, establishing connections during data collection, and considering relationships in the representation of findings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I combined narrative inquiry with grounded theory in this research, as researchers are increasingly combining methods and methodologies to better research outcomes. Grounded theory allows researchers to develop theories directly from data, providing deep insights into complex social phenomena (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory does not test pre-existing hypotheses. It aims to generate theories that are grounded in data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Its inductive approach, constant comparison, and systematic coding processes ensure the emergence of well-grounded and comprehensive theories. I also chose grounded theory because it centres on crafting theories that are rooted in data and moulded by the perspectives of participants, transcending mere description (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Therefore, grounded theory is beneficial for the research of sensitive topics as it allows the researcher to discover from the participants the meaning-making of their own experiences (Scerri et al., 2012).

These two approaches can be seen as methodologically complementary, as the issues of fragmentation and de-contextualisation in grounded theory can be counterbalanced by the “situated and particular” focus associated with narrative inquiry. Integrating both approaches opens opportunities to cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied and to present findings that are accessible to a broader audience (Lal et al., 2012).

Riessman (2008, p. 391) differentiates the analytic process between narrative inquiry and grounded theory by providing that grounded theory is “category centred” while narrative inquiry is “case centred”. Grounded theory data analysis concerns finding relationships between concepts and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by coding data, which is then developed into categories. Grounded theory also employs memos as a tool for documenting and refining the researcher’s analysis of the data and encompassing the specifics underlying the comparisons drawn between categories (Turner & Astin, 2021). Memos not only stimulate the researcher’s thought process but also capture essential insights (Turner & Astin, 2021). After the interviews, I initially coded them by listening to the interview recordings and noting codes. “A code in qualitative analysis is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 5). I then conducted a second round of coding using Microsoft Word and highlighting text.

With narrative inquiry, the researcher aims to embed theory within a participant's narrative and maintain the integrity of the participant's stories. In this approach, a story is a unit of analysis. In contrast, the grounded theory approach involves coding a story and subsequently fragmenting it based on one or several categories of emerging interest (Lal et al., 2012). In narrative analysis, coding procedures may be employed, but in this context, the researcher codes data by identifying narrative features such as plotlines, details of the setting, characters, and actions within a participant's account (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I opted to integrate both narrative inquiry and grounded theory in my study because I interviewed 32 participants, which meant that solely relying on narrative inquiry would have posed a challenge, as it emphasises maintaining entire narratives intact. By incorporating grounded theory, I could fragment participants' stories while preserving as much detail as possible. This involved quoting extensively rather than summarising their accounts, enabling me to present findings in a more digestible manner. This approach allowed me to keep the richness of the data, ensuring that the depth and intricacies of participants' narratives were preserved in the analysis. In this manner, I balanced the more conventional methods of recording and reporting research emphasised by grounded theory (Thomas & James, 2006) and the flexibility in approaches granted by narrative inquiry. This hybrid approach allowed me to capture the strengths of both methodologies.

Once I acquainted myself with the interviews, I discerned both similarities and differences among them: I identified common themes across the interviews whilst recognising that each woman's experiences and journeys were unique. The main themes I identified from the interviews could be categorised into three stages, as outlined below. These stages were then translated into the findings chapters as reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Initial stages—Leaving exploitation:

- Women's agency in liberation
- Challenges in the aftermath of liberation
- Barriers to identification: Information, awareness, and fear
- Informal support networks

Secondary stages—Navigating support:

- Navigating continuous obstacles
- Yearning for a normal life
- Rejecting and navigating suffering
- Women's unyielding persistence

Third stage— Transition Into independent living:

- Setting women up to fail
- Negotiating relationships

Before delving into the findings, I will address one more aspect that is pertinent to narrative inquiry and feminist methodologies: reflexivity. Researchers are encouraged to bring their histories and perspectives to the forefront, which involves creating a point of reference and introspection for themselves and, by extension, for the reader in relation to their theoretical analysis. This strategy enhances clarity regarding the researcher's impact on the reconstruction of meaning into theory (Mills et al., 2006), which is fundamental when considering the potential influence that the researcher may have over the findings that they develop.

3.7 Reflexivity

As England (1994, p. 82) provided, "Research is a process, not just a product". Part of this process is the reflection that researchers do on the research process and their positionality. Reflexivity involves critical self-awareness and self-examination by researchers throughout the research process, acknowledging their subjectivity, biases, and influence on the research outcomes (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Reflexivity involves a self-conscious awareness on the researcher's part of the relationship between the researcher and an "Other" (Pillow, 2003). This awareness includes being aware that research represents a shared space shaped by researchers and participants (England, 1994), and the researcher's and participants' identities can impact the research process. Identities come into play via our perceptions of others and how we expect others to perceive us (Bourke, 2014).

In detailing my positionality herein, I begin with my own story to lay bare my ontological and epistemological underpinnings. I follow Dang's (2021, p. 85) observation that "rarely does anti-slavery literature question or reveal its ontological and epistemological foundations, leaving them unstated and tacitly assumed." Epistemology concerns itself with the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge and asks, how do we know what we know? What can we know? (Audi, 2011), Ontology, on the other hand, delves into the nature of being and existence and seeks to answer questions like what exists? And what is the nature of things? (Quine, 1969). Despite their distinct domains, these philosophical disciplines are intricately interwoven, and their interplay has far-reaching implications for our comprehension of reality, human cognition, and the nature of truth (Rhee, 2021). My standing comes from my positionality, which is informed by my identity and story, both of which I reveal below. Feminist research presupposes that research involves emotions and methodology involves connections (Rhee, 2021). In addition, while conventional academia often requires detachment from one's writing to achieve objectivity, deliberate presence fosters relationships, and acknowledging bias (coupled with reflexivity) allows for the examination of subjectivity (Masamha, 2020).

I am a Black African woman and a mother. I am in my early thirties and a human rights lawyer who worked in the Namibian government for nearly ten years before starting this research. I have always been interested in women's and children's rights, which ignited from my childhood and early adulthood. Inevitably, I brought a women's and children's rights perspective into this research. Furthermore, my research journey commenced in the initial year of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. I arrived in Hull with my young daughter shortly before a nationwide lockdown was imposed in response to the surging cases and fatalities attributed to the COVID-19 virus in England. This situation posed considerable obstacles in terms of securing private rental housing, arranging for childcare, and coping with the closure of schools, all amid a backdrop of various other uncertainties. I made a deliberate and conscious choice to uproot both my life and that of my child from Namibia. I was fortunate to be able to undertake this relocation safely and within the framework of regulated immigration procedures. However, I am acutely aware that this is a privilege that many other women who are also on the move do not possess. It is a privilege to decide to pack up and leave because I had the financial means to support such a move and the additional benefit of receiving a scholarship from the Doctoral College at the University of Hull.

Although our experiences are not similar, I highlight that mutual connections were identified with some women, especially those racialised as Black, that nourished a relationship borne from our racialisation (Blackness) and our Africanness, which created an instant yet essential connection. As Tamale (2020, p. 11) poignantly pointed out, “sitting at the bottom rung of the racial construct, Black people have a common cause regardless of location, ideology, class, gender, and other life circumstances; ‘blackness’ becomes their tribe, their nationalism.” Nevertheless, whilst interviews with the African women fostered recognition and comfort surrounding issues such as culture and family dynamics, the non-African women also found ways to connect with who I was, primarily as a woman and single mother.

While it is essential to recognise the factors that connected me to the women and seemingly placed me as an “insider” to a certain extent, I remain an “outsider” because I have never been unfree in the way that the women have been. An insider perspective refers to a researcher’s position within the studied community, organisation, or social context, and an outsider perspective involves researchers external to the context being investigated (Lindvall & Rueda, 2014). I do not have the subjective experience of exploitation in this context, and as such, I do not go into it, assuming I know what the women have gone through. In the section that follows, I explore in further detail how the women received my positionality and how it interacted with them.

3.7.1 My Positionality in Relation to the Women

Most of the women I spoke to are non-UK nationals, predominantly from Africa and Asia, more than half of whom are mothers. Most of those mothers are single mothers whose journeys have also been acutely affected by COVID-19 in various ways. There were similarities that we shared with, to a certain extent, a worldview that generated connections that brought about richer data (Masamha, 2020). Therefore, being “women”, while it facilitated our connections, was not the only aspect that played a role in how we interacted. In fact, it would be too simplistic to assume that our gender ensured automatic connections as the combination of other factors and common positions, such as race, played a role (Phoenix, 1994; Puwar, 1997). Most of the similarity is based on the “liability of foreignness” that we share, an inherent disadvantage that foreignness confers on non-natives, which shapes our understanding of and interaction with the UK’s “sticky” written (Masamha,

2020, p. 103) and unwritten laws and regulations which affect the everydayness of life, but also be aware that we come from different places and have distinct cultural identities.

My journey of starting anew in a different continent, country, and city with a young child bore significant resemblances to the experiences of many women, particularly those who grapple with childcare responsibilities, accommodation challenges, relationship dynamics, and the navigation of British culture. Establishing these connections was vital because my research also seeks to delve into how women confront these private trials and achievements. It is essential to underscore that while these connections allowed for a deeper understanding, my experiences can never truly mirror those of the women I studied. Their struggles were further compounded by irregular migration and the associated constraints that accompanied it. Nonetheless, these connections enriched the quality of the data gathered as I candidly presented my own experiences to the women, and some of them perceived this transparency as a basis for trust.

We discovered commonalities, shared concerns, moments of joy, and practical advice on the challenges of raising young children in the diaspora. We openly exchanged stories about our experiences in navigating racism, delving into conversations about how we educate our children about its existence, how to identify it, and how to address it effectively. Our discussions also revolved around concerns related to our children's sense of belonging, which is often a topic of intense consideration in their everyday lives. These children frequently find themselves in situations where they are the sole Black child in their surroundings or, to fit in, may make choices that clash with their true sense of belonging.

I observed that the women I interviewed displayed a genuine curiosity about me, often inquiring about my journey towards pursuing a PhD, the steps I took to reach this point, and how my journey was unfolding. I welcomed their questions and was more than willing to share details about myself. Their interest in my story made our conversations reciprocal. This dynamic, in a way, influenced the power balance between the women and me. It transcended the conventional model of me simply gathering their data and moving forward. Instead, they, too, departed with a deeper understanding of me. While they may not have an immediate use for this information about me, this interaction contributes to breaking down the traditional hierarchical structure within academia. It fosters a more equitable exchange of knowledge and experience.

Owing to the multitude of shared experiences I had with the women, I possessed a “particular feeling, knowledge, and understanding” (Lorde, 2019/1984, p. 49). This unique perspective positioned me favourably to engage with the women, enabling them to open up and share their stories with me more freely. It also significantly shaped my comprehension of their narratives. I, therefore, entered this project from the position of someone who can relate and connect personally to a certain degree with the women herein but also from a place of being able to be aware of my own biases as a researcher, which also “shape the research process, serving as checkpoints along the way” (Bourke, 2014, p. 1).

Recognising the potential biases inherent in my role as a qualitative researcher is crucial. In this research, I serve as the primary research instrument (Bourke, 2014). The concept of bias in research is multifaceted. It can encompass adopting a specific viewpoint that highlights certain aspects while obscuring others. More commonly, “bias” refers to systematic errors, indicating a deviation from an accurate measurement or the precise estimation of a population parameter (Hammersley & Gomm, 1997). Consequently, my subjectivities can influence my approach to both the women and the practitioners involved in this study. Acknowledging that these subjectivities are integral to my identity, I am also mindful of their potential impact on the study’s findings.

At the outset of this research, I was initially unaware of any potential biases I might carry. However, as Pannucci and Wilkins (2010) emphasise, bias can manifest at any stage of the research process. It wasn’t until I realised that a significant portion of the women I interviewed were mothers, nearly halfway through data collection, that I became attuned to the possibility of bias. My personal experiences of relocating to England, compounded by the challenges of motherhood, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, triggered this awareness. I began questioning whether my research might inadvertently prioritise or accentuate the experiences of survivor mothers, potentially overshadowing the experiences of non-mothers. I also worried that my primary findings might become heavily influenced by motherhood-related themes. To counteract this potential source of bias, I consistently reminded myself of the research’s original objectives, emphasising that every woman’s unique experiences hold equal importance. This practice allowed me to remain conscious of the multifaceted experiences of survivor women, including the aspect of motherhood and its associated

challenges. After disclosing my positionality, I now direct my attention to equally critical components of reflexivity, which include the data collection and analysis stages.

3.7.2 The Data Collection Stage

I maintained reflexive notes by keeping a research diary throughout the data collection phase, using it as a tool for reflecting on each interview I conducted. The first interview was with **Caitlin**, and it was challenging in that it was the first, and I worried about various issues like the location of the interview. I had to plan for her to be able to bring her young child with her due to a lack of childcare, but the child would be protected from the conversation, and the location would be secure enough from eavesdropping. She chose a soft-play establishment. Safeguarding procedures were implemented, such as sitting at a strategic location out of earshot of anyone but also keeping an eye on the child. During the very first interview, I worried about how I came across to her and my composure; these worries disappeared as soon as I started speaking with **Caitlin** as her warmth and willingness to share her story eased me. Upon listening to the recording and repeatedly reading the transcript, I realised there was a wealth of information in that interview for my data collection for this research, but also for conducting future interviews.

Emotions were a prominent and expected aspect of the interviews for both the women and me. Some women became emotional when speaking about their children, and almost all of them showed emotional difficulties when talking about their future aspirations and where they wanted their lives to lead. For me, hearing how the women struggled throughout the years was challenging. The reflections I recorded after every interview indicated that my emotions were sporadic depending on the woman's trajectory but also on the fact that I could not do much to help their circumstances, even with the awareness that doing this research may potentially help other survivors. But being in the moment as a human being talking to another human being leaves one feeling overcome by a sense of helplessness.

> I felt emotional while I was talking to **Chioma**; I really felt so bad for her. I felt like I could see that she was on the verge of tears the whole time, and I felt terrible about that, so it's just one of those things where you realise that, you know, there is nothing much you can do, and you are here asking people to speak about their experiences, but there's nothing much you can do for them. **Chioma**, however, told me something really profound. She says that she wanted to speak with me to tell her story because "sometimes, when you speak to people, it can be therapeutic, and it can be that person might say something encouraging to you."... Talking about it helps,

> **Chioma** said, so maybe while I may not be able to help with big issues like immigration, accommodation circumstances, and so much more, I am helping by being there, listening and just talking to her as a human being. [Field notes of the first interview: 19/11/20121]

My field notes covered extensively my takeaways from the interviews, and these takeaways shaped the approach I took to analysing them. The emotions and feelings experienced during the data collection stage are all important to the process. They kept me grounded in my humanity and were a constant reminder of the women's humanity. Their experiences of exploitation were incidental, an interruption to life, as Brennan (2014) posited. However, they were still human beings with aspirations and desires that were constantly running up against systems that did not recognise this. The emotions I experienced throughout this journey are an essential aspect of research as connectivity, one that connects further our epistemology with our ontology (Rhee, 2021).

3.7.3 The Data Analysis Process

During data analysis, reflexivity involves critically examining how one's perspectives may impact interpretation. I began my data analysis by first re-listening to the recordings. I then eventually started transcribing the voice recordings, and it was the transcription element of the analytical process of my research that became the most challenging aspect of my data analysis. This was not only due to the arduous nature of transcription. It was the reality of repeatedly replaying the women's experiences and putting them in writing that made them even more grounded and left me feeling even more helpless and sad.

Frequently, when I reviewed the recorded interviews for transcription and data analysis, I found myself deeply affected. Especially when I heard the emotional quiver in the voices of the women, their heavy sighs, and the prolonged silences—occurrences that were quite frequent—it was genuinely heart-wrenching. When I posed questions about the positive aspects of their journeys so far and received long pauses and deep sighs as responses, it was challenging. Many times, their answers were "no," or they would dwell on everything that had gone wrong. It was mainly heartbreaking when the mothers would break down while discussing their children and their desires to provide them with better lives, but various factors beyond their control hindered them.

The encouraging part came when I heard about the women's resilience, their determination to carry on, and their commitment to seeking a better future. While survivors are typically portrayed in one-dimensional terms—weak, damaged, and devoid of agency —the narratives shared by the women I interacted with were already challenging this stereotype. They didn't break down emotionally in these interviews due to lingering experiences of exploitation but instead connected these emotions to the obstacles they faced after leaving exploitation. For example, **Anna** shed the most tears when recounting the challenges she encountered while seeking employment. Repeatedly listening to the audio files for transcription of their interviews allowed me to grasp this more clearly. The women weren't crying because they were helpless victims of exploitation; they were crying because they were being held back from what should have been their freedom.

As I continuously and actively did reflexivity work throughout my research journey, I implemented various well-being strategies for my benefit. Firstly, the unwavering support and patience of my supervisors served as a form of care. I never hesitated to communicate with them when I encountered challenges, and in return, they consistently offered valuable guidance. They encouraged me to acknowledge my emotions and advised me to take a step back when necessary. We talked through difficulties during data collection and analysis. They encouraged taking breaks and engaging in less mentally taxing tasks. They also emphasised the importance of utilising mental health services when required.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

As is customary with any research project, there were limitations to this work (Tyldum, 2010). The main restriction of this research is that it took place in a climate of constant change in laws, policies and practices in the field of MSHT. This meant there was a disjuncture between what practitioners narrated they practised at the time of our conversations in 2021 as opposed to what the women went through five, ten, and twenty years ago. However, because the women have been subjected to systems that rejected them and made them wait years to receive support, most of their experiences were still relevant to the current policy and legal developments.

The second limitation was the issue of access to participants, as highlighted before, which is one of the significant limitations. Even though I gained access to an exceptional number of women and practitioners, the

sample was saturated with one major demographic of women: African women (12). This means the results may not capture a holistic picture of all possible outcomes for survivors in the UK. Nevertheless, generalisation is not the aim of this work. This work looks at the subjective experiences of women and the broader structural factors that affect their journeys. Thus, the experiences of these women who participated in this work are not meant to represent survivors' general experiences. This is an impossible task, as no two survivors' experiences are the same.

Another limitation is that most of the women interviewed herein have been through the NRM, and only two did not go through the NRM, which makes the findings highly shaped by NRM experiences, which was also helpful in cementing the limitations of human rights. As Chapter Two indicated, biases towards non-UK, predominantly non-White survivors are adversely affected by immigration laws and policies, which adversely affect their trajectories and usually come back to prejudices surrounding the "Other" who does not belong and must be removed, as further discussed in Chapter Seven.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed my research journey, having detailed the vital approach of critical methodologies and humanising research. I restated the research questions and justified why critical methods are essential for this thesis. I also emphasised the importance of narrative inquiry as a crucial aspect of feminist methodologies highlighting women's voices and life experiences. I described the participants, introducing both the women survivors and the practitioners who participated in this research and justifying the importance of using both perspectives for holistic research. I then discussed the research journey, detailing the ethical considerations I had to undertake. I described the research journey from the first stages to the data collection process, including participant recruitment and the interviews. I highlighted pertinent methodological insights obtained when comparing online and in-person interviews. After detailing how I conducted data analysis, I offered my reflexivity on the entire process. All the steps and approaches taken in this research journey, as discussed in this chapter, paved the way for reporting the findings, which the following three chapters discuss.

Chapter 4 Leaving Exploitation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of three findings chapters, detailing the three phases most women who participated in this research have experienced after leaving situations of modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT). Through their journeys, there are traceable points where they exited exploitation and navigated formal support systems and, for some, eventually lived independently. The first phase is the initial period after the women exited exploitation. This is discussed in the first chapter of the findings, which details that leaving exploitation does not mean complete freedom. The second phase is the women's time in support systems, predominantly the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and how they navigated that phase, which will be examined in Chapter Five. The third phase is starting over and moving into independent living, as discussed in Chapter Six. The duration of these three phases cannot be quantified, as they depend on every woman's story. Separating the women's journeys into phases does not imply or confine the women's journeys to a simplistic and straightforward journey. Their journeys have been varied, complex, and unique, as all three chapters of the findings will show.

This chapter begins with the women's self-representation, as whether to call them survivors, victims, or anything else has been debated, and it is apposite that the women who participated in this research provide how they identify in this regard. Subsequently, the chapter will examine the women's liberation from exploitation, their various ways of leaving exploitation and the immediate aftermath of such leaving. It then moves to how the women found their way after leaving exploitation, revealing the complexity of their journeys as shaped and affected by a lack of information for both the women and others in society, fear of authorities, incredulity, and dismissal by authorities, and finally the role of informal support networks.

For ease of reference and reading throughout these chapters, all survivors' names are in **bold** text, practitioners' names are underlined, and their positions are abbreviated and bracketed next to their names on their first mention on each page. See Table 3 in Chapter Three on the practitioner's roles and abbreviations.

4.2 Self-Identification

In their self-identification, the women revealed the fluidity of identifying as either a survivor or victim or both, as that depends on their circumstances. At the time of interviewing them, however, they generally fell into four categories: survivors only, simultaneously survivors and victims, victim only and dis-identifying from any labels. The survivor narrative can be "described as a heroic quest narrative, in the course of which the phoenix rises from the ashes" and is preferred "in part because it offers the survivor a sense of power that was missing from the victim discourse" (Hunter, 2010, p. 186). The women in this research—**Mary**, **Chosen**, **Naita**, **Naomi**, and **Parisha**—identified themselves as survivors; however, they regard the survivor label to encompass more than just surviving exploitation. They attributed survival to several aspects - Survival is literal - they have survived exploitation and continue to survive obstacles afterwards. Sometimes, leaving exploitation marks a transition into survivorship, but survivorship is not confined to surviving MSHT. They narrated that they were also victimised by processes they encountered after leaving exploitation, and thus, survivorship can be a continuous state of a woman's journey. They do not automatically become survivors just because they exited exploitation. They revealed that victimhood comes not only from exploitation but also from the processes that come afterwards, such as going through the NRM. They further recognised that self-reliance and persistence are critical aspects of their survivorship - they have not given up and are using their lived experience to navigate life.

To illustrate, they narrated as follows:

Mary:

> I am a survivor; I am not a victim. I am a survivor—for me to be alive today, to be as strong as I am? What doesn't kill me makes me strong. I am a survivor; I am not a victim, and I am not crying. I don't depend on anybody. My life is not in anybody's hands, so I am not a victim. I don't need anybody's sympathy. Yes, you are empathising with me; you are not sympathising with me, so I am not a victim; I am a survivor…

Chosen: **"**I am a survivor. Because I survived it because if I gave up, I am not a survivor, but I survived it." **Naita** stated, "I guess I am a survivor. To me, I was a victim when it was still happening to me, and then now, I have left as a survivor." **Naomi**: "I am a survivor… I have survived all this process, so I can say I'm a survivor because I'm telling my story and all that…"

Parisha:

> I am a survivor because I am definitely surviving; I am dealing with it, and I am able to deal with it, so the T [Trafficker] has done a lot to me, but still, I am alive, and I am still here.

Nelao also narrated that: "I am a full survivor, honestly, because I escaped that situation, and now just because I decided I am not going to date, I don't think I can fall into that situation again."

Tiwa, **Tara**, **Abebi** and **Diwata** identified that being a survivor also means surviving the restrictions they faced during the NRM or other systems, pointing to the inability to exercise rights such as work, showing the entanglement between the survivor and victim status—that it is not confined to exploitation but also applied to situations where rights and freedoms are restricted after exploitation.

Tiwa initially regarded herself as a victim because of all that she experienced during and after exploitation:

> For a long time, I saw myself as a victim, but I am a survivor now. After getting into the NRM, you just seem like you are a victim. Because you are a victim of everything because you are… in a situation that you didn't cause by yourself, and then the authorities even use that against you, and then you are in a Safehouse, and you think I'm not able to do anything with my life. So, you are a victim of something if you are limited, not even limited, but you can't do anything…

While considering herself a survivor because she has overcome her exploitation, **Tara** recognised that being unable to work and send money to her family and being unable to be with her family makes her a victim.

> I passed that case [exploitation]. I am already a survivor. I am no longer a victim; I am already a survivor, but still, it's not enough. Although I am earning now, I was a victim when I don't have the right to work. My life isn't normal because I can't send them [children] well to support them. Now… I can work, I can send them well, I can send them money to support them, but the feeling that as a mother, to see them, to go back and see them, to visit them physically, that's another depressing situation for me as a mother.

Diwata's narration also connected survivorship to surviving government restrictions, stating, "I feel I survived because I have already the permission to work and remain in the UK." **Abebi**'s resilience makes her a survivor, narrating, "I am a survivor; I am a fighter. I am not going to lie to you. Life has put me down, but I decided to kick life back…"

Survivorship is thus varied and depends on every woman's circumstances. It is not confined to surviving exploitation but also includes navigating any restrictive systems they must navigate upon exiting exploitation.

However, sometimes survivorship can co-exist with victimhood, which **Ginger** and **Paloma** expressed. They attributed embodying both labels simultaneously to their present circumstances, such as living conditions and their abilities to support others. **Ginger** recognised that her victimhood is also rooted in her experiences in her Safehouse,[9] but she believed she embodies both labels, narrating:

> At the moment, I am a survivor. I am a victim in the house, in the Safehouse, I am a victim, but I am a survivor, and on anti-slavery day, I gave a speech to survivors to encourage them. So, if I am in a situation like I am going nowhere, I'm a victim in the Safehouse, but I'm a survivor. I'm a survivor/victim.

Paloma considers herself both a victim and a survivor as well because she can fight for herself now:

> I am a victim, but I am a survivor as well because right now, since I am empowered already …I am working in the community so right now, I have empowered already that I can fight for my own rights.

Consequently, being a survivor and a victim simultaneously depends on the challenges a woman faces and on what she can do for others. Sometimes, however, the survivor label has differed even after exiting exploitation, again depending on people's circumstances, and when the circumstances are not suitable, the victim label is more realistic.

Some women may not identify with survivorship as they may not feel like survivors at all (Peternelj-Taylor, 2015). **Khanyi** was the only one who identified as solely a victim explaining:

> I still have to tell myself the truth. I am still a victim. I can tell someone my story and use it to advise and encourage them because I am telling people I was not a victim. It's like I am trying to paint it white while it's already black.

Therefore, embodying the survivor and/or victim label depends on various aspects, including their life circumstances, the stage of the journey, what they can do and how they feel. Labels are, however, not always accepted and some women are often unwilling to self-identify as trafficked women (Cusick et al., 2009). In this research, **Chioma** and **Selma**, who preferred to stay away from labels as they do not want to be constantly reminded of their experiences or be defined by them, narrating:

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[9] A detailed account of the women's Safehouse experiences is in Chapter Five.

> I don’t call myself that because when you call yourself that, your mind will always be flashing back. You don’t call yourself a survivor. No. You don’t call yourself a victim. No. **Chioma**.

> I don’t put a label on myself; I don’t like putting a label on myself… that’s why I also don’t like being asked in the interview [job], okay? We see a gap. What were you doing in this gap? And it takes me back. The people in front of me will now see me as weak to do the job that I am applying for, so putting a label on myself would limit my capabilities. So, I don’t want to put a label on myself, but when I meet with somebody who has gone through what I went through, I can tell them that actually I also went through that, and this is how you can get better help, or I will support them any way I know how. **Selma**.

The women in this study have shown that navigating labels such as "survivor," "victim," or a combination of both is a dynamic process influenced by their circumstances and life experiences. While some women identified as victims during periods of exploitation, the transition away from such conditions does not automatically confer the status of survivor. This is because the challenges they face after leaving exploitation can also be victimising. The following section explores the beginning of their lives post-exploitation, focusing on their exit from these adverse conditions and the complex interplay of identity accompanying their journey.

4.3 The Exit

Leaving exploitation is multifaceted and may include some of the women hatching detailed plans to leave, making a literal run for it, collaborating with health professionals and other authorities to facilitate their getaway, and sometimes crossing borders within and outside the UK. Not all the women were exploited in the UK but have all ended up in the UK through different circumstances such as trafficking, migration for work or education, migration to seek refuge or being brought back “home”.

While this research did not focus on the women’s circumstances during exploitation but on what happened after that, some women revealed their exploitative experiences organically as they detailed the events surrounding their exit from exploitation. Those who did deemed doing so necessary to give context to the events leading up to their exit as a way of telling their stories in a complete manner. Therefore, before examining how the women left exploitation, it is fitting to recount how some ended up in exploitation and subsequently in the UK as a crucial contextual aspect of their eventual liberation.

4.3.1 Coming to the UK

Naita, **Abebi**, **Tiwa**, and **Anna** were trafficked to the UK as children by family and close relations. **Naita** narrated, “I was trafficked by my family, and I was forced into sex work”. **Abebi** also revealed that she was brought to the UK at 13 or 14 years of age, and **Tiwa** narrated that:

> I came to the UK at age 13, and that’s where the journey began. I and my sister we were both trafficked here by… we thought, a family member. We were into child servitude and were sent to different houses for domestic chores. **Tiwa**.

Anna was also trafficked to the UK as a child:

> I was trafficked when I was just 17. I was just brought into this country. I was a minor; I was just a child. I just lost my grandmother. I didn’t know where my parents were because I grew up with my grandma. Then when my grandma passed away, I think, like, because you know in Africa, everyone is aunty or uncle around you… so I think one of the ladies…

Others migrated to the UK for studies, work, and other reasons and eventually became exploited. **Parisha** was in the UK to study and narrated how she ended up in exploitation: “I was struggling with the people that I was living with, and I really wanted to improve my English. I asked them if they knew somebody who could help me with that… this is how I met my trafficker.” **Chosen** was also in the UK for studies and ended up being exploited. Others migrated to the UK to work or with work. **Rose** was in the UK for work and became trapped whilst attending an interview. **Paloma** and **Diwata** were in the UK to work as migrant domestic workers and were exploited by employers. A family employed **Tara** as a migrant domestic worker in another country where she was exploited, but she escaped that situation when she accompanied her then-exploitative employer on a visit to England.

Other women fled to the UK for safety. **Nelao**, **Mary**, and **Chioma**’s journeys to the UK were their way of leaving their exploitation. **Naomi** and **Khanyi** were also trafficked to the UK under circumstances they chose not to disclose. **Selma** and **Ginger** migrated to the UK for undisclosed reasons and eventually became entrapped in exploitation. **Caitlin** is a UK national and was exploited in the UK. **Ruby**, also a UK national, was exploited elsewhere and brought back to the UK through diplomatic means.

The above details of the women’s situations show how every woman’s story differs. Just as how they ended up in exploitation differs, so do the conditions of their leaving exploitation, which depended on each woman’s

circumstances and the resources they had, including but not limited to financial resources—such as the ability to pay for plane tickets to leave a country — and human resources— such as liaising with others to aid their exit from exploitation. The following section explores how this transpired for the women.

4.3.2 Ways of Leaving Exploitation

The literature on MSHT often emphasises dramatic narratives of rescue and escape (Brennan, 2014; Brennan & Plambech, 2018). It has been highlighted that there are diverse methods by which individuals exit such exploitative situations. According to Choi-Fitzpatrick (2012), exits can occur through three main ways: (1) escape, death, and disappearance—areas where data is notably scarce; (2) raids initiated by sympathetic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or police forces; and (3) collective action, which may arise internally within the community or through external facilitation by NGOs. However, many victims are not "rescued" by law enforcement or external parties but instead manage to escape on their own and may subsequently seek help (Haynes, 2007, p.350).

The women who spoke about how they left exploitation in this research cemented the above studies and revealed that leaving was done in two ways: several liberated themselves, sometimes collaborating with their social connections. Others left through collaboration with practitioners such as medical professionals and the police. . The women's narratives contribute significantly to knowledge about leaving exploitation by revealing more nuanced methods of leaving and emphasising their agency. Their accounts spotlight how women utilise their own bravery and ingenuity to orchestrate their liberation, shifting the narrative from passive victimhood to active self-rescue. Even in situations where the women were assisted to leave exploitation by authorities and social connections, they still played active roles in how that occurred, as discussed in the following subsections.

4.3.2.1 Liberating Themselves

Caitlin, **Rose**, **Naomi**, **Selma**, **Tiwa**, **Abebi** and **Tara** revealed they liberated themselves by making a literal run for it or liaising with others, such as friends, to do so. **Caitlin** was exploited in England and ran away from her perpetrator, crossing the border into another UK country to escape her situation, saying, “I had to run away literally. I was in [English city] when I escaped, and I ended up in [UK country].” **Rose** says, “There was an incident there where I confronted him, and then I made … a run for it.” **Naomi** also narrated, “I was trafficked and pregnant at the same time, so after like a month, I was able to escape from the traffickers,” without going into further detail about how she did that. **Selma** left similarly.

Tiwa left with the help of her older sister, with whom she was exploited.

> We were in a house with a couple and their two children, and the husband was sexually molesting me and my sister. At the time, I didn't know. I thought it was just me, but obviously, my sister, who was just two years older than me, was being molested, too. She then planned for us to kind of run away from there when she's been sent to the shops, so I kind of went with her, and that was it.

Abebi was also trafficked together with her older sister, who, with other people in their community, aided their liberation, narrating:

> I was new to this country, actually, so I did not know the laws and processes, and obviously, I was thirteen at that time or fourteen, and so I was a child myself, and it was hard to know, okay, this is what to do, and this is what not to do so my sister and a couple of other people that have helped over the years have kinda like helped to get out of the situation.

Tara spoke of her exit in more elaborate terms. As mentioned previously, **Tara** was brought to the UK by an employer from another country. She narrated:

> I was so scared for my life because they are powerful people; they have connections… but we didn't have a phone; she [employer's wife] confiscated our phones. She gave us a Nokia that had no camera, only for texting, and she was only the contact… so before that, I said that there was a lady driver before that happened this lady driver brought us the Samsung tablet, and we kept it really hidden, I took it with me when we were here in [city], and I really hid it in the secret pocket of the luggage… I have a friend here from [country], we are friends on Facebook, but I said how can I contact her because if we don't have Wi-Fi… so I made a white lie to the daughter [employer's], I said to her my oldest daughter is very ill, and I really want to speak to her, so I said can you give me the Wi-Fi password because I want to speak to her… She gave it to me, and I contacted my friend. I said I really need help; I am here [location]; I remember the house number the street, so I gave her this address, and it was good timing because there is a security lock at the door and there is a man who came, and she [employer's wife] said a password for the lock… I had a chance when Madam was taken for a medical check-up, so I said to my friend come, and when she came, I just run out of the house, and she drove away.

Other women found studying opportunities in the UK to escape their situations of exploitation in their countries of origin, aided by friends to do so, as it was for **Mary**, who narrated:

> I told her [friend] everything. I was communicating with her, so before I left, she was actually the one who helped me secure the school and every other thing. So luckily for me, because she was British, she was able to help me do everything, so she bought the ticket for me.

Naita left exploitation with a client, narrating:

> Some people have a period when they escape or are rescued, and nothing ever happens again. But for me, it was a bit more like a gradual ending type of thing…I didn't get rescued as some people do, but I ended up leaving with a client, and he was then… very abusive…

Naita eventually left the abusive client and found her own way after that. The women left in various ways, and their leaving sometimes took meticulous planning and swift action. They took courageous steps to leave exploitation, and those who had them used their social connections to leave. Some women left in collaboration with practitioners such as the police and medical personnel, which the next section explores.

4.3.2.2 Authority-Assisted Liberation

The police and other practitioners aided **Ginger**, **Paloma**, **Parisha** and **Anna** in exiting their exploitation in the UK. **Ginger**'s exit was facilitated by a mental health professional who, after consultation with **Ginger**, identified that she was potentially being exploited. With **Ginger**'s permission, she liaised with the police, who aided her exit. While **Ruby** indicated authorities supported her to return to the UK from the country where she was exploited, she chose not to reveal the details surrounding that.

Paloma did the school run for her then-exploitative employer's children, and thus her exit involved a parent at that school and the police, narrating:

> A British lady was the one who reported to the police that I was a possible victim of MSHT because maybe they just saw me that I am this person because I am scared to talk to people because they said to me that you are not allowed to talk to anyone, so I don't talk to anyone, especially in the school, so one of the British ladies reported to the police because she asked me where are your passport and I said my passport is with my employer. One day, near the school, police officers approached me and interrogated me. They asked me about my situation at my work, so I told them everything, and they applied me to the NRM.

Parisha's exit was also facilitated by the police, narrating:

> The place where I was working was a big police presence, so they realised that something was not okay… they asked me if they could approach me, and then I explained to them what was happening. "I am here not because I wanted. I am here because of my T" [trafficker]. And then they say, "Okay, you need to move from that place. We're going to move you to a Safehouse because we need to make sure that you are safe."

Leaving exploitation was done differently and was often a concerted effort with others. When the women left, the hope was that life would be better. However, the immediate aftermath of leaving has not been easy for most. While some of the women received assistance immediately, those assisted by the police were taken to Safehouses. Others, especially those who liberated themselves or were assisted by informal networks in their liberation, went from one bad situation to another, as discussed below.

4.4 The Immediate Aftermath

The women in this research indicated that they expected leaving exploitation to be liberatory, a new beginning. However, the women were met with endless obstacles. The women were often homeless, and those who liberated themselves without the involvement of authorities often ended up roaming the streets, sleeping rough before going into shelters or being taken in by social connections. **Tiwa** described this as follows:

> In the aftermath of that, because once you've gone through that and you have come out, it's always gonna be one thing after the other until the government does get involved and you get help… until you're able to get help from the government, you escape from one place, but then you can be manipulated into another. It's gonna be continuous until there is an intervention from the government…

Typically, the women describe the first few days and sometimes months and years as riddled with confusion, fear, desperation, and a lack of choices. Brennan (2014) also found that fear and confusion are commonplace in the immediate aftermath of leaving exploitation, as people usually do not know where to go or what to do. **Ginger** narrated:

> The day I was rescued, I had too much anxiety. And I had depression, so I was scared; I didn't know where I am going; I was so confused. I wanted to run at first when I saw the letter from the Home Office, but I had to give in because I wasn't okay.

Anna, **Naomi**, **Selma**, and **Ruby** were pregnant at the time of their exits and had their well-being and that of their unborn children to think of. Others already had children left elsewhere before going into exploitation and were extremely worried about their well-being after leaving exploitation. The initial days after leaving are thus tumultuous. Those assisted to leave by practitioners often had a more guided but still challenging path. Those who liberated themselves often had to find their way, which has been labyrinthine for most. The section below discusses how the women found their way after exiting exploitation.

4.4.1 Finding Their Way

The women struggled to find their way after leaving exploitation, compounded by their homelessness, a lack of social connections and information, the fears of detention and deportation, dismissal by authorities, and much more. Nevertheless, the women's initial periods after leaving exploitation were highly aided by informal

support systems such as social connections for those who had them and organisations such as faith-based organisations (FBOs)[10] and charities, as usually, those who were not assisted to leave by the police or other practitioners, did not immediately access formal support and relied on these support systems in the absence of any other. Therefore, to determine how the women found their way after exploitation, four aspects will be discussed as follows:

- Support in the immediate aftermath of leaving.
- The lack of information, awareness, and knowledge.
- Encounters with the police and the Home Office (HO).
- Support from social connections and organisations.

Various women received support from their social networks, Good Samaritans[11], religious institutions, and charity organisations as they navigated life after leaving exploitation. This section explores how support was provided and experienced during the women's immediate aftermath of leaving exploitation.

4.4.1.1 Assistance through Social Connections and Others

After exiting exploitation, the women lacked social connections because they were typically in unfamiliar environments with strangers. Having social connections is essential, as Amelia (CP) noted, "Without any kind of connections its very difficult to find their way, to find opportunities…" Good Samaritans assisted those with no connections at all by providing them with housing, personal necessities, and, most crucially, advice on what to do next. Some did, however, have some social connections, such as family and friends or could make some after leaving exploitation. These connections were pivotal throughout the journey for some, and in the initial stage of leaving, Good Samaritans and social connections chiefly provided support with accommodation, information, physical health care and moral support. Ava (MSC) noted, "Homelessness is a specific

[10] The term faith-based organisation is used to mean "an organisation with ties to a religious institution and/or an underpinning faith ethos" (Lewis et al., 2020, p. 7).

[11] This term is used in this thesis to describe people who performed acts of kindness and compassion towards the women when they needed help.

vulnerability to MSHT, and as such, accommodation presents the biggest challenge." (See also Parker, 2021; The Passage, 2017).

Nevertheless, problems with accommodation occur at various stages during the women's journeys, including the period of formal support for those who get it and during their transition into independent living. However, in just coming out of a situation of exploitation, the women usually have no place to stay. Some have been able to move into Safehouses, asylum and charity accommodation, homelessness shelters, and domestic violence shelters as soon as they exited exploitation, depending on, but not limited to, their circumstances, who aided their liberation, and the type of information they received.

Others have, however, struggled on their own before this could happen, sometimes sleeping rough, as was **Chioma**'s experience, who said: "Because I don't know anybody, I have been living from one place to another, and there was a time I slept outside, I slept outside for almost two weeks." **Chioma** eventually met a woman in the church who, together with the church, ended up providing her with accommodation and other primary needs until she entered the NRM. Others, like **Selma** and **Naomi**, were also homeless until friends and Good Samaritans informed them about potential places to be accommodated. **Selma** was homeless for a while before she eventually encountered the police, who took her to a hotel but left her there. She had no money to pay for her stay, and the woman who managed the hotel ended up assisting her; she narrated:

> The lady felt sorry for me, I think because I was pregnant, so she told me to stay for the night again, and then she directed me the following morning, telling me that there's a place that is called [organisation], they do help people who are homeless and stuff, so I went there that morning.

A Good Samaritan who found her roaming around while pregnant directed her to The Salvation Army (TSA), which also aided **Naomi**. After that, she entered the NRM. Others had friends they could go to. **Rose** was living with friends before she became exploited, and she could return to them but had to leave after returning, explaining:

> My flatmates didn't know what had happened. So, I was scared that if I stayed, I would put them at risk, so this is why I was like, I need to leave immediately, so I did; I went and saw a friend, and I was like, I just need to get out right now. I can't go back there.

For **Tara**, the friend who assisted her liberation accommodated her during her initial period of exiting exploitation:

> She accommodated me for some days… because she was also undocumented at that time, so the landlord did not want me to stay in their place because she also found out that I have run away, so my friend gave me a part-time job, or sometimes she took me to her job so I can help her, we would share the money, but she said that she could not accommodate me anymore…

Because **Tara** did not know anyone else in the UK apart from the friend who aided her liberation, she ended up being homeless until this same friend aided her in getting a clandestine job and introduced her to the organisation that supported her further in her journey. **Diwata** also received accommodation from a friend when she left her situation, stating, "My friend sponsored me before, and I am still staying here for free with my friend who helped me before when I was new here."

Other women had family connections they could turn to. **Caitlin** went directly to her father's house after her exit, stating:

> I turned up on my dad's door… I had a carrier bag in my hand, and I said can I come and stay for a few weeks, and he was like yeah, and after a few weeks, he was like, are you going home? And I was like, no, I'm staying.

Tiwa and **Abebi** were relatively young when they escaped exploitation, and because they did so with their elder sisters, they depended on them to help find housing. **Tiwa**'s sister sought help from her friend, which **Tiwa** narrated:

> We had to like stay with one of my sister's friends from college…who was male… and he can only accommodate two girls for so long… I mean, two young ladies with no job with no money, we can't work, so you know after a while he was like complaining he said you guys gotta leave."

Abebi's sister rented a place for them, but they struggled with the rent. Their church assisted them in paying the rent.

Besides accommodation, social connections helped to provide women with the information to find their way in their initial stages of leaving exploitation. They provided information about which organisations to approach for assistance, as stated in the preceding section, and as briefly narrated by **Chosen** as follows:

> I was homeless until I met one of my friends, and he told me about the [organisation], that they help people who are in my situation. He took me there, so they were like assessing me to know

> what was wrong with me. I told them everything that happened between me, and so they were like, okay, they have to confirm it before they can render help to me, and they did.

Social groups, such as survivor support groups and motherhood groups, have also provided some with valuable information. **Mary** joined various groups and became affiliated with multiple organisations that work with and support survivors of MSHT in the UK. As a mother, she also frequented motherhood groups, narrating:

> If you belong to a group like [organisation] or other groups like where I take my children to, I take them to the play centre, and there are a lot of people under the play centre who have gone through this thing I'm talking about here [exploitation], so people talk a lot. Everybody comes and gives their own version of the story and tells you, okay, this is what I went through, and there are some people who went through it [NRM] and got something, but the majority of the people didn't really get any help. So, I wasn't really up for it [NRM].

Some of the women identified information sharing as a crucial aspect of their journeys after exploitation, and women such as **Tiwa** now dedicate themselves to giving other survivors as much information as possible to make informed decisions. However, as the survivor journey is never the same, there are always exceptions and as such, women such as **Abebi** and her sister experienced information withholding by their social networks, which negatively affected them. Therefore, for **Abebi**, while she and her sister stumbled around seeking what to do after they exited exploitation, she realised that some people around her had the information but kept it to themselves, as she narrated below:

> At the time, I didn't know what to do. I had no clue whatsoever about immigration or what it meant or any other thing; I was just a child, and you just continue living. But the people like my sister, that was old enough, did not necessarily know the laws either. But we did encounter other people that did know, but you know people tend to keep good advice to themselves? And so, they did not speak. A lot of [country of origin] people keep quiet when they have information, and so they don't tell you. It happens a lot, unfortunately, and it makes the situation worse because, at the time when I was a child, it would have been easier to seek… help that time if my sister knew. She was new as well, and she did not know the laws as well. If she knew what to do, she would have done it, but she did not know what to do. I didn't know what to do; I had no clue about that as well, so we spent a long time just trying to live and survive.

Silence from others around them at the time cemented their condition because it prevented them from getting the assistance they required. However, **Abebi** understands that she and her sister might have acted quickly if they had timely access to accurate information. As the section below demonstrates, the lack of information, awareness, and knowledge was detrimental. However, as **Abebi** stated above, social connections

were important in disseminating information about where women may turn for specific types of support, although this was not a universal experience.

Some social connections helped to provide health and moral support, as some women faced challenges with their physical and mental health. They needed medical attention when they left exploitation, as well as day-to-day care to nurse them back to health in their initial stages of leaving. For some, their friends fulfilled this role by taking them in and nursing them back to health. **Khanyi** came out of her situation of exploitation, homeless and physically and mentally unwell, and her friend supported her with this, narrating:

> They [charity] offered me accommodation. I didn't accept it at first because I was not right in my mind. I stayed with a friend because I was so down, so I went to the hospital almost every two to three days. So, staying at the charities accommodation is like I'm going to be alone…so I needed a place where someone will be there behind me [there for me]. So that friend was there… because I couldn't do things for myself, so she was always there to do things for me.

Leaving exploitation has been emotionally challenging for some women. Having nowhere to go and not knowing what to do has not been easy, compounded by experiences from their exploitation. Therefore, some of the social connections that women came to make during that period played an important role in providing them with encouragement and safe spaces to share their stories. These social connections have often been made through organisations such as charities where women go for support and meet people.

Chioma found this in the church: "I met somebody in a church that I can confide in, and I told the person a bit of my story, and the person heard me, helped me, gave me food and clothes…"

Other women found moral support in support groups often established by organisations that support survivors of MSHT, as **Khanyi** explained above. In these groups, women encourage and celebrate one another, as further discussed in Chapter Six.

Overall, informal support provided by social connections has been comprehensive in the initial period, as this section has shown, with acts of kindness playing a crucial role. Additionally, informal support continued throughout women's journeys. Similarly, informal support structures proved invaluable when women moved into independent living. However, informal support systems are limited in what they can do as they often lack information on how various processes work and lack the resources to provide most of what the women need.

Thus, additional support from organisations, such as charities, FBOs and others, was crucial in filling or supplementing this role. Notably, such organisations are also short on resources and may not always be able to provide support to all who require it. For instance, Lara (PCO) stated, “Unfortunately, we are a small charity, and it depends on capacity, but where we can, we will always assist.”

Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that not every encounter with social connections was positive. While some provided helpful assistance, there were instances where some women ended up in harmful situations. **Tiwa**’s sister’s friend could not accommodate them for a prolonged period, and **Tiwa** and her sister separated. **Tiwa** narrated:

> My sister had to find her way. I had to find my way… we had to [split] ‘cause nobody was gonna take two people in their house… I was staying with a friend, and I got a boyfriend because I could not sleep outside. I ended up going into relationships that were abusive and all of that ‘cause it’s always the same thing: well, you can’t go to the police, so I can do whatever. I mean, my last relationship was: “I’m the Lord, I’m the boss. You do whatever I tell you to do because there’s nowhere you are going to go. I own you.” Basically, those were his last words to me. “I own you.” And it was that word. I mean, this is what we’re talking about in the space of 10 years. So even though you escape your trafficker, it’s from one, you know, to another, especially when you don’t really have a place to stay, and if someone says, okay, I’ll give you a place to stay, and you get there, and as a woman, and they tell you you gotta do this you gotta do that.

Naita left her situation with someone who became her boyfriend and thus accommodated her, but he also ended up being abusive towards her. When she left him, she moved from a homeless shelter to a domestic violence shelter until settling into a council home.

Other women also pointed to the challenges of living with friends that may not necessarily be abusive but rather demanding in terms of the rules they have for their homes, which made daily life challenging. This was **Mary**’s experience:

> I was with my friends, but you know, when you stay with friends, they set limits on what you could do. I wanted my own privacy, you know, so I was helped by the [charity], and they gave me accommodation this way.

In the early days after exiting exploitation, housing offered by Good Samaritans and social connections offered women brief relief from homelessness. Its availability is constrained as social connections might not give women lodging for extended periods. Relying solely on social connections can also result in harmful cycles of dependency that hurt women. Similar patterns have been found in other studies; for instance, although

informal support systems have at times been associated with creating a risk of further exploitation (Beddoe et al., 2015), they have been deemed valuable in other instances (Hynes et al., n.d.). The women's experiences in this research have illuminated the immense value of social connections in the immediate aftermath of leaving exploitation while also highlighting some of the drawbacks that accompany this assistance. Their stories reveal how crucial these networks can be in providing support and resources during a critical transition period. However, they also shed light on the complexities and potential challenges of relying on these social ties .

4.4.1.2 Assistance from Organisations

Various non-governmental organisations, such as charities and FBOs, have played a vital role in women's journeys. In this section, they are collectively referred to as "organisations", which address their roles in aiding women to navigate their initial period after exploitation. It is essential to highlight that these are not all anti-MSHT organisations. Like the support provided by social networks, however, organisations engaged have also provided support with accommodation and necessities but have gone further to solve issues like insecure immigration status. Several women received housing, financial assistance, and other necessities from organisations. **Abebi** and her sister's rent was paid by their church when they could not pay it, and **Abebi** explained:

> My sister was paying the rent, and because she wasn't settled either, it was a struggle for a while to pay, and there were instances whereby we couldn't pay, but we were quite fortunate that the church paid for us…

Some founders/owners of organisations were even as generous as accommodating women in their own homes while still working on fully establishing their organisations. This was **Paloma**'s experience, who was taken in by the director of the organisation that supported her:

> They [police] drove me to [city], to the house of the director of my current organisation, so I stayed with her for a couple of months… because right now we don't have a staff house or accommodation house or Safehouse, so she has quite a big house like she has how many rooms in there is a space and she's the one who is taking care of them [survivors].

Usually, those with insecure immigration status will attempt to secure their immigration status within the initial stage of leaving. Some organisations assisted women with this. **Tiwa** and her sister found this support within a church she attended, narrating:

> We explained to the pastor, and the pastor was like, okay, he's got a lawyer within the congregation. Speak to the lawyer. Of course, the lawyer also is money. He would take a down payment which two of us, I mean, I was 17; she was 19 and couldn't afford to pay. But all he could do was like the little he could do. He was asking us where's our I.D., and we explained to him it was with the trafficker…what's the next thing to do? The lawyer was saying well, why can't you apply? I can help you apply, but you know you have to pay.

Others were assisted with counselling, which they found helpful in the first few days, although counselling is another issue many survivors have battled to receive. Organisations also assisted women with information and signposted women to other support systems in the early days. Some women found communities within organisations, often meeting other survivors and forming social bonds.

Support from social connections, Good Samaritans and organisations has been pivotal in the initial stages after exiting exploitation, as various women had nowhere else to turn. While this section focused on the initial period after exploitation, the support offered by organisations at times lasted throughout the women's journeys. However, while some social connections and organisations provided invaluable support to survivors, giving them options where there were usually none or few, the assistance provided therein had, sometimes, been inadequate for longer-term trajectories and created cycles of dependency in some cases. While women were receiving support from friends and organisations, they continued to find their way by seeking further assistance with their immigration status and others, but this was hindered by a lack of information and awareness across the board. The next section examines the implications of the lack of information and awareness.

4.4.2 The Lack of Information and Awareness

The first few days, months, and years after leaving exploitation have significantly been affected by a severe lack of information and awareness for some. This covers aspects such as knowing what to do, where to go, and what entitlements they have, if any, culminating in women finding it difficult to navigate the initial period after leaving exploitation. This affected women's trajectories and has been demonstrated across the board - by themselves and those around them and by some practitioners they came across. Thus, the discussion will be divided into how women experienced it and how some practitioners displayed it.

Anna and **Naomi** were among those who did not know the UK. Trafficked to the UK as a child, **Anna** never familiarised herself with the surrounding community before leaving exploitation, narrating, "I didn't know the environment; I didn't know anything…. I was brought to this country at 17…" **Anna** was pregnant when she left exploration and was aided to leave by the police. They directed her journey onward— leading her where to go, informing her about her entitlements, taking her to a Safehouse, and receiving the rest of the support she needed until she could move out independently. **Naomi** was new to the UK altogether and exited her situation a month after being trafficked to the UK, narrating, "After I escaped then because I didn't know where I was, I didn't know anybody in this country, so someone saw me on the way [street] wandering about with the pregnancy, so they took me to the Salvation Army." Unlike **Anna**, however, **Naomi** left her situation on her own, pregnant, and wandered about for some time until someone directed her to TSA. Fortunately, she did not spend long before accessing formal support because whoever she encountered led her there.

Tiwa, **Abebi** and **Caitlin** were, nonetheless, not this fortunate. **Tiwa** and **Abebi** did not know the laws and regulations in place, feared the authorities, and spent numerous years just trying to survive. It was not until a decade passed that **Tiwa** and **Abebi** received support under the NRM after prolonged battles with the Home Office (HO). **Caitlin** was overlooked as a victim, even though she went to the police when she left her situation. It was over 20 years when she was finally recognised as a victim of MSHT through her own efforts. There are, therefore, various ways in which women's journeys can be affected by a lack of information, awareness, and knowledge, the dominant one being the delays in accessing support. It is worth noting, however, that some women sometimes had information and awareness of some aspects, such as the implications of their insecure immigration status, usually deportation or removal, which leaves them fearful of what will happen to them. Sometimes, they would stay away from the authorities because of it, thus staying longer outside formal support. The following section examines how this was experienced.

4.4.2.1 Fear of Authorities—Staying Away

There is usually fear of authorities among the women, particularly the police and the HO, which has kept some women longer than necessary from accessing support (see also section 2.3). Non-UK nationals typically know that they do not have secure immigration status and understand that the consequence of this is deportation

or removal. This information sometimes came from perpetrators who threatened them that they would be detained and deported or removed by the HO should they contact the authorities. This threat of detention and deportation is constantly weaponised by perpetrators for compliance (Brennan, 2014; Hodge & Lietz, 2007; Hopper & Hidalgo, 2006).

Parisha was fearful of what would happen to her with the police, fearing that she would not be heard, a fear that was instilled in her by her perpetrator, narrating:

> Initially, I was slightly afraid because I did not know if I was going to be heard or not. This is because I was told by my T [trafficker] that I'm never going to be heard, so that stopped me from asking for help from them because maybe they will use their immigration and stuff like that, so… even though my student visa was still valid. I came here legitimately, and there was no issue of immigration, but it's just because I was told by my T that something that is always scary is that I'll be sent back to my country of origin, and she said that she would destroy me like if you run away, I'll tell your father that you have not been a good able girl and you're basically a spoiled girl and a womaniser… In terms of our culture, there are good women, and I don't know how to say it, but you know, in the culture, if you say to somebody, especially your father, that somebody has been funny with the boys, they don't appreciate that. And I was so afraid because she was like, you are pregnant and things like that, but I'm still a virgin actually, so that was something I was so frightened about…

For **Tiwa** and her sister, their perpetrator withheld their identity documents, even after they reached out to her after they left to request them. This is another common tactic that perpetrators utilise to frighten victims into compliance (Einbond et al., 2023; Sigmon, 2008; Yea, 2020b). **Tiwa** narrated:

> We called the lady, the trafficker, and she was like, I'm not giving it back to you, I don't even know where it is, I've done whatever with it, and if you go to the police, you'd be arrested cause you don't have your I.D. on you.

Tiwa and her sister initially stayed away from any authorities for fear of being removed from the UK, and when **Tiwa** eventually came out of the shadows, she was dismissed. The fear of detention and deportation or removal is not unfounded among migrants, as indicated in section 2.5.1. This fear, as other studies found, compromises people's ability to leave situations of exploitation (Brennan, 2014) and sometimes leads them to flee from authorities, too (O'Connell Davidson, 2013, 2022; Mantouvalou, 2010). For the women in this research, this fear manifested in their lives after they left exploitation, as some women have seen or heard how people they knew became detained and were deported. Others have experienced attempts at detention themselves. **Ginger**'s fear of the police and the HO delayed her exiting her situation for some days as she was

anxious about what would happen to her and her family if the HO became involved, as she was undocumented and was nearly detained by the HO once explaining:

> When I saw that letter written Home Office, I was like, how could you let these people know? These are the last people I could want because, knowing they are together, I said I didn't want them. I didn't want the HO to know because I did not have documents. HO has been to that house before coming and takes me to detain me, but they didn't on the day they bounced. So now, when you don't have documents, HO will deport you or detain you, so I didn't want them to know where I am.

Abebi was in immigration detention several times and faced attempted removal from the UK four times:

> Around the time of 2015, going back and forth in terms of applications [to regularise immigration status], I was detained in an immigration detention centre twice within the year… The first ticket I had was at the airport, and I refused to go. The second one was a chartered flight, and we were driven to [Airport] to get into the flight. I was actually inside the airport, but I don't know how God stepped in, but they did not have my documents… So, at the end of the night, they told me that the plane was full and I had to go back to detention, and they would place another flight for me. So that was how I was able to get out of the second one. The third one was the one where we had a protest in the detention place where I was asking them very valid questions… but they couldn't answer that. The fourth time was even after I claimed asylum. They still tried to keep me there, but the flight was still cancelled.

Chosen, who was given HO reporting conditions for five years, was subjected to a debilitating fear of deportation for the entire five years she reported to the HO. It was, according to her, not so much the act of having to report but mostly what she saw at that office whenever she went to report. **Chosen** frequently saw other immigrants who went to report just like her handcuffed and taken away. On one occasion, she was detained with her young baby for four hours because she failed to report the month before, describing this as a "big, big trauma" as the HO put fear in her.

Naomi was also subjected to reporting conditions and was constantly afraid of being deported, which the HO fuelled by continually sending her letters to remind her she could "voluntarily leave" the country:

> The immigration experience, going through the asylum process, is a bad experience. Going to the Home Office, asking me to come every week, not knowing my fate. Receiving lots of letters. Receiving letters telling you you can do voluntary exit out of the country… During that period, I was just living in fear. I didn't know the next thing that was going to happen to me.

The narratives of the women not only reinforce previous research on why people fear authorities, including fears of detention and deportation, but they also offer insights into the effects of this fear, which are twofold. First, fear of authorities causes individuals to remain in exploitative situations longer than necessary, even

when they have opportunities to escape. Secondly, women are deterred from accessing support. Further, the fear of authorities demonstrated that sometimes information could also keep women afraid to approach the government's MSHT support provision. It has also shown that having knowledge and awareness and approaching authorities does not mean one will be supported. However, eventually, encounters with the police, the HO, or immigration control become inevitable, and women must face them. Below, it is revealed that facing the authorities, especially the police and the HO, resulted in incredulity, dismissal, and disappointment.

4.4.3 Facing the Authorities

When some women finally get the courage to approach the HO or police or are in some way or another having to face them, they hope they will be received positively, be listened to and believed, and have their perpetrators investigated and brought to justice. Unfortunately, this has rarely been the case for the women in this study. Through some of their experiences and those narrated by practitioners, an overwhelming culture of disbelief and dismissal across the authorities, ranging from the police and the HO to local authorities and other stakeholders, can be observed. **Abebi** and **Parisha** described this as:

> The people that are really supposed to find us always kinda like automatically think that you are lying and you are only doing this to avoid being deported or something like that. I have been accused by one of the Home Office officials of purposely coming into this country to overstay, so I asked her … how does a 13-year-old purposely come here when she is 13 to come and overstay? That doesn't make any sense… And so, when one part of it denies your story, it's hard. It's a big slap in the face. **Abebi**.

Parisha expanded on this, poignantly pointing out that:

> It's irritating cause… you are the one suffering, yet people don't trust you. They should chase the T. They are the ones that did it, so it's again like another hardship… They hear you, but not completely. They want evidence, but you don't have the evidence. They want to see things like you should run away, but you can't run away because you have been under control. My passport was there.

Several others faced this problem, especially in their initial encounters with the authorities – their accounts of their experiences were treated with the utmost suspicion and thus disregarded and disbelieved. The examples expressed below are encounters with the police and the HO, as these are the two foremost authorities that have had a significant impact on their journeys. The police, being the first point of contact for various women

after leaving exploitation, has been identified as a primary source of frustration as often, women have had negative experiences with them, being dismissed, disbelieved, treated without compassion, and their cases not appropriately investigated.

Rose experienced the culture of disbelief that led to her being dismissed, shamed, and labelled, firstly with the police after initially exiting exploitation and later with the HO as she challenged it to secure her immigration status, narrating this to say:

> It was really shocking for me because I thought…the help from there was like he [police officer] is an authority that is meant to help; it's their job to help you, and they weren't doing that with me. I was faced with discrimination straight away. The first officer had said, "I don't know how you girls do what you do". And I was like. I didn't choose to be raped. That's not fair… I'm not okay with that, and at that time, the wall just went back straight up.

Her interaction with the police has affected her willingness to share her experience with them further. This was like **Selma** and **Naita**'s experiences. After leaving her family's exploitation, **Naita** went directly to the police, but she ended up not revealing much to them, explaining:

> Actually, I first went to the police, and I went to them twice. The first time, they didn't really do anything, but I didn't tell them very much because they weren't very nice and they were like really not very understanding… this was actually when I was with the guy who I left with, and I spoke to them, and they were just like, your case is historical now, and we don't really look at historical cases, and they took my statement, and everything and this guy was like annoyed with me, and he was like there is a 13-year-old in the hospital right now who I have got to go and deal with… I always remember that comment…

Similarly, when **Selma** eventually became in touch with the police, she was also treated with disregard and a lack of empathy and was not believed, saying:

> It was scary because the police, the way they approached me, didn't show any sympathy or empathy at all. The questions they were asking and pushing words into my mouth and twisting what I said, so it was really difficult because when I told the police one thing, they would turn it around and somehow conclude what I tell them to what they think is and take that and push it back to me… I tell the police that, okay, I was in this situation, this is what was happening, and I left because of this, and this is what happened. When I met them, I was pregnant, so what they say was okay - "We don't think that you have been through this situation. We think that you are making this story up because you are an immigrant, and you want to stay in the country."

Abebi was dismissed for taking too long to reveal she was exploited:

> I was still a child, and to be honest, I was young then. I didn't know what to do. I just came to a new country, and I don't know the laws, etc. The benefit of the doubt thing isn't there because,

> according to them, well, you could have spoken up in school. How many people speak up in school about things like that?

Thus, the women were often dismissed and disbelieved because of their immigration status, being accused of wanting to stay in the UK seemingly at any cost. Some women linked this culture of disbelief and dismissal by the police to how their cases were investigated, and thus, oftentimes, there were disappointments with how the police handled some investigations to bring perpetrators to account. The women have not been happy with police investigations that have typically not led to arrests. The lack of redress, as Enola (CP) indicated, can be a source of frustration:

> Another challenge is the fact that many of the people I work with don't see any justice through the courts; we don't have the opportunity to redress in the way that the victims of other crimes have, and often, their initial response from, say the authorities such as the Home Office is one of disbelief.

Naita provided that when the police eventually started investigating her matter, nothing came out of it:

> I waited like a year or two years for them to investigate…I gave them loads of names of people to speak to, and in all that time, they spoke to like six people, and they said we are not going to proceed as we do not have enough evidence to prosecute or charge or whatever it is.

Khanyi experienced similar disappointment:

> I reported everything to the police, but they could not do anything. They tried to do their investigation, and the police who were in charge of the case ended up disappointing me. They said sorry that they did not check the CCTV in time, and it was so sad. And that is not what I expected from them, and they are supposed to do their job and bring the man to book and do their judgement, but what they said is that they are sorry, the CCTV inside with the Wi-Fi was broken. This broke me because that is not what I want. That's why I went to them because I thought that they could help me to get the man and give him some punishment…

Other women, such as **Selma** and **Abebi,** also provided information to the police to aid in their investigations of their perpetrators, but nothing came out of it, and they were accused of fabricating events for the purpose of staying in the UK.

Caitlin, who did not have to face accusations of pretending to be exploited to stay in the UK as a UK national, was treated with the same disbelief, saying: "So they wanted to investigate, but they treated me as someone that was just been raped on the way home from work or something. They didn't identify me as having been trafficked." Unfortunately, the culture of dismissal and disbelief is all too common against people with the

lived experience of MSHT, especially if they are also migrants and asylum seekers (Joubany, 2011; Murphy, 2019; Souter, 2011). The consequences of this culture are various, as the women revealed above.

Therefore, for the women who tried to get their perpetrators to face justice, the evidence that they gave was never good enough. This was disappointing to them and took an emotional toll, as did the overall experience of being dismissed and disbelieved. These women's experiences point to the fact that even though the preferred response to MSHT by the UK government is criminalisation, this response is undermined by the profound disbelief and dismissal that some survivors are subjected to. Dealing with the HO was also challenging. Even more notorious than the police, some note that the HO frequently dismisses women and treats any proof they possess as insufficient or dismisses them for failing to provide evidence they were unaware they were required to. Non-British women were treated with suspicion, and often, not much investment was put into their matters by the HO, as though having insecure immigration status blurs the fact of their exploitation. **Mary**, narrating her experience with the HO, provided, "You tell them [HO] this is what happened to you. They will say they will see the evidence, and still, they will doubt you…" **Rose** went as far as taking the HO to court and found that she was, as many others have, labelled a liar and accused of making up her "trafficking claim to seek status here in the UK." **Tiwa** also experienced constant dismissal by the HO because she did not have her original identity document, and they subsequently left her to languish on her own. **Tiwa** narrated:

> When… you can't go to the police. And I also think the stigma is there because, I mean, within this time, we were able to apply to the Home Office. I wrote a letter to the Home Office to tell them what's going on, and I got a reply to say, we need your I.D… Even with all the details on there to the Home Office. If the Home Office is saying that, I mean within a space of all these years, all those ten years in between after escaping originally, I mean I managed to do like petty jobs; you know, cleaning and all of that, save up to apply for leave to remain in the UK with the same story, and everything with a lawyer and the Home Office still rejected you several times because you don't have an I.D. I'm like, how can I have my I.D. when my trafficker had my I.D.? And within these ten years, I've been researching and realised that this trafficker of mine sold both my and my sister's passports as soon as we got into the country because there was a story on BBC news in [year], and there was an article that named her and a few other people that were into the selling of passports. So even with all this information, the Home Office still declined.

Tiwa concluded that the way the HO treated her was due to the profound bias the HO exhibits against certain people, narrating:

> I believe that's what happened to me in the authorities, because it's not like they don't know. They know, but it's like, no, we don't want to be responsible for that, so it's easier for them to say, well, you need your I.D. for us to give you anything you need to prove you need this. You need that just to turn a blind eye.

Enola (CP) shared **Tiwa**'s sentiments of prejudice between UK and non-UK survivors when she narrated a story of a client she once supported:

> One lady I worked with several years ago was brought to the Home Office. She went into the Home Office building in a complete state, almost nine months pregnant… she'd been in a basement for six years. At the Home Office, the people who saw her and helped her were really clearly shocked and moved, but then she wasn't believed in terms of her case, which seemed extraordinary when she was literally brought into their building, and she said she just couldn't believe it because she was comparing it to some other cases of missing people who were found after many years and it's big news headlines. She thought that would be the reaction to her case, but actually, there was never a full pursuit of the potential criminals. There were lots of things that didn't end up happening. I mean, I would probably attribute that to her having not been documented; I think if she was a British national, she might have been treated differently.

The culture of disbelief thus leads to various outcomes and consequences for survivors, the predominant ones being dismissal and stigmatisation because of their immigration status. It is, therefore, harmful in multiple ways, including preventing women from accessing formal support or significantly delaying such access, which leaves women vulnerable to harm. It is also psychologically harmful, potentially creating mental health problems. Mercia (SM/CW) provided: "For people who have been through such extremely traumatic things to be told, we don't actually believe you; it is just the most detrimental thing that they could receive." As **Mary** narrated, not being believed is re-traumatising: it is demoralising for women who have survived exploitation and taken incredible steps to liberate themselves just to be denigrated by those meant to assist them. **Mary** added:

> I can't be going through one problem, and I want somebody to talk to. You want to hear my story, but you won't believe it. That is giving me flashbacks and taking me back to what I am trying to avoid or something that I want to forget.

There is a lack of knowledge, information, and awareness among some practitioners, such as the police, local authorities, and solicitors. Research over the years has identified the lack of awareness, knowledge, and training, with the ATMG particularly flagging this issue time and again in its various reports (see ATMG, 2010 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2016a, 2016b, 2018). In this research practitioners also identified awareness and knowledge as challenges. Awareness has been said to be embryonic in some local authorities, with staff failing

to identify potentially exploited people they come across. Steve (ASBM) stated, “that awareness stuff is still quite’ embryonic, really. I'm trying to … and everything is in place, the framework is there, the pathways are there, everything is there. It is literally making people now stand up and take notice and then report it”. He added that attitudes towards migrants also hinder identification because there is an overwhelming opinion among those who provide the support that people choose to be exploited and thus are undeserving of support. The lack of awareness feeds into stereotypes of people, which pour into the culture of disbelief.

However, women who do not have insecure immigration status can also be affected in other ways. It has been shown that British citizens are also impacted by this awareness and knowledge problem (Heys et al., 2022; Human Trafficking Foundation, 2021). In this research, **Caitlin** is a suitable example of a British national who avoided denigration regarding immigration status. However, as a survivor of MSHT, she was misidentified as those she encountered after her exit, including professionals who lacked the awareness and knowledge of MSHT. Due to a lack of awareness, **Caitlin** was not identified as a victim, was misdiagnosed with a mental disorder, and was ridiculed and shamed. She narrated some of this as follows:

> I’ll drop into a conversation something about my experience, and the response was usually like you are not right in the head or you are making this up… sometimes I was laughed at by some people. They were like, “Haha, yeah, right, whatever,” they thought I was just self-deluded and making things up… Because then I was wrongly diagnosed with post-natal depression, I was diagnosed with other things as well because they did not recognise it.

Caitlin’s British citizenship gives her automatic access to various support pathways under local authorities and the National Health Service (NHS), both of which she approached over the years but was never identified. Andrew (CM) explained why survivors like **Caitlin** are affected by practitioners’ lack of awareness and knowledge as follows:

> People that have access to benefits or they can access their entitlements… are not always identified as victims because they can access mainstream support. Much of their practical needs are met already. So, it’s never disclosed or identified that that person has been a victim…

Organically, therefore, the lack of awareness leads to missed opportunities for identifying survivors in general. It is further noteworthy that a lack of awareness goes beyond knowledge of MSHT but also pertains to understanding procedures to follow to assist potentially exploited people, as Steve (ASBM) explained:

> We've got refuse collectors, we've got housing occupancy, we've got lots of people that are going into people's houses, carers within adult social care not only within the council but our commission services and we will be seeing it out on the streets as well. But what we're not doing is we're not collating that with identification and referral. When we have the meetings, we hear an awful lot of - "Oh, I think I saw that a few weeks ago." "What did you do about it?" "I didn't know who to give it to." So that awareness stuff is still quite embryonic …

The lack of awareness, knowledge, and information among the police has been prominent. The women particularly experienced dismissal by the police because of this. While there have been some aspects put in place to improve police response, such as embedding victim navigators within police forces who work closely with the police to build trust and provide support specific to survivors while in contact with the police, much training is still needed, especially regarding approaches to survivors with insecure immigration status, as Colin (DC) explained:

> We still have to educate police officers that if someone got an immigration issue and serious criminality, we are never going to get anyone to speak to us if we just deal with someone who has an immigration issue. I spent a lot of time over the years trying to educate folks and the immigration officers' invulnerability. So, for instance, I work for [teams], so my team is a mixture of police officers, charity workers, and immigration officers. So, at first, immigration is doing all the: "This person is here illegally, this person does not have the right to… we need to remove them", and I go, "No… we need to look at the vulnerability first…" but we are getting there slowly, and it's getting police to understand that we don't just always answer one all to immigration.

Therefore, a lack of awareness by various authorities has harmed women's progression in remodelling their lives after exploitation. It has delayed their progression onto the second phase of their journeys - accessing formal MSHT support for those who needed it in various ways. As **Abebi**, **Tiwa**, and **Caitlin** have shown above, this delay lasted for numerous years, and often, all three of them finally accessed formal support through their efforts. In this study, women and practitioners shared their experiences with approaching authorities after leaving exploitation. They discussed how they have engaged with law enforcement and the HO, as well as the actions they have taken in these interactions, including how such interactions made them feel and regard such authorities. Additionally, practitioners, some of whom fall under this category of authorities, highlighted their acknowledgement of the ongoing problems and shed light on some of their efforts to address the significant challenges, particularly the lack of awareness and knowledge about MSHT and its impact on survivors. This input is crucial for knowledge production as it provides real-world insights into the systemic barriers and

facilitative mechanisms within the authorities' response systems. Understanding these dynamics enhances policymaking, training programs, and overall strategies to combat MSHT more effectively.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that leaving exploitation is multifaceted and does not mean instant freedom. The women became liberated from exploitation but moved into an unforgiving environment where they were constantly disbelieved and dismissed by the authorities. Conversely, it has also highlighted the women's agency from the beginning, that they have been active agents in their liberation, finding creative and brave ways to become free from exploitation and their active role in finding their way after leaving exploitation. Showing that leaving exploitation varied and depended on the type of informal support women had, the chapter also highlighted the significant role of informal support in the immediate aftermath of leaving exploitation. In finding their way after exploitation, however, a lack of information and damaging attitudes of disbelief and dismissal when they finally encountered the authorities have been detrimental to their journeys, cementing the sentiments some women revealed when speaking on the representation of being a victim, survivor or both, or nothing.

Chapter 5 Navigating Support

5.1 Introduction

This chapter delves into the subsequent phase of their journeys, where the women navigate formal support channels, particularly through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). It explores the experiences of the two women who did not participate in the NRM, examines the encounters of those who did, scrutinises the strategies employed to cope with the waiting period in support systems and provides insights into their overall encounters with support systems.

5.2 Not Going Through the NRM

Two women who participated in this research, **Naita** and **Mary**, did not go through the NRM. Some survivors choose not to enter the NRM for various reasons (Balch, 2017; Heys et al., 2022; Lazzarino & Greenslade, 2022; Schwartz & Williams-Woods, 2022; Wright et al., 2020), including a lack of knowledge and information about the NRM, as was the case for **Naita** or adequate information that is largely negative, as was the case for **Mary**. Practitioners also play a significant role in survivors' ultimate decision-making in this regard. They are usually transparent about the NRM to those they support to ensure they make informed decisions. Ava (MSC) narrated:

> For our clients to give informed consent, we are very clear with our clients, and we say this is the NRM, this is what is happening, and this is where information is going. I think that scares lots of people. Some have criminal records and do not have immigration status, and the fact that many won't be able to work, so there will be no more money going to their families and countries of origin.

Although Constance (VN) acknowledges that persuading individuals to refrain from entering the NRMS is a more manageable task, yet recognises that providing adequate information has the potential to convince someone to willingly participate in it depending on what they are looking for:

> Typically, again, we have a better rate of not convincing people to go into the NRM but making sure that they understand that it's not just a safe house or whatever they want it to be, so if they only want immigration advice from a solicitor then the NRM could be a good option for them to be entitled just to a free immigration solicitor, so I think when people are properly informed they are much more likely to enter that system, but it might be that they just have no interest, or it might be months before they have interest…

Ultimately, as Enola (CP) highlighted, the paramount consideration for whether to enter the NRM is the best interests of the survivor:

> They [survivors] might still go through a process of claiming asylum, but sometimes a solicitor might decide that if their situation in other respects is relatively stable now and maybe they are safe living with a friend or something like that, and they can access therapy and things like that, but if they do the NRM as well as the asylum, it will delay the asylum case… I think with some people, there's a bit of careful thinking about - will an NRM decision be helpful to them or will it just take so long because the NRM decisions are inclined to take a very long time. Is it just creating more obstacles to them having some form of status, whether it would be a bit safer and able to have more choices in their lives? So… Will the NRM be helpful to this person?

Mary decided not to enter the NRM based on the information she gathered from the various groups for survivors that she attended, narrating, "Because of the stories that people were saying, I didn't even bother because people were saying a lot of things - that they don't believe their stories even when they do they promise you and they won't do anything…" **Mary** was supported by charity organisations and people in her community, offering her accommodation and other basic needs as well as what she called "moral support".

Mary's trajectory, however, changed when she met her now husband. She moved out of the charity organisations' accommodation she was provided with and moved in with her partner. While the dynamics of her love story with her husband will be highlighted in Chapter Six, this was what she said when she decided to go and live with him:

> He was there for me, and we started as friends, and you know I told him everything that I went through so he has got a listening ear, and we became close so then he offered if I can go and stay with him, so I said why not and I was already like in love with him you know…

Mary's transition out of support went smoothly. She met a supportive partner, got married, and has kept busy raising her children over the years.

Naita's decision not to go into the NRM was due to a lack of sufficient information and a lack of understanding from the police who assisted her. Unfortunately, as the previous Chapter highlighted, together with further studies (see in particular Hestia, 2019; HMICFRS, 2017), the Police have lacked sufficient knowledge about MSHT, the NRM and dealing with victims of MSHT. In her experience, **Naita** narrated:

> They [police]… tried to refer me to the NRM, but they didn't explain it properly, so I didn't go for it, so I never went to the NRM. But I don't know if it would have done me good anyway… they just

> kind of like went, well, you are seeing a therapist already, so you don't really need support, so we won't refer you to anything.

Naita's immigration status was secure when she left exploitation because she was in the UK for numerous years with her family, who ensured her regularisation. She had recourse to public funds and could access the labour market. She could pay for private counselling and eventually receive accommodation from local authorities.

Naita went through mainstream support from the time she exited exploitation, which was challenging. Firstly, the support she received was minimal in that those who were supporting her merely focused on getting her a place of her own through the local authority. She moved between domestic violence and homeless shelters, and she took a while to eventually live on her own, explaining:

> The first hostel was like a sharing…. I was sharing with two other women, and like one of them was okay, but the other one was like had some drug issues and things, but it wasn't that bad. It was just that people ended up finding where I was, and the next hostel they moved me to was basically the hostel where they put people who had come out of prison. So… I ended up getting my i.d. stolen by someone who like took my card and took out a loan in my name, and there is something like there's this one guy who was like do you like getting fucked by ten guys or something like that to me. I was in the hostel for like a year and a half, and I think that took a little bit longer because I went to the psychiatric ward a couple of times, and then I kept on getting into the hostel again, and then that made the whole process longer…I then eventually got a council place to stay…

Naita's safety was further compromised when her perpetrators located her:

> It wasn't a nice place to be, and it wasn't a safe place to be, either. At the time, phone tracking had started coming out … basically, when I was living in the hostel, my partner tracked my phone, and other dangerous people from my family ended up coming to where I was living. And the police didn't believe me because they had never heard of phone tracking, so they thought I was just paranoid. I was like, I can show you the software on my phone like because, you know, one of those phone finding things that's what it was actually, he activated it, and he knew exactly where I was. So, I ended up like… Oh, God. Like someone set fire to my arm, and then I ended up in the hospital. I ended up… from the hospital to like a mental health unit because like I was obviously not in a good way, and then they move me to another homeless shelter after that…

Naita also provided that she had to fund her own counselling as she said she did not have much luck with the mental health services, explaining:

> I went through like three different therapists, and they just like the first one got made redundant, and the second one was like he couldn't cope with me, so he dropped me basically. I think he just didn't have the heart to like deal with my issues or whatever, and then the third one was really

> good, but she was also made redundant, but then I ended up going to see her privately, and it was her who, like, started talking about it too [trafficking experience], and I reported it to the police.

Naita eventually received council housing and moved to a place of her own.

Consequently, what happens to people who do not go through the NRM varies, but they typically seek assistance from mainstream support systems and charity organisations. Women who went through the NRM also took divergent turns, primarily depending on where they ended up being accommodated and the other options they had while navigating the NRM. It is, therefore, fitting to reiterate that the women's experiences of the NRM cannot be homogenised; as Enola (CP) described it, "the NRM process seems to be okay for people, and sometimes not." Thus, there were some positive and negative experiences with the system, which are discussed in the following section.

5.3 The NRM Experience: Accessing the NRM

Access to the NRM has varied among women. Firstly, as discussed in section 2.4, the NRM contains various stages and only organisations, departments and so on specifically designated as first responders can refer people into the NRM. For some of the women in this research, getting referred to the NRM was reasonably quick, but this was not the case for all women. **Rose** narrated

> Very quickly did a woman from an organisation here in [the UK] come out and see me and wanna meet me and check, and then yeah, they took me in quickly, got me through the interview process, first responder interview, and then it was organised really quickly that I needed to be put into a Safehouse. So, it was quite fast.

Nelao also experienced a swiftness in entering the NRM:

> The first few days, when I came over… I claimed asylum in the airport like day after, so after that, I was kept in a hostel or kind of hostel it's a big holiday hotel, but it looked like a hostel because we were sharing the room with other ladies, so when I came there, they told me to write down my story of what happened in [country of origin] and all those things… After I had written the story, it took like three days, and then I moved from the hotel to a hostel in [county]. When I came there, I received a letter from the Home Office telling me that we read all your story… we understand that your story is part of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. So, we are gonna refer you to the NRM.

Women whose exit from exploitation was done in collaboration with the police were also referred to the NRM quickly. For instance, **Anna** and **Parisha** went straight into the NRM as soon as they were assisted to leave

their exploitation. However, some, especially those who exited exploitation without the aid of authorities, were not as quickly admitted into the NRM. **Tiwa**, **Abebi** and **Caitlin** spent years—for **Tiwa** and **Abebi**, it was over ten years and for **Caitlin**, it was over twenty years before they could access the NRM, and for each one of them, the inability to enter the NRM was due to a lack of information and awareness across the board as well as the pervasive culture of disbelief and dismissal.

Nonetheless, accessing the NRM for those who participated in this research did not always mean that they received holistic and timely support. **Anna** and **Parisha** had positive experiences whereby they both received satisfactory support as soon as they entered the NRM. **Anna,** for instance, when talking about her Safehouse, indicated that "to me, it was like the best thing that has ever happened to me because I didn't know any other experience because since I came to the UK, that's where I was until I was rescued. So, it was good; I was being fed. I have been given money, clothes, everything." Some women like **Abebi** were not so fortunate – she only started receiving support a year into the NRM, narrating:

> A year later, I was speaking to one of my friends who… studied law. She looked at the letter, and she was like I was supposed to get support from the Salvation Army, and I said I had no idea what the process is. So, she called them, and she spoke to them and said basically they have been neglecting to support me since last year, so why is that? So, she got the person to actually interview me and find out the support that I actually needed.

Caitlin and **Ginger** did not receive the full extent of the support they required, narrating:

> It wasn't until after I got my positive CG that I learned that I should have been getting financial support, so I ended up finding my own lawyer, and she was like, no, no, you are entitled to legal support… and she basically took over I hadn't had any therapy because it was to be provided by the NHS… so during the NRM, I didn't have any of the support that I should have had. **Caitlin**.

Ginger also consistently requested a solicitor when she was placed in the NRM but did not get one and sourced one independently. **Ginger** also highlighted that she had to request training opportunities. She was refused, as she was informed by the support workers in her respective Safehouse that she was not entitled to anything. It was because of her own initiative that she could access certain entitlements, such as short educational courses, and helped others do the same:

> When I came here, I knew I was entitled to things. When you come and ask, can I have ABCD? We were told we were not entitled because we are not from the EU. So, when you tell them, but we were told we were entitled. Yeah, there is nothing like the EU only. Bad luck: you can't get this.

> What about this? Oh no, you are not entitled; you like free things a lot. What free things? I worked for free, and you are telling me I like free things? They said we were not entitled to this, everything we were not entitled to… **Ginger**.

Further, NRM support is easily compromised by various factors, and the lengthy wait in the NRM is challenging (See section 2.4). Additionally, immigration status continued to be the biggest obstacle for the non-UK national women who participated herein, preventing access to work, higher education and much more (See section 2.5). Another obstacle to women's journeys, often tied to their immigration status, is the prolonged period of waiting they endured (see Section 2.4.2). Going into the NRM, some of the women in this research were informed that they would receive their Conclusive Grounds Decision (CG) in 45 days[12]. For all of them, those 45 days turned into months and years. Some initially regarded those 45 days as a beacon of hope, having waited so long for their lives to start over until they discovered it was not so, as **Tiwa** described:

> At that moment, you think of 45 days; finally, I get to get a break, and then after like three months, six months…. in a lot of ways that a lot of women describe that is it's like you are being given a lifeline or a lifeboat and then immediately it's being taken away, so you are in the middle of the sea. You either sink, but you can't go forward, and you cannot go back, so you're like just staying in the middle of the sea, and you just hang on to like a branch. Because immediately you are about to cross the river, you get to the middle; the boats are taken away, and you just have a branch to hang on. You can't go forward. You can't go backwards.

As **Tiwa** described above, the hope for freedom usually dissipates as the wait becomes longer, leaving women trapped. However, some women have been informed from the onset that those 45 days could be years, which helped ease uncertainty, as it was in **Ginger**'s case:

> I was looking at the 45 days they talk about… I didn't know whether I would stay here or go where. And I was told, no, you will stay; you can even stay for two years or three years in the Safehouse.

Nevertheless, no matter how long women wait, life continues. Lara (PCO) provided: "These people, having lived in the UK now for years whilst waiting for decisions, their lives continue. They enter relationships. They have children." Life goes on, even though waiting is riddled with uncertainty, which makes life planning challenging, as **Abebi** provided:

[12] This period has been shortened to 30 days in 2023 – see section 2.4.2.

> The uncertainty makes it difficult to plan forward. You know, I like to take a relationship seriously to have kids and all of that… because you don't necessarily wanna make plans in uncertain situations, so that does affect my planning.

Moreover, as private life continues for some, external processes that affect personal life, like immigration control, continue. Several of the women interviewed herein entered the UK through regular means with valid visas. However, for all of them, their visas eventually expired. Some of them lapsed during the wait in the NRM, such as in the cases of **Rose**, **Parisha**, **Diwata** and **Tara**, whose visas ran out while awaiting NRM outcomes and were placed in precarious positions— they could not work, putting them and their families in destitution as **Rose** demonstrated:

> It was quite a long time between that first referral and getting the conclusive grounds. In that time period…the original visa I had come over to the country on actually lapsed, and that then pushed me into a position of destitution. While I am waiting for an outcome from the police, Ultimately, I was stuck with no right to work… I was restricted with what I could access, education and everything, and ultimately, I took the Home Office to court, and I won… They didn't give me a proper visa; they just gave me a temporary grant of 12 months of discretionary leave to remain…

Meanwhile, while women awaited these various processes to take their course, they are often housed in Safehouses, and some live with friends and associates. The Safehouse experience has thus formed a significant part of women's journeys, and it is through what they experience in the Safehouses while awaiting NRM decisions that they created various navigation strategies to cope with the conditions and obstacles they faced. This is best explored through the women's accommodation experiences. The following section thus examines the women's experiences in formal accommodation provision, the difficulties faced and the navigation strategies they used to deal with them.

5.4 The Accommodation Experience

It has already been established that homelessness is common to survivors of MSHT, and accommodation is one of the primary support needs that survivors usually have (see section 2.5). Often, those with nowhere else to go are accommodated in Safehouses. Women have, however, been accommodated in varied accommodations, usually depending on the phase of their journey. Formal accommodation experienced by the women has included accommodation provided before, during and after the NRM under the MSVCC and by charities and other organisations, housing provided under domestic violence services, accommodation

provided by the National Asylum Support System (NASS)[13] and emergency accommodation services by local authorities and others.

Throughout their journeys, some women experienced living in one or more of these various accommodations, while others remained in the same one. In these accommodations, women wait out processes pertinent to their journeys, such as the NRM decisions, asylum decisions, local authority accommodation placement and others receiving various forms of support in anticipation of independent living. All accommodation provisions are different, and those differences have shaped women's experiences during the wait. Positive experiences have been noted; however, regrettably, among all the women interviewed for this research, only **Anna** and **Parisha** reported positive encounters during their stay in Safehouses. **Anna** resided in an all-female Safehouse that accommodated both mothers with their children and women without children. She enjoyed the way she was treated with such care and love in her Safehouse to the extent that when it was time to leave, she did not want to go. She says: "Everything that was happening there was good to me because I have never been since I was 17 been treated the way I was being treated in the safe house."

Parisha also had a positive time in her Safehouse, narrating:

> I moved to the safe house, and I was being looked after very well by [charity] organisation… my caseworkers were really amazing and very helpful. The first time, they were like making sure we were safe, we were comfortable, we will be provided food, weekly money and any help, the GP, dentist, any issue, education, so people are providing so much facility and I still appreciate it because without their support. I could not be here today living my normal life, so they have really made a huge contribution, and so I appreciate them so much because there was a time also like, we used to feel … because that experience was so strong, and it's really hard to come out of that experience, and I must say, you live like a live person, but you are not alive because of that experience.

The majority of the women were, however, not this fortunate. Some had problems with their case workers and other staff at the Safehouses, and others experienced problems with frequent relocations and blended accommodation. Starting with relocations, the subsections below address some of these challenges.

[13] See Chapter Two, section 2.5.2 on more on the NASS system.

5.4.1 Relocations

Relocation is a constant reality for women during this phase of the journey, which can happen within the same city or between several cities (on relocations, see also Hynes, 2022; De Angelis, 2014). Some women were moved multiple times. **Naomi** was one of these, narrating:

> Moving me from one house to another… the first one, they took me to a family to live with. The foster carer, from there I, was moved to a hostel. From the hostel, I was moved to another family … I was just moving like this is the 10th accommodation I am now, so I have been moving from two times hostel, family house, shared accommodation, so it's been like that …

Others were moved a handful of times, and others not at all. Some women remained in the same Safehouse for extended durations and expressed a desire to relocate to improve their living conditions. **Chioma** and **Ginger** expressed strong desires to be moved from their respective Safehouses. **Chioma** articulated: "I want to leave that place; I like to live in a place where there is no noise; I don't like noise. I like to be by myself; I like to have my own kitchen, have my bedroom."

Selma was moved numerous times during her journey, between different accommodations, and she lost count of how many times she was moved. **Nelao** was also moved several times between hostels and other shared accommodations. **Rose** succinctly explained the implications of these moves as follows:

> There's nothing worse than removing a survivor from, you know, someone or something that actually brings them some joy in their life. I think that's just so disheartening when they do that. And they move survivors out, and this was one reason I had refused some of the accommodation options because I was like, I don't wanna be moved further out. I don't wanna be taken away from my friends…

Moving, as with other aspects of women's journeys, was experienced differently. It was desired by some. However, it was a negative experience for some, creating instability, as **Naomi** narrated:

> It's been terrible really, it's been terrible. This is the first place I am living on my own without sharing. For the past three years, I have been sharing accommodation with different families; it's been a bad experience, really. I did not want my daughter to grow up in that way. There is no space for her to play; we are just living in a small room there …

The conditions in their next accommodation were often unknown, and they may find unsatisfactory living arrangements, such as shared accommodation arrangements with undesirable individuals, which the next sub-section examines.

5.4.2 Blended Accommodation

Often, accommodation is shared. Several have specific criteria, such as women only, women and children only, and women without substance dependencies only. Practitioners who participated in this research explained that their organisations usually only support a certain criterion of survivors and, as such, who qualifies for their support is limited. For instance, some run facilities for women only, some for migrant women only, and some for women with specific indicators such as mental health support needs only.

Mia (CP)'s organisation primarily specialised in mental health support services and narrated:

> One of the key things that we're looking at is whether they would like therapeutic support because that's a big part of what we offer. If somebody is not interested in therapeutic support, then that might be because all these terrible things have happened, but they don't have any mental health problems. As a result, they might not want therapy, or they might not be ready for therapy. If that's the case, we say well, maybe we're not the best organisation for you, and it might be best to go elsewhere. So, if somebody feels that they would like to have therapy and they're ready for therapy, then that's somebody that we can help and take them on.

Mercia (SM/CW)'s organisation's primary focus is to provide accommodation and related support to women only, but it is a small Safehouse with limited capacity. They fill their vacancies following precise criteria:

> We rarely take in women who have substance abuse needs or dependencies… And this is specifically because we are not a 24-hour facility, and what we found is that they need a slightly different level of support. We do not have the capacity to support them with what they need at the moment, and also it changes the dynamic in the Safehouse completely.

However, various accommodation facilities experienced by the women who participated in this research, whether through the NRM or mainstream support, do not have much specificity, and women were blended with different people – both survivors and non-survivors of MSHT. Some positive and negative aspects arose from blended accommodation. At a certain time, **Ruby** was living in two houses at the same time – she spent the day in one and had to spend nights in another due to a shortage of beds. **Ruby** narrated:

> So I was basically like spending my time in the house that [survivor friend] was in, and then I would go and sleep at the other house… it was something about because I had my papers already

> that they could get funding for that house, but the experience was like obviously not great. This other place … was not a positive experience for me because it had like girls with eating disorders and like cutting and stuff like that...

Some women found these differences challenging, and women like **Naomi** and **Nelao** described having to do this as “horrible” and “terrible.” Furthermore, **Chioma** expressed this succinctly to say:

> There are different kinds of people there, different characters, different attitudes, different faces. You see different behaviour and all kinds of manners. I don’t smoke, and I don’t drink, and in this shared house, they bring all manner of people in it: the ones that smoke, the ones that drink, the drunkards, the ones that are lesbians, the ones that are gay all mixed together in one house…Mentally, it is not healthy. It is not good for me.

Women have expressed that mixed accommodation has been problematic in various ways. As **Chioma** mentioned above, different people have distinct characteristics, and some have made sharing accommodations unpleasant for others. Some racialised groups formed cliques within Safehouses, and often, people not racialised as Black people received unfavourable treatment from some Safehouse managers. **Tiwa** explained this as follows:

> You have like Europeans in there or Albanians in there, and everybody has their group, and the managers are not doing anything to bring everyone together, and they are like giving them an upper hand compared to Africans. If something happens, you blame the Africans; you leave the Albanians. It was absolutely prejudiced there.

Ginger also reiterated that nothing would be done whenever she or other African people in her Asian-run Safehouse made a complaint. After relaying an incident of theft in a Safehouse with CCTV, nothing was done to trace the stolen goods, and she felt that “cause we are Black, nothing will be done.” Regarding utensils and other everyday implements around the house, **Ginger** also experienced that the Black occupants were asked to buy all cooking utensils with their own money, stating:

> I have got bedding things, and I have got kitchen utensils, which we were made to buy. When you ask for pots, they say you buy them yourself. There is no cooking stick; you buy it yourself. We were buying our own. The Asians, when they come, they will buy them pots; we buy pots just because you are Black.

Racial prejudice was thus a factor in certain Safehouses and was sanctioned by those who managed them. Another factor that women struggled with was sharing living spaces, including bedrooms and communal areas. Depending on where they lived, some women shared sleeping quarters with various other women, others

shared a room with only one woman, and others had a room of their own. For women like **Tiwa**, sharing a room with another survivor was challenging, stating:

> You know you have traumas and if two people have to share a room; I mean, we are discussing a house of whereby you are like 12 women there, and you know you have to share a kitchen, a bathroom, a toilet, and then you're now in a room that is not even private and like when you have got so many traumas of being domestic servitude were someone watches where you sleep, whenever they like to molest you. When someone else opens the door at midnight when you are sleeping, you get curious because is this the person who is supposed to be in here or is it someone else? …

Common living areas such as lounges, kitchens, bathrooms, and gardens were often shared. Some women found this challenging. **Chioma** expressed:

> I hate that when I enter the kitchen at times, I don't like the cooking in there because of the way things are placed anyhow. I don't like cooking there. When I cook, it irritates me. It is not easy for me to eat my own food irritated because of what I see in the kitchen.

Others found living with men challenging, owing to past negative experiences with men. **Chioma** was subjected to sexual exploitation and was placed in a Safehouse with men, which she found triggering, stating, "When I come in contact with them, if I am going out of my room, or I am just… it takes my mind back to what I went through. I am not settled; sometimes, I don't even sleep…"

While certain women found mere male presence enough of a trigger, some men actioned those triggering traits. Certain men displayed similar traits to those the women like **Ginger** encountered in exploitation, as **Ginger** narrated:

> They will look at you, and they call you old woman, old woman, as this boy calls me an old woman. I know I am fifty, over 50, but I am not an old woman like for him to come and insult me because he wants to have a good time. A person has experienced this in the past, whether old or young. Do you understand? And somebody is coming every day calling me motherfucker bitch. You have to fear him because he stabbed. He went to prison for stabbing. Why are they putting a boy like him in the house? I was abused before, you know, by people with the same character, and again, I am put in the same house by this boy insulting us. You feel uncomfortable because most of these men they are doing the things that were happening in the house I lived in… My anxiety is always high; my sugar is high…

Blended accommodation is thus challenging, and some women have created navigation strategies to cope with those challenges. Some of these navigation strategies are discussed in the next section.

5.5 Navigation Strategies

Women used strategies under two overarching groups to navigate challenges detailed in the preceding sections. The first group consists of strategies of self-preservation, such as refusing to live in Safehouses, leaving permanently after some time, leaving temporarily whenever they could, or isolating when they could not. These will be discussed first. The second group of strategies falls under resistance, where women fought back through protests, lodging complaints, pushing back through self-improvement, and giving back to their communities. The third aspect, which supplements self-preservation and resistance, is self-motivation and faith in God.

5.5.1 Refusing or Leaving the Safehouse

Sometimes, women know the implications of living in a Safehouse, and if they have the option, they decline to live in them altogether, to hold on to their sense of agency, freedom, and autonomy as well as to live a "normal life" as **Tara** aptly described:

> They offered it to me, but I didn't accept it… I said I wanted to have a normal life. But…my friend offered me to stay with them. I stayed with them… I didn't accept their accommodation because, for me, it's just that I don't want to be so depressed. I think it is better for me to stay with my friends who are here because I really want a normal life. I want to because when you are in accommodation, there is that time to check in and check out, and they can track you. I want my freedom, and that is the one thing for me to have a normal life, for you to have freedom.

Others wanted to avoid constant relocations. Notably, refusing accommodation is a powerful demonstration of agency and the value of having safe options. However, not all women had alternative living arrangements and had to navigate the conditions in their Safehouses whilst living there. One of these navigation strategies was leaving the Safehouse. This strategy manifested in a twofold fashion–leaving temporarily and leaving permanently. Leaving temporarily depended on the rules and regulations of each Safehouse, and thus, when they could, women left temporarily for the day, leaving for work or education or to meet friends and participate in leisurely activities. Sometimes, they left for a couple of days to visit friends. And as soon as they could, they left permanently, as discussed below.

5.5.2 Leaving Temporarily and Permanently

Abebi, **Tiwa**, and **Nelao** stated that leaving the house to attend university or college was an excellent way to spend time outside the Safehouse and avoid much of what happened there. **Abebi** described this as follows:

> Because I was going to Uni then, I wasn't necessarily inside the house that much, and this was okay… I just saw how they [staff] treated people - laugh at you and whatever all those things, but when I was in a lot more, I saw things that you are not supposed to see, as in staff shouting at clients in the house, which is not okay.

Work also provided a fantastic opportunity to leave the Safehouse. However, not all women could work, predominantly because they were barred from doing so by their immigration statuses and had to find other ways to leave the Safehouse. **Chioma** was not permitted to work at the time of our first conversation and left the Safehouse as frequently as she could during the day when the house was at its busiest, as the best way to avoid the anti-social behaviour and incivility of those she lived with, narrating:

> I don't stay in the house in the daytime. I just walk, go to the shopping mall, go wherever I can cool myself down… I can't stay, I can't sleep during the day, I can't have a rest in the house. I can't relax. I keep hearing the kind of music they play. I don't like it. With the situation I am in, that kind of music keeps ringing in my mind all the time when they are playing it over. It is not good for my mental health… so I hope when I get a job, I will be leaving and coming home at night.

Chioma's ultimate desire is to leave her Safehouse permanently, and she expressed at our second interview that she was working towards a live-in care job that would enable her to leave the Safehouse for good**.** **Chioma** received permission to work by the time she was interviewed for the second time as an asylum seeker who was waiting too long (for a decision on her asylum claim) due to no fault of her own.

Ginger also left during the day as often as she could, narrating.

> I am always out. When I am feeling okay, I like to go out to keep my mind occupied… I have made a friend outside the house. I go and sit in her house; she is also a victim of trafficking, but she has everything now… We talk, she calls me. I go to her house; she is the one who is teaching me to crochet.

Leaving for some was more radical, as for **Ruby**, who ran away twice to temporarily escape her Safehouse's unfavourable conditions and restrictions. **Ruby** narrated:

> I was just like, I just wanna go, I wanna leave, and also like, every day you're not doing anything, so then I got really frustrated. The second time was when I was in the other house; they used to do drug testing for the girls because I was living there; they were saying to everyone that

> everyone needed a drug test, and everyone's room was searched. So yeah, I just refused to like to do that, and then I left, and then I went to [city], and then they called the police… and then I went back.

For **Nelao**, leaving the Safehouse for a couple of months after giving birth to her daughter was for her health and her baby and, thus, lifesaving. When **Nelao** was discharged from the hospital after a complicated birth, she could not walk or sit and stayed in the Safehouse alone with her newborn child. She left to live temporarily with a friend, who took care of her and her child, stating, "I went home, after three days with the same situation… I can't sit, so my [national] friend… took me from my house, and I went to live with her in her house because I couldn't sit down."

Even those who had positive experiences found it challenging to stay in the Safehouse for lengthy periods. Notably, leaving is not necessarily a strategy to navigate bad living conditions, but it was also used to navigate the wait in a broader respect. **Parisha**, whose Safehouse experience was good, as she "was being looked after very well," explained that her case worker would take them out from time to time, saying: "When we found ourselves unable to take it, we used to go to her office. She used to take us to town sometimes, even if she was busy, to make sure we are okay."

Ultimately, however, leaving the Safehouse permanently was most desirable. Women who could attain alternative accommodation permanently left the Safehouse as soon as possible. As Ava (MSC) said, "People are usually unhappy with the Safehouses, and so they leave and opt for outreach support."[14]

Leaving permanently is a good strategy for women to gain more independence and freedom, leaving behind the restrictions imposed in the Safehouse. However, this strategy is only available when women have alternatives. **Rose** had friends and thus left her Safehouse permanently to live with them, narrating:

> I opted for independent living with my friends… they said you could come, and you won't have restrictions living in a Safehouse. As a process, as a support system. It is hard. The best thing is like me being out, being here, being with my friends. I can drink a glass of wine just because we can if we feel like it. I can go out and stay out a little bit after 12 because I'm having a good time… I had a key that allows me the right entering and exiting my home; I prefer independent living like this

[14] Outreach support is support proffered to survivors living outside support structures such as Safehouses, on their own or with friends and others, but who still require support with their rebuilding work.

> than under the system of the state that is in place right now because the idea is to extend our sense of freedom again, and it’s just not. It still controls…

Those who left the Safehouse to live elsewhere while still in the NRM get support through outreach support; thus, leaving the Safehouse permanently does not mean that women disengage and are disqualified from further support. Nevertheless, sometimes, leaving either temporarily or permanently is not possible, and in such cases, women use other strategies to cope, as discussed below.

5.5.3 Isolation

Isolation from other residents and activities around the Safehouse was used as an effective strategy to navigate conditions such as anti-social behaviour from other residents and difficult staff members and for self-preservation. **Chioma** would confine herself to her room when she could not leave the house, stating:

> The day I am in, I would bear the whole noise and everything they are doing. I will be in my room. I don’t even go out to the lodge to sit. I stay in my room. It’s terrible… I just stay in my room… They know me; I don’t come out. I stay in my room unless maybe I want to go to the kitchen to make myself something to eat or to use the bathroom… that is when they will see me. That is when they will know that I am in…

Selma did the same at times, too, narrating:

> I was more isolated, and only a few guys… because they always saw me sitting alone, waiting alone; they were the ones who tried to make friends with me, but I was more isolated, so if I am not eating, I was in my room, so I never got to interact with people a lot.

Abebi and **Ginger** first tried to participate in their houses, socialising and getting involved in activities around the house, but withdrew as an act of self-preservation upon realising that most of what was happening was beyond their control. **Abebi** explained this as follows:

> I used to be very involved and things in the house before, like I am a people person. I do a lot of things outside. I do a lot of community duties in my church. I am a people person. But in this kind of house, because everybody has, they are all kinds of demons… I have to live here, so I have kind of withdrawn since last year… I don’t want any drama.

Ginger observed, “When I came in, I found everyone isolated, everyone living in their own room, they don’t talk, they don’t even say good morning…” and sought to change those dynamics. She started being very social and, on a quest to bring people together in her Safehouse; however, she found that this was not feasible, narrating:

> We started getting along with barbeques, but the staff are not people who like to put people together. Somehow, we fell apart, and there are some clients who take advantage of others. Others now started to steal. When they steal, they [Safehouse managers] don't do anything about it…

Ginger resorted to staying away from others, not getting involved around the house and either leaving or keeping to herself in her room. Isolation has also been used to navigate and safeguard in blended accommodations with men. **Tiwa**, who was sexually exploited whilst in domestic servitude, was assigned to live with men in emergency accommodation and provided, "I was just staying in my room. I don't go downstairs to the kitchen. I would then go out and get take away with the little money I had, and I would go back straight to my room." Whilst not an easy strategy to resort to, explained better in **Chioma**'s words, "It's not easy for me to stay in my room, just to be alone in the house doing nothing," it was nevertheless valuable when those who needed it had no other options.

All the above strategies - refusing the Safehouse, leaving, and isolation - are forms of self-preservation that women use to survive and forge on in situations over which they have limited control. However, women also took to resistance strategies, where they pushed back on oppressive conditions by fighting back and challenging simplistic notions of what they can and cannot do by engaging in self-improvement and giving back to their communities. The following section explores these strategies.

5.5.4 Fighting Back

The women in this research decided upon an indomitable will to make it, and thus, quitting was no option, firmly believing, as **Abebi** showed, "it's better to fight back and lose than not fight at all." Therefore, they learned to fight back, to use their voices to air their grievances or to use other strategies to do so. Fighting back is multi-pronged. Women fought back by "rebelling in the Safehouse", as **Tiwa** provided, fighting against rules and regulations they deemed unfair. Women also fought back by regularly requesting improved conditions through their caseworkers and Safehouse managers.

Chioma takes every opportunity to raise the issues in her house, stating:

> I raised the issue that it's toxic for every one of us; they bring different types of people into the house. I raised the issue, we talk about it, discuss it, and they said they are going to do something, but we didn't even see anybody. So, there is no change at all.

Ginger was in a similar predicament and often raised her concerns, and nothing was done to solve her complaints; **Ruby** challenged the rules in her Safehouse. However, those who resisted this way received pushback, and instead of their complaints being addressed, they were vilified. They were labelled as "complainers" in **Chioma**'s words and "troublemakers" in **Ruby**'s words. Another way of fighting back is actively seeking information to improve their circumstances. Some women revealed, as **Ginger** had done earlier that opportunities were not being availed to them and went out to seek these opportunities for themselves. **Tiwa** provided in this regard: "Get some information for yourself because these workers are not gonna give you that… You can't just sit down and wait for them to help you; you have to help yourself…" Thus, fighting back also entails not sitting back idly while waiting for decisions.

Other resistance strategies are self-improvement and giving back. Efforts for self-improvement and giving back both represent women's resistance against the MSHT victim trope that believes them helpless and pushing back against structures that work to keep them docile, as detailed below.

5.5.5 Self-Improvement and Keeping Busy

The strategy of self-improvement while waiting involved women keeping busy through various activities, such as acquiring whatever new skills they could and using them. **Tiwa** formed a group with other survivors who shared similar interests and embarked on a self-improvement journey together, learning new skills from one another while keeping busy at the same time:

> I had a group of people, just, who were like, we need to do something for ourselves. You like to dance, teach us how to dance. Let's do it: dance class; we have a drama class; let's have an English class.

Tiwa indicated she learned that using one's skills and doing something for herself has been pivotal for her journey, and she now works to ensure that survivors caught up in the wait know that they should do this:

> You know the only way to deal with the trauma is to do something with yourself, do something with your skills. The only way to deal with the trauma is to get better qualifications for yourself, although the problem a lot of people don't always do even though you can't go to university or to college. These free courses that one can take are available to asylum seekers and people in the NRM – English, maths, hairdressing, beauty, but the information is not given to people.

Diwata was one of the women who initially refused Safehouse accommodation, as a friend assisted her with accommodation. She also navigated the wait by keeping busy while waiting for employment, undertaking various training opportunities, and helping others when possible.

> I have started carer training. And I do that in the afternoon because in the morning I am doing fashion designer training and at night I do something else. The school also gives me a chance to choose my time… Some days, I can finish this course. I am very busy. If I get time, I go to my friends who need help because they are suffering with their health.

Ginger also keeps busy by learning new skills—she has learned how to knit and is working towards registering a charity to support other survivors in the future. **Khanyi** keeps busy by taking singing lessons. She has joined a choir and regards counselling as an essential aspect of her self-improvement; thus, she attends counselling sessions regularly.

Another aspect attributed to self-improvement is the women's participation in activities that bring them pleasure and relaxation, ranging from singing, dancing, crocheting, walking, writing and so on. **Nelao**, for instance, writes to cope with her asylum and NRM situations, narrating:

> When I'm on my own in my spare time every day, I need to write anything that I think about. If I went out and I see something that inspired me or hear someone talking something that inspired me when I get home, I need to write it down.

Women have also revealed that helping others is as vital as improving their own lives. Thus, giving back has been a treasured aspect of women's journeys, with women proving that while victimised by structures and processes in place, they are not helpless victims who cannot do anything for themselves or others, as discussed in the following section.

5.5.6 Giving Back

Women's resistance also lies in helping others while waiting, even though they are still waiting to change their circumstances. When waiting, however, women go out into their communities and help where possible. **Diwata**, while providing that "I am struggling with my life at this moment…" still dedicates her free time to look after others, stating:

> On my day off, I am going to some of my [country of origin] people because I need to help them because they are suffering with their situations, with their health and that… so I am busy going to visit all who are suffering in the hospital, in their homes…

Women have also learned to use their experience of navigating various systems in the UK to help others.

Abebi volunteers at her local church as her way of giving back:

> I have been volunteering for God knows how long. I have been looking after children in my church since 2004, to be honest, and so I always have something to do… I still look after them, and some of them are 17 now. And I've been looking after them from birth… so keeping busy and doing something that I am passionate about. And after that, I started tutoring children as well as adults. I help with science, math, and English, and I also help nursing students, so I have been doing all of this before I started my own Uni. I still have lessons with the children because I see the gap in terms of the education system in this country. The things you are taught in school are not exactly the things that you need. You need to be taught a lot more. And a lot of kids, especially Black families, take it for granted that you still need a lot more help… I am not allowing my story to bring me down; I am now using it to change other people's lives.

In terms of the future, most of the women desire to continue giving back through altruistic professions such as working in the care, health, education, charity, and domestic sectors. Giving back is a powerful form of resistance as women show they are not helpless victims only waiting to be "helped". They are active agents changing their lives and those around them. However, going through constant obstacles is not easy, and even though various women expressed the resolve not to give up, they needed to keep the hope alive to keep going, hoping, and striving for a better future. Some women did this through self-motivation and faith in God, as explored below.

5.5.7 Self-motivation and Faith in God

Despite the earlier challenges, women such as **Mary**, **Tiwa**, **Nelao**, and **Khanyi** regarded the Safehouse as an improvement from their previous circumstances and thus had to motivate themselves to persevere. **Mary** expressed: "I did not have a choice then… and they were still giving us food, so it was better than not having anything because I didn't know anybody here," and **Tiwa** remarked:

> That Safehouse, no matter how it was, was still better than where I came from… I still knew it was better than being outside or staying with those people that are ready to molest you just to stay there, so it was like this was heaven for me, even if it was like that.

The lack of choices created in women a vital strategy: self-motivation, coupled with faith in God for those who believed – **Nelao**, **Tiwa**, **Chioma**, **Mary**, **Abebi**, **Parisha**, and **Diwata** were most vocal about their faith. This extended beyond the Safehouse to their broader waiting.

Nelao shared that having somewhere to live instead of being homeless, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, kept her going. Thus, while one accommodation she was given did not have cooking facilities, making it difficult for her to cope with takeout daily for three weeks while pregnant and sleeping on a couch as there was no bed, she endured and frequently motivated herself to stay strong, narrating:

> When I feel that way, feeling bad, feeling stressed, I just started thinking positive like, come on**,** **Nelao**. I managed to escape a hard situation in [country]. A situation of rape, forced sex and all those things, at least I have a roof here where I can sleep, where I am not forced to have sex, so that's something that was making me keep going and think positive all the time even though the situation was not easy… There are some people who are pregnant like me at this time, but they don't have a roof. At least I have a roof.

Nelao, as previously stated**,** also writes as a strategy to endure the wait and expresses further self-motivation in her writing. The subsequent passage is extracted from a written composition **Nelao** shared, with permission to incorporate into this research:

As an asylum seeker they is no plan because anytime is tea time you can be deported, you can't study to high education you can't work what you do is just to be in sweet prison, monitored no privacy to your room no choice to the accommodations YET you will be told that you are free from what you fear from your home country. TRAUMA AFTER TRAUMA.. BAD THOUGHTS 24/7 the word I'm tired of myself become your moral. You are here stuck in sweet prison you can't go back because of what you fear. Some people end up killing themselves Home office will you roof and £35 weekly to sustain yourself and the rest it's in your hand even if you are not happy you don't have choice. LIFE OF NO CHOICE IN SWEET PRISON.. ANGRY EYES AND HEART 24/7 BUT NO CHOICE..

MORAL OF THE STORY

Don't give up on yourself always thinking positive no matter how hard the situation is always think positive always be proud of yourself even if you did nothing for the day just be proud of yourself, keep telling yourself that me myself and I, I can do it doesn't matter how long it will take but I can make it.. it doesn't matter how people judge me wrong or calling me names but I will prove them wrong I WILL MAKE IT. Remember about the bad things that you went through but you didn't die means that God did it for a reason as a test to test your faith.

Whenever she felt like giving up, **Nelao** kept reminding herself that there must be a reason God brought her to

England, often talking to God, saying: "… God, you brought me far to England, and you know why you brought me far. I managed to escape a situation, and you brought me to England."

Khanyi and **Tiwa** shared similar sentiments: no matter how difficult the conditions of their respective accommodation were, they adjusted and endured as they had nowhere better to go. **Khanyi** narrated:

> When they give you a house, you really need a place to lay your head. Even if the house is not comfortable, you have no choice but to accept it and manage yourself there. Even the temporary accommodation is not easy, it's not advisable, but you have no choice but to accept it, even if the house has no washing machine, it's fine, if you are living alone, you can wash your clothes with your bare hands… You can't even bathe with a bucket. They will say that you can't bathe with a bucket. You have to use the shower. That's why the shower is there, and that is not what you want. That is not right, but you have to cope. You are better than homeless. Even if it's difficult, you are struggling. You can adjust it.

Khanyi's narration touches on various aspects shared by other women—the lack of choice, the restrictions in the Safehouse and the struggle and determination to make it. To "adjust" to the conditions, as there is no other choice.

Tiwa also repeatedly indicated that no matter the situation in whatever Safehouse she lived at any point during her time in the NRM and afterwards, it was better than any other place she could go, and thus, "it's just been the grace of God" that kept her hopeful. Self-motivation coupled with God has been necessary because it has not only kept women going but also kept them hoping their circumstances will change; as **Abebi** provided, "It's easy to give up, but I believe in God, and I believe that every situation is there to mold me, not to break me down." She further provided an example, one of many where she had to rely on self-motivation and hope when she could finally attend university:

> I just tried to get a system, but for me, it wasn't just taking a toll. It was the fact that this is an open door. There have been years of living like a zombie every year; you know, it's always the same thing over and over again. You don't know where the hope is coming from, and this is different. I am doing something that I want to do. So, even if I wanted to get tired, the fact that this was a light at the end of the tunnel was just enough to keep me going.

Women who did not speak of God or any religious or spiritual beliefs as motivators to keep going spoke of aspects such as their children, for those who are mothers, and, once more, the hope that their circumstances would change. **Paloma** and **Tara**, for instance, left their children in their countries of origin and striving for

better for their children was their main source of motivation to keep going. **Caitlin** has always had her children living with her, although some have since become adults and moved out, narrating:

> I was really, really close with all my children. They are kind of what kept me going. They are my priority, and I put everything into my children. And I made sure that they had opportunities that I didn't, so I went full-on.

The women thus employed various strategies to get through their waiting periods, as discussed above. They did not wait idly for their circumstances to change. They did the best they could within the constraints of the systems in place.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that the women's journeys differed depending on the options available to them. While most of the women entered the NRM, two did not; however, their trajectories were different, too, depending on the options available to them. Those who did not go through the NRM demonstrated that support is available through other organisations, such as charitable organisations and mainstream support systems, such as local authorities. However, one's experience in those systems can also be challenging, as **Naita**'s experience demonstrated. Those who entered the NRM were severely affected by their accommodation provision, and they faced various challenges. However, through determination and the will to make it together with a lack of safe options, women created strategies to navigate and negotiate those challenges, revealing the true strength of will and ability to forge on in the face of adversity while also practising resistance.

Chapter 6 Transition into Independent Living

6.1 Introduction

Independent living is the third stage of the journey, which this chapter examines. The chapter begins with how survivors experience the transition from support to independent living, revealing that fresh obstacles follow them into this stage. The chapter will then proceed to examine how the women manage their personal relationships after exploitation, with a note that personal relationships are not confined to independent living only, as the women cultivate such relationships throughout their journeys.

6.2 The Transition

Transitioning from years of support and dependency on the state and others was challenging for some and exciting for others. It is, as Mercia (SM/CW) provided, "just so stressful and so terrifying…" and as **Anna** described, "It was taking you from where you had people, and it's a good thing because they want you to be independent… but for me, I think I wasn't… ready ready, ready to move out of the Safehouse…" Others, however, longed for this transition, to move out of the uncertainty, out of the Safehouse. Either way, transitioning was a considerable shift and required appropriate support in preparing for it and navigating it.

The field of MSHT in the UK has been in a constantly changing climate. The support provided under the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC) was initially not intended to be long-term. However, a policy shift occurred, acknowledging the necessity for extended assistance for certain individuals. This led to the implementation of the Recovery Needs Assessment (RNA), as detailed in section 2.4.2 (see also Home Office, 2024). Unfortunately, some of the women in this research have not benefited from the RNA[15]. Nevertheless, there are women who received their conclusive grounds decisions (CG) after the RNA policy came into effect but did not benefit from it. **Tiwa** received both a positive CG under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and her refugee status in 2021; well after the RNA was established, she did not benefit from that system and had to navigate her transition on her own. Her support ended abruptly with no support for her ongoing needs, such as accommodation. **Diwata**, **Selma**, **Anna**, and **Naomi** also experienced an abrupt end to support. They

[15] See Chapter Two, section 2.4.3. Caitlin and Rose were undergoing the RNA process at the time of their interviews.

were directed to seek support from mainstream systems such as their local authorities for accommodation and the welfare system for other benefits. This is in accordance with the central structure of the MVCC; it is designed as a temporary support system, emphasising that individuals should seek long-term assistance from other agencies, organisations, and departments, such as local authorities and Universal Credit (The Salvation Army, 2022)

Other women, however, such as **Caitlin** and **Rose**, benefited from the RNA provision, and as such, their transition has been gradual but not necessarily satisfactory. Other women such as **Paloma**, **Tara**, **Diwata** and **Parisha** also received support for their transition. **Paloma**, **Tara** and **Diwata** were affiliated with organisations that supported them throughout their journeys before, during and after the NRM. **Parisha**'s NRM caseworker helped her tremendously prepare for life on her own, helping her find employment and giving her moral support and friendship through her moving-on process.

The practitioners who participated in this research also indicated that the women they supported received a gradual ending of support, where practitioners prepared their clients for independent living and continued to support them through the transition period. For instance, Mercia (SM/CW) provided:

> I would give someone a notice to quit, which is four weeks before they need to move out, so basically, it's like a formal letter. Hence, if they want to go down the council route of homelessness, then that's what we are providing to them to say that they need care and support from the council in four weeks' time… Then, I support them through the whole housing process before they move out. When they move out, they have me or whoever is the support worker at the time for six weeks that focuses and kind of helps them to settle, helps them get access to the community… They have me as a support worker for six weeks, and then they can choose to go into what we call stage two or three ... In stage two, they can have a befriender, someone who is a volunteer within the charity, so it is not someone who is a professional, not a support worker. We have like a community and resettle coordinator, and whilst these women are moving on, she builds a relationship with them, understands their passions and things like that… The befriender meets with them or has special conversations with them every once or twice a week, and they, for example, with a befriender's job, wouldn't be, "I have a support need; I need to make a doctor's appointment". It would be to say to them, "Okay, you need to make a doctor's appointment. This is where you need to go ..." so it's like, here are the steps. It's not like here I'll do it for you…

The women's transition was, however, marked by numerous challenges, as the following section discusses.

6.2.1 A Continuing Terrain of Obstacles

The women who made the transition into independent living in the UK who are non-British nationals also had to transition from insecure to secure immigration status to be able to stay in the UK and seek assistance from mainstream support systems. Many of the women who participated in this research applied for asylum; some eventually received refugee status, and others were still awaiting decisions. Applying for asylum was highly encouraged by those who supported them. However, becoming a refugee was not desired by some and women like **Tara** and **Paloma** vehemently refused to apply for asylum despite being encouraged to do so by solicitors. **Tara** was told, "With asylum, you stay longer because of the process." They withdrew their legal assistance when she continually refused to give in to making an asylum application. **Tara** wanted an Overseas Domestic Worker (ODW) visa instead, as she identified as a worker, not a refugee, narrating:

> I didn't want to apply for asylum. They offered me asylum, but I didn't want to apply. Because my life is not a trap, I want to go back home. I still want to see my family, so I don't want to end up as a refugee to be supported… I am not a refugee… I am a worker…

Paloma also fought for her ODW visa instead of applying for asylum and eventually received it. **Rose** applied for discretionary leave to remain, which was only granted after she took the Home Office (HO) to court. Thus, regularising immigration status is challenging as Mercia (SM/CW) provided, "… immigration is one of the most sensitive and unstable things that these women go through. Even the women who have gotten their status now still feel unsettled."

The women looked forward to the regulation of their immigration statuses as the expectation was that they would access rights and entitlements, such as work, higher education, housing, and others, that their insecure immigration statuses restricted. Nevertheless, their transition, although varying from woman to woman, proved that regularising immigration status did not guarantee access to rights and entitlements easily, even though said rights and entitlements were formally granted. After exiting the NRM and the National Asylum Support System (NASS), with secure immigration status, survivors are meant to obtain further support from mainstream services such as local authorities for accommodation and benefits under Universal Credit[16] – see

[16] Universal Credit is a welfare benefit consisting of a monthly payment (in England) to aid with living costs for people on low income, out of work or those who cannot work (Gov.UK, n.d.c).

section 2.5.5 for more on NASS. Accessing mainstream support services was challenging; however, it made their transition turbulent. Regularised immigration status should open various doors that were shut for a long time for them. However, as **Tiwa** described it:

> You have been given an open door, but the open door is like a maze…It's not a journey whereby, when you come out of all of that, and you receive your leave to remain, and you're like, thank God! Finally, I can start my life over again! No, you have not come out of the maze. You only came out of the maze of legal stuff… I've spent all these years looking forward to it, and then this! This is why I tell people in the NRM and in the Safehouse to gain skills because when I got my refugee status and I was to leave the NASS accommodation, the nastiness that I have witnessed - I don't know what to compare it to… I had to say to myself, if I fought for so long for so many years to get this, and I get it, and people are making me feel like a piece of shit, was it even worth it?

Tiwa further expressed that having a clear picture of what to expect once out of formal support would have been helpful for women who needed to prepare themselves for the aftermath of formal support, narrating:

> If I knew this was how it will be in the real-life world, that one month that I was given to leave the NASS accommodation, I would have used that one month to get a job in Tesco's or something, but because the assurance was there from the beginning - my caseworker and the lawyers said don't worry you are all covered because they know you need at least three months to integrate, so that gave me hope like I've got three months to integrate but I came out, and it's just so bad…

Those who receive their refugee status quickly time out of NASS accommodation if they were staying there because one of the critical features of the NASS housing allocation is that once an asylum seeker is granted secure immigration status, they are required to move-on from the NASS accommodation within 28 days to seek accommodation from mainstream housing services (Home Office, 2022a). Those women falling into this category found themselves in challenging and dangerous circumstances. Upon timing out of the NASS accommodation, **Tiwa** was reassured that she would not be homeless and would receive housing from the local authority. She contacted the local authority when she received her refugee status, and her time in the NASS accommodation ended. She was then entitled to support from them following her grant of refugee status. Like **Ruby**, however, **Tiwa** did not meet specific criteria and was thus not a priority for local authority accommodation, narrating:

> … I called her [person at local authority] the day I was supposed to be evicted from the NASS accommodation…she said we don't have a place for you… we can't even help you because you are on your own. You're under 40. You are not vulnerable because you are physically well. I said I have mental health problems, and I am on medication, and she said what medication are you on? I told her, and she googled it. And she said your medication is for allergies. I said have you got my file in front of you? Have you checked my file? Have you called my GP? Do you need to? …she said

> no need to do that. You don't have to Google it when there is a doctor. And she said the only thing I can do for you is to refer you to a Safehouse. I asked her, do you know I have been to a Safehouse? … do you know what it's like to live there? … I had lived there when I had to live there, and I am not ready to be turned back to a Safehouse. She said that's the only option you have, and I said, … I need to go to a place tonight, so I don't even mind whatever it is as long as I'm not sleeping in the street. She says it takes two days for a referral. I was like, okay, if it takes two days for a referral, where am I supposed to sleep tonight and tomorrow? She said, speak to the manager of the house. Maybe he will let you stay, and I was like, no, because I have applied for over two months to let you know that I'll be needing the accommodation for today, and you assigned someone else to move in tomorrow morning, the manager is going to kick me out tonight because they need to clean the room.

Tiwa was left homeless for a couple of nights while awaiting the outcome of the referral because she was not a priority, as she was not ill enough. She was healthy, clean, single, had no children, and was self-sufficient. Her other option was a homeless shelter, but she needed to pay £25 a night to stay there, which she did not have, as her Universal Credit financial support had not started yet. She was saved from sleeping in the street by her friend, narrating:

> I had a woman that I have gone through NASS accommodation with that I met through relationships that I could just squat with for about three days. I had to call the MP [member of parliament]; I had to call the police officers; I had to call everyone I could call to help… the third day, the council then got me an emergency accommodation.

Tiwa was placed in shared emergency accommodation with men despite her history of sexual abuse by men, which she informed the council of. According to the council, nothing could be done, so she stayed there because homelessness was the alternative. After a short period, **Tiwa** faced eviction and potential homelessness again when her time in the emergency accommodation lapsed, and someone else was lined up for her room. **Tiwa** still had nowhere to go and resorted to calling various people to assist her again. She was informed she needed to find a job, yet she did not have sufficient skills apart from those she learned in the Safehouse, such as baking. She was also finally admitted to university and was studying, but she could not take on full-time employment. When she came to an impasse with the council regarding accommodation, she considered renting privately. That was not feasible because she had no full-time employment and did not have references or three months' bank statements. She could only open a bank account when she received her refugee status in August 2021 to secure a tenancy agreement. **Tiwa** reflected on all these barriers, saying, "I have been through so much shit now. I've got my refugee status and leave to remain. This is the last thing I expected from the world."

Due to problems experienced with obtaining accommodation from local authorities, which, even if temporary accommodation is received whilst waiting for long-term accommodation solutions, has challenges that impact women's remodelling work, such as being placed in mixed housing with men, the private rental route **Tiwa** attempted is often seen as the better alternative to local authority accommodation. Deemed ideal even by practitioners, as Mercia (SM/CW) provided:

> Housing is really, really tough, and even through the council, they generally tell them to go through private rental, and I am starting to learn that is possibly the best because temporary accommodation can take back women into their recovery so far, and relocation, they have created a community in a certain area and then are moved from that… You can put as many supporting letters as possible, you can tell them [council] about their needs as much as possible, and they are most likely still gonna put them in a shared accommodation somewhere quite far away with men.

However, as **Tiwa**'s story revealed above, even that is out of reach due to accompanying problems with further requirements that women could not satisfy at that stage. **Diwata** also received refugee status and was placed on Universal Credit. She struggled to secure a private rental, stating, "When I ask for a tenancy agreement, they don't give it to me because they don't want Universal Credit… So, nothing is happening because I don't have money to pay because I don't work…" again, this is a shared experience. Mercia (SM/CW) explained:

> A lot of landlords won't take them as tenants. I was trying to find a private rental for someone, and I was constantly calling estate agents. Most of them said to me that this landlord wouldn't take that type of tenant. I did not know that at the time that was illegal, and then once I found out later that it was illegal when I tried to challenge it, I got told by the estate agent that it doesn't matter because the landlord would say something else or would choose someone else…

Thus, while private rental is a way to circumvent barriers experienced through local authorities by both women and practitioners, it is often out of reach because women usually come out of their wait financially insecure because of being unable to work and thus cannot afford the rent. They also do not meet other requirements, such as providing references and bank statements, and are discriminated against by landlords for being on Universal Credit.

Consequently, Steve (ASBM) concluded that the system is setting survivors up to fail, giving them rights and entitlements that are difficult to claim, by narrating:

> They're being removed from where they were housed through immigration into a local area, where there is simply no provision, and if you look at the provision within [city] and you look at the priority cases that we have in [city], somebody that's been in immigration accommodation for the last six months will look really well. They will present very well, they will present well clothed, well fed, whereas the demographic of those that we're trying to support in [city] will look nothing like that, so they're always gonna get the priority… And there are families, and the priority will always be on those families that have a local connection. So, you've got to have a local connection first, and if you don't have a local connection, then there's actually no encumbrance on the local authority to give you anything. And that's the rub, so when you come out of an immigration status, and the Home Office said, you can have leave to remain, wherever you are in the country is you don't have a local connection for. When you come to housing, that's the first thing that housing will ask you is, what's your local connection? ….

The insights provided by Steve (ASBM) elucidate integral aspects of the social housing policy in England, highlighting the imperative for local authorities to conduct evaluations that aim to ascertain individuals' connections to the local community and determine priority housing needs based on specified criteria (see Brown et al., 2022; Darling, 2022; Gallent & Robinson, 2012).

The British citizens, **Ruby** and **Caitlin**, faced challenges too. For instance, **Ruby** was essentially removed from support as soon as she received her positive CG, narrating: "Because I already had my papers as a British citizen, they were like… "Oh, can you move into another place …" so they wanted to keep the Safehouse beds open for girls who maybe did not have citizenship…"

Ruby's subsequent Safehouse, which she said was called an "after-care provision", closed due to a lack of funding, and she was directed to a local authority to receive housing and further support. Still, she could not be assisted immediately because, even though she was entitled to receive support from them as a British citizen, she did not fit their criteria, narrating:

> The council said that I had no connections to [city] and that because I was having surgery, there wasn't suitable accommodation; I needed to go to adult services, and adult services were like, you don't fit our criteria because you are not mental…

Safe accommodation was the women's most urgent need as they transitioned into independent living. However, requirements such as priority need and connections to a local area when seeking accommodation from local authorities, lack of funds, stigmatisation for being on Universal Credit and a lack of references when seeking private tenancies impacted their ability to secure accommodation. Therefore, whether supported in their transition, women usually continue encountering barriers.

When accommodation is provided, it is sometimes unsuitable for women's circumstances, which creates more challenges. **Naita** and **Selma**'s experience demonstrated this. **Naita** never entered the NRM but was supported through mainstream support throughout her journey. Her transition into independent living started when she moved out of a domestic violence shelter into a council flat. She described her initial time in her apartment as follows:

> In the beginning, it was strange; you get a flat, but there is nothing in it… only carpet, so the first few nights, you are building yourself up for this. I always say this to people … be prepared for those few nights because you think it's gonna be great, but you are sat in a room with like a cardboard box with nothing in your flat, and it's pretty grim… I was stuck in my flat for a year because of stuff that happened to me. I ended up housebound, and I could not walk, and I was on the third floor… and there was no working elevator…

Selma was offered accommodation in another city, where she knew no one. She refused it, narrating:

> They wanted me to move to [city] of which I didn't know anyone, and my life had been like in [city], even my school and my child's school … so [charity] got involved to advocate, who pushed them to at least put me in temporary accommodation and they put me there for a week. Then they found me the house that I stay in now… they didn't even take long to find me a house, of which it means the house was already available. They just didn't want to give it to me.

Anna did not struggle with obtaining accommodation when she timed out of support. However, she was placed in an excluded area, away from everyone she knew from her Safehouse and alone with her child. **Anna** explained, "You're not allowed to contact them [staff]… once you leave the house, you're not allowed to contact them … you are on your own. They are not allowed to check up on you to see how you are doing." This was a lonely and terrifying experience for her. Fortunately, she had a friend who showed her everything she needed to know, including how to buy bus tickets and take the bus to move around. Eventually, her friend introduced her to a church community of her co-ethnics in another city, where she moved to and started finding her belonging and building a community with her child.

Naomi was relieved that her years of constant relocations and sharing accommodation ended when she received her refugee status and was granted a council flat. Being on her own with a young child, confined to a new home during the COVID-19 pandemic with no ongoing support during her transition and during her first few days on her own during the pandemic, proved challenging.

Caitlin presented a unique experience. As a British national, she could go to her father's house, as she detailed in Chapter Four. However, because she was not identified as a victim of MSHT, she began with her moving-on processes almost as soon as she exited exploitation. She did not have any immigration restrictions; therefore, she found a job instantly and started a family, stating:

> I just had to pretend that nothing had happened. I got a job, a normal job, and I tried to fit into society… about a year, and then I got a council house, and then I met my husband, and then I got married very, very quickly… I was pregnant within three months of meeting my ex-husband. I was very desperate for a normal life and a family.

Over the years, she had five children whom she ultimately devoted her life to raising. **Caitlin** was not tertiary educated but made incredible efforts to gain that education despite her challenges, stating:

> I went to university and got a degree, but it took me ten years to get a degree, and when I finished uni, you've got the DBS checks, so when I was going for a job, I couldn't go for jobs because of my criminal record. It stopped me from applying for jobs… I started in 2000, so then I got divorced and then graduated in 2011…I had no qualifications whatsoever. I had got one GCSE because I got kicked out of school and pretty much dropped out of school because I was being exploited. Contacted the university and said I wanna do a degree. I did it for my children because I was kinda like, how can I encourage my children that education is important and you know that for them to succeed, they need to work hard and study hard? … I contacted the university, and I said, look, I'm really keen. I really want to do this. One of the professors emailed back, and he said okay, if you do two first-year modules and you pass them, we use them as entry to get into the course…so that's what they did, but I didn't know how to write academically … I mean I understood the topic, but I couldn't put it on paper, so I passed those modules, but then when I went through time, I failed the first year three times. They were gonna kick me out. And they had a meeting to kick me out, and then by the time I got to third year, I was homeless…we were living in homeless accommodation, me and the kids. The boys were little; I was breastfeeding the boys, so I was going into lectures, and I'll be breastfeeding in the lectures when babies were with me…I was taking them in with me, and when they had a meeting to decide if I should stay or not, they kinda took sympathy on me because they were like, you know, she's got all these challenges. She is homeless. She has four children. She is sitting on this lot, and I didn't tell them what had happened previously, but I told them what was going on at that time. And I was homeless because of the relationship and everything, so they let me stay.

Caitlin was officially acknowledged as a victim of MSHT over two decades after initially leaving her exploitative situation. Throughout this period, she underwent multiple transitions toward independent living. At the time of the interview, she was residing in NRM-provided self-contained accommodation with her youngest child, who was undergoing the RNA process. **Caitlin**'s narrative highlights the challenges of defining specific timeframes for individuals' experiences and establishing clear-cut stages in the aftermath of MSHT. **Caitlin**'s (and **Ruby**'s) experience also underscores that immigration status is not the sole factor introducing barriers in

survivors' lives. Without the proper assistance, a survivor can face challenges coming from all directions, (see also Heys et al., 2022; Human Trafficking Foundation, 2021) as **Caitlin** did, which undermines their ability to thrive and achieve their hopes and dreams. She expressed:

> I'm really worried about the future. I will never be able to own my own house. I'll never I've had to come to terms with the fact that I'll never be able to have long-term employment full time, and once my children move out and they grow up, what am I going to do? I'm really concerned. I was offered compensation. It is not enough to support me for my future as it is.

Though varied for the women, independent living was not as expected. Women continued to face multiple barriers, with rights to access services granted on paper but difficulties accessing those rights in practice. The transition into independent living has thus been turbulent and continued introducing multiple barriers that essentially set women up to fail when they expected to finally secure a moment of relief. This reveals that some survivors still miss out on the long-term support provisions in place, such as RNA or are exited from the asylum system with no plans of assisting them further with their transition, which negatively affects them. There is thus a need for survivors leaving the asylum system to be granted appropriate transition support. There is also a need to recognise that without' appropriate support, survivors' moving-on processes will be tumultuous. Survivors will continue to face the "cliff-edge" narrative (Balch, 2017, p. 7).

Nevertheless, despite the various challenges encountered, the women continued striving to move-on with their lives. The following section examines the women's moving-on processes, focusing on their personal relationships.

6.3 Managing Interpersonal Connections and Dynamics

Human beings are relational beings, and relationships are key to building resilience (Winfrey & Perry, 2021). This section delves into women's private lives to determine how women asserted belonging and identity through their relationships with family, friends, romantic partners, and others. It uncovers the difficulties of navigating these relationships for various reasons, the prominent one being shattered trust through lived experience, which inspired heightened vigilance around others. Therefore, before examining the women's relationship dynamics, shattered trust sets the scene for understanding how relationships were built or dissolved. After the brief examination of shattered trust, the dynamics of different relationships, starting with

the family, moving-on to friends and finally romantic partners, will be explored. While shattered trust plays an essential role in women's approaches to relationships, there are additional factors of equal importance at play, such as the continued desire for self-preservation, paralleled with factors such as unequal footing in society.

6.3.1 Shattered Trust

There have been various instances when women were betrayed and disappointed by those they trusted. From this, they have prioritised discernment and withheld trust, carefully and intentionally choosing whom to trust and what to reveal about themselves. This is across the board and covers a range of experiences. Thus, mistrust comes not only from their experiences of exploitation but has also developed because of their broader lived experiences.

Women made various decisions regarding how to approach trusting others. **Naomi** resorted to being so careful that she did not get close to anyone, saying, "The only person I have a good relationship with now is my child. With any other person, no. Because of everything that happened, I have trust issues. I can't even keep friends…" **Parisha** lives in constant alertness of those around her, not completely shutting them out but drawing clear boundaries in how she interacts with them. To illustrate, she provided an example of how she approaches relationships with people she shares accommodation with, stating:

> Even if I live with people in the sharing accommodation, I don't share my personal details… or personal experience because I cannot trust fully because still, my experience is not allowing me to become easily trusting… You can talk about the weather, food, or any funny experience, but not the personal one because the people target you based on your weak point…

Parisha directly relates this to how others take advantage of others' circumstances and weaknesses. Chapter Four indicated she became entrapped in exploitation by trusting those she lived with to recommend a good English tutor but ended up in exploitation instead. Equally, people taking advantage of other circumstances have been highlighted by **Abebi**, who did this by giving an example of how people treated her because of her insecure immigration status:

> I have been around people that used…my immigration status and say I will help you do this… I don't want something that will exploit my situation against me again. I don't want someone that will make me feel as if I am inferior, and that is a problem that I've had to deal with for a long time.

Selma also revealed that she constantly monitors relationships to protect herself and her son because her trust has been continuously broken:

> My trust has been broken a lot, so ever since my trafficking situation and my childhood experiences growing up, seeing things happening, I don't trust. So even when I am in a relationship, I don't trust. Because I am thinking like, okay, this will happen to me, this will happen to my child, and I don't want my child to go through that.

Rose, following her exploitation, became cautious of making connections with new people:

> I was scared of … just making new friends around me. Anybody I had established in my life prior to my experience they were kind of safe. There were people I felt safe with cause I knew them, and they knew me, but anyone following my experience, I was more closed off.

The above are just a few illustrations of how trust has been broken for some of the women through various experiences which have affected how they proceeded with most relationships. As discussions on family, friendships and romantic partner dynamics will show, other instances broke trust. However, there are other factors to be revealed in the following subsections that affected how relationships were created and nourished or avoided and destroyed. The first relationship to be discussed is the family[17], looking at how this shaped and shifted after exploitation.

6.3.2 Family Dynamics

After leaving exploitation, women did one of two actions: maintain contact with family or sever ties with them. These decisions are explored below, starting with those who maintain contact, analysing how that is done and examining the limitations or boundaries women have placed in sustaining those relationships. The second aspect of severing ties with the family will be discussed after that in section 6.3.2.4.

6.3.2.1 Keeping Ties with Family

Women whose families played no role in their exploitation or made them vulnerable in other ways maintained contact with them after exploitation. Closeness differs from woman to woman, with some, like **Mary** and **Nelao**, keeping a close relationship. **Mary** explained, "They were not the cause of my predicament… where I

[17] In the context of this section, family is taken to mean women's nuclear and extended family units (for those who had them) prior to exploitation.

come from. We are really closely knitted. We are very close to my family. Although what happened just happened, we are really close." **Nelao** maintains the same relationship as before, close with some and not others, explaining: "I haven't grown up with my mother… We're not that close, but with my sisters and my brothers from my father's side, it's still the same relationship. It's still good, but my father passed away".

Women who left their families in countries of origin on the quest to provide for them, such as **Paloma**, **Tara**, and **Diwata**, maintain close relationships with them as their families' survival depends on the remittances they send. Some women who did not have the responsibility of sending remittances to families also fostered close relationships depending on their circumstances, such as **Mary**, as stated above and **Rose**, who still maintains a good relationship with her family in her country of origin. Some women like **Ruby** and **Abebi** have families in the UK and enjoy close relationships and mutual support from them.

Wherever family may be and however supportive and loving they may be, women have changed the dynamics of those relationships by maintaining certain boundaries. One of these boundaries is non-disclosure about their exploitation. Disclosing survivor status is something that most women in this research chose to keep private for a plethora of reasons, many of which will be revealed in the subsequent sections, such as making new friends and entering new romantic relationships. Family is no exception, and women often choose not to disclose that they have been exploited to them. **Rose** and **Chioma**'s families do not know they have been exploited and keep it that way. Non-disclosure has also been used where the family knows or suspects something has happened to the woman, but they choose not to discuss it, as it was for **Ruby**, **Parisha**, and **Ginger**, as discussed further in the section below.

6.3.2.2 Choosing not to Disclose: "To Protect Myself and to Protect Them"[18]

Rose maintains a relationship with her family in her country of origin. They do not know that she has been exploited; they only know that she left for the UK in search of work. She intentionally concealed her exploitation from them, narrating:

> I have no family here in the UK, and my family has no idea if I have even been trafficked… I've made that decision actively to protect myself and to protect them from that… Sounds kind of sad,

[18] **Rose**.

> but it has sort of eroded my connections. You know they're not as strong as they used to be years ago because how am I supposed to? Your family wants to ask how you are what you've been up to. What you're doing this weekend, and when you're in a position of destitution, you just say you're existing. You can't really explain or bring joy and project that in a nice way to your family… It's very hard… it's changed how close I am willing to be with them… I often sit and navigate my conversations around… Like I told them, I am working two part-time jobs… I can share that with them. But before, I wouldn't want to talk about anything to do with work; I'll just avoid it and not talk about it because I'm not working, because I can't work, I can't come and see you, and you're asking when I'm gonna come and see you. I can't come and see you 'cause I don't have the rights right now even to travel…

Rose revealed that shame drove her decision of non-disclosure: of not achieving what her family thought she came to do at the time, which was to work. She did not want them to know when she was destitute. **Rose** revealed further:

> My biggest fear right now is my family finding out what has happened. And the repercussions that could come have I told them what happened and the guilt. There's guilt there. I mean, I will have experienced years, and for them, it's like you just dropped the world on them like they may feel entitled that they should know that because they're your family… So, my biggest fear going forward is how I keep myself secure and comfortable and content, unable to and still embrace my family for the position they are in.

Shame also informed **Chioma**'s decision to keep her exploitation from her children, stating:

> I was thinking about myself… How am I going to explain myself to my children that this is what I have gone through? Even today, they do not know. Till today, as I am telling you, I keep it to myself because it's not a good story to tell.

Therefore, keeping their exploitation away from their families has been best for some women. However, some family members have some knowledge that something happened but chose not to discuss it, as discussed below.

6.3.2.3 The Elephant in the Room

Ruby and **Ginger**'s family knew something happened to them because the police had contacted **Ruby**'s mother. After all, she was returned to the UK by the British embassy. The day **Ginger** was taken to the Safehouse, she was collected by The Salvation Army (TSA) from her sister's house. Both, however, have not and do not discuss what has happened to them with their families.

Ruby maintains a close relationship with her mother and siblings; however, **Ruby** does not discuss the details of her exploitation with her family because of reasons such as culture, shame, and the need to protect her mother, narrating:

> …a lot of it is seen as a curse, or shameful, or like bringing dishonour to the family, so to keep the family honour, and my mom also had quite a hard life, so I don't wanna add on to that… So, they know, but we don't really talk about it. We just pretend like it has not happened at all; we just try and move-on.

Ginger speculated that her family knows something has happened to her; they do not discuss it, saying: "I told my sister only here [the UK] … After reading a paper, I think they understood, and the day I was coming [to the Safehouse] … they [TSA] picked me up from her house."

Parisha's family in her country of origin also have some knowledge that something happened to her, but she keeps the rest of her story away from them for fear of their reaction:

> I am afraid to talk about it. They know the basic one… that something bad happened to me, but I will not go into detail because I don't want to make them feel like… I don't know how they are going to take it, so I just keep it quiet.

Therefore, the decision to disclose or discuss their exploitation in further detail with the family has been informed by various reasons, such as shame, culture, protection, fear, and guilt. However, no matter the changes in family relationships, some women's families have been essential sources of encouragement and support, as narrated below:

> Being in access and proximity to family and support networks that's been hugely important to my recovery. **Rose**.

> The fact that I also had my siblings have been a good thing because going through all of this alone, I don't think I would have survived if I am perfectly honest with you. **Abebi**.

> I speak to my family. I have my sister and my mom here in the UK. My mom is in the [area] of the UK …I speak to them… I am close to my siblings as well, and it's hard because, obviously, we can't be in the same city because of stuff that has happened. **Ruby**.

> My daughter has been so supportive. Keeps calling me and encouraging me. She calls me all the time and encourages me, "Mommy, don't worry," we'll talk through it all… That is even giving me hope. **Chioma**.

Shame and fear of stigmatisation are common reasons why some people choose not to disclose their survivor status to family and close ones (Yea, 2020a). The women in this research however revealed that there can be various reasons contributing to withholding information about exploitation, one of which is to protect their loved ones. Family dynamics have consequently changed, but having a connection with the family has still proven invaluable for some. While some women have relationships with family, others have severed ties with family for several reasons, which the next section examines.

6.3.2.4 Severed Family Ties

Anna has lost all contact since she was trafficked as a child by an extended family member, and **Naita** intentionally cut all ties with her family, who trafficked her to the UK and lived in the UK. She expressed she severed all ties with them for her safety and well-being and has not spoken to them since she ran away from them.

Selma, **Naomi**, and **Chosen** elected not to say much about their families in their countries of origin. **Selma** narrated: “I don’t have family in the UK. My family is my son. My family is my friends… and my family back home, the relationship is not as solid….” **Naomi** said, “I don’t have any family in the UK, and I don’t keep in touch with my family back home.” Moreover, **Chosen** simply said “no” when asked about family.

Caitlin, who has family in the UK, narrated that her family relationship has collapsed:

> I no longer have a relationship with my mom. My siblings are all through my mom because we’ve got different dads, so my siblings have sided with my mom, and I’ve almost been ostracised from family, so I now have no family support.

Family presents a complicated dynamic for women, and every woman’s relationship with her family is unique. Women who did not keep in contact with family and spoke about it revealed that it was necessary for their safety and protection. Those who maintained contact shared some or nothing about their exploitation but benefited from family support.

Another complex relationship is with friends. Friends are crucial for support across the board, ranging from providing accommodation, moral support, health care support, and much more, as evidenced in Chapters Four and Five. However, friends also come with complexities. The following section explores these complexities,

and the choices women make regarding friendships. Before approaching this, the concept of making new connections will be examined to indicate that besides the shattered trust that was discussed earlier, there are other factors, such as disclosure of survivor status, confidence, catching up[19] and others that stand in the way of survivors forming connections with new people.

6.3.3 Survivors Making New Connections

Survivors are often relocated whilst in support, and relocations continue in independent living. Often, women face moving-on to new cities where they are not acquainted with anyone. They then face the task of getting to know new people. However, this has been made challenging by several factors, such as catching up with others in terms of life goals, disclosing survivor status and finding people they can relate to.

Mercia (SM/CW), **Abebi**, and **Tiwa** explained that survivors must, therefore, "catch up". Mercia provided, "These women are incredible. They have got a massive amount of strength in what they have done and what they have shown. They just need some time to heal and to catch up on some things." **Abebi** substantiated:

> The fact of the matter is that for the last few years, I have been caged. Even if I get regularised, for instance, there is a lot of catching up to do. There are a lot of things I need to fight for, so there are a lot of things that are running against me.

Tiwa also pointed to the fact that being exploited, followed by long years of fighting, has affected her life trajectory:

> In the space of you leaving a trafficker and… I had many years after, that over ten years of abuse after that… All I'm thinking about now is most of my life is wasted. I have to make use of my life now, and that is what helps me.

Therefore, this catching up places women on an uneven playing field with others in society and can impede their rate of progress in comparison to others and in terms of making new, meaningful friendships and connections. **Ruby** explained:

> I don't really like to mix outside of work with a colleague and stuff like that because of the survivor stuff. For example, even though I am working, I still haven't got my own place, or I can't afford to get my own place, so it's kind of like most of the colleagues have got their own places, or

[19] In the context of being in exploitation, some women in this research found themselves falling behind in their education and skills development. As **Abebi** stated there was a perceived need to "catch up" on these and other aspects after exploitation.

> they see family at the weekend or evenings or in relationships and stuff like that. I find that if you mix with them outside of work on a more personal level, then they will ask questions. I don't want anyone to come to my home here because it is shared or ask questions about my family, and I do not really relate to them… I have done it in the past [mixed outside work], but I didn't find it authentic… I think it depends on where you work because I work with people that are professional, like highly professional skilled, they are on high wages… They might say, "Oh, why are you still in the shared accommodation? I could never live like that," or "I could never share a kitchen", or "Oh my gosh, I couldn't live away from my family like what would you do? Who would you go out with?" and so I find those questions very difficult to answer… at the minute, I am sharing with eleven people in a house share, and it is just for what I can afford at the moment and with finances and stuff…it is like something that I have to do because I am still supporting my family and stuff like that, and those are the things that people from work don't really understand.

Consequently, catching up plays a crucial role in how survivors can make new connections. Often, colleagues such as those that **Ruby** mentioned may not know that a certain woman is a survivor and ask ignorant questions and make ignorant statements. When they get close to people and may want to disclose, it is difficult to decide when to do so. **Naita** illustrated this when she expressed how she grapples with knowing when to disclose, which affects getting to know new people:

> It's like one of those things when you are like, at what point do you tell someone about your life because this is like a huge, I mean, it's more than half of my life that I spent in that situation. So, it's like I feel like I can't reach most people. When they have conversations, they get to know each other and talk about the past and like, oh, maybe I did this, and I have a family who is like this. But I can't really talk about any of that without it being like, oh, I was trafficked… so it's hard to get to know people, and when you do, it's like, at what point do you tell them because I used to tell people too soon I think, and that put me in like vulnerable situations, and now I am like I don't tell people for like ages, and then I feel like I am being false.

Other factors that women found to impede getting to know others are confidence, education and being different in other ways, for example, speaking a different language, having different goals, or having a different culture. **Diwata** narrated:

> I used to be ashamed to talk to people, even those who were my co-ethnics, because I am not educated, and I do not know how to speak some languages from home because I have my language, which is not our national language. So, I am shy to speak to them and communicate. I also had problems with English.

Tara said she felt discriminated against when she was with people who differed from her, did not share her goals and was thus hesitant to make friends and speak to people. She eventually found a supportive organisation that changed that.

There are many good reasons women need to get to know new people. Moving to new places requires this, as human beings are social beings, and communities are essential to resilience (Mawadha, 2023; Winfrey & Perry, 2021). Having friends or people to talk to and socialise with is also crucial to combat loneliness, which is prominent in independent living. As mentioned above, getting to know new people is challenging. This does not mean women remain completely friendless unless they explicitly choose to. As **Ruby** provided, "Survivors are very good at knowing what to do to survive," so they developed strategies to circumvent the impediments faced in getting to know new people. Like navigation strategies examined in Chapter Five, women employed techniques such as keeping minimal friends and finding solace in the familiar, as discussed in the following section.

6.3.3.1 Keeping the Circle Small

The women have not attributed much importance to having a large circle of friends. **Ruby** explained:

> I haven't really got [a circle of friends]; I have got some friends that I would consider friends where I am living. I would speak to them. It is lonely, it can get lonely, but also having a circle… I think that having a circle is what people think they need, but I am also content with spending time by myself, reading.

Those befriended often show genuineness and good intentions, from whom women can benefit and vice versa. This is usually done through discernment and using lessons from the past. **Selma** narrated how she did this:

> How I weigh that, okay, this person can be my friend, this one. I don't think we can get along. I think it's because I find that many people they compete, or they are not true friends. Were when you are in need, they just abandon you only when they need help. That's where they remember you or when you are okay; that's when they want to be friends, so I don't want to associate with people who just take me for a ride. I want to be around somebody with me in poor and in health, not when everything is good.

As **Selma** explained above, discernment is crucial; through that, women keep few close friends. Keeping people at arm's length by having superficial relationships with them to survive work and social environments is another crucial way besides discernment. **Ruby** calls these "faking relationships" and narrates:

> The good thing about being a survivor is that we know how to fake relationships… I think at work I can just act very professional, act friendly, do what I need to do to survive in the workplace… so I can take an interest in other people, hold conversations, have a laugh, have a joke, but really after

> I finish work that is it for me. I don't do it in a rude way where I say I can't come or hang out after work. I just tell them I have got plans or I am busy…

Therefore, being polite but keeping people at arm's length is utilised, something that **Parisha** expanded on:

> I talk to people, but I have a safe line where I always make sure I don't get along with deeply just because of my past experience; I have to save myself. I am still happy to speak to someone, greeting or basic. I am okay, and if someone asks me, can you come to my house? Can you do this? I don't do that because I don't feel ready yet… I chit-chat hold the phone if someone calls. It's fine, but it's like a boundary just for safety… I mean, if it's my former caseworker, I can trust her… but for me, this kind of friends… I try to keep my distance; I try to maintain that healthy border…

Therefore, a small circle is preferred, even by women who consider themselves extroverts like **Mary**:

> I am an extrovert, so I love going out. I build a lot of relationships. I have a lot of groups that I belong to, you know… but I don't have… best friends; I just have people - we talk when you come to the meetings, we talk, and that's it. My children and my husband are my family and my best friends.

Selma and **Naita** also keep a few close friends, with **Selma** maintaining a close relationship with a woman she met in one of the Safehouses where she lived, providing, "I have one or two friends; I don't have many friends. I have a friend whom we stayed with, the one who gave me accommodation when I was homeless, so she stays on the other side of [city]." Moreover, **Naita** said, "I don't have many close friends…". Others prefer not to have close friends at all. **Naomi**, for instance, said her child is her only friend. However, there are always exceptions. In this case, the exception was **Chosen**, who found comfort in having a large circle of friends, but even then, discernment remained crucial. She narrated:

> I have so many friends around me now, the ones that I will benefit from, not the ones that will lead me to do unnecessary things; you know, I have friends that advise me; I go to community work; we do community meetings, that's it… I am the type that makes friends.

Friendships are dynamic; the preferred approach is keeping the circle of friends small or non-existent circle. However, using this strategy does not mean that women are entirely closed off from other people. They maintain friendly relations but consciously choose not to let many people close.

Women are cautious of whom they let close because of lived experiences and are careful to select only those who bring value to their lives. All approaches to friendship are through the process of discernment and leaning towards people to whom the women did not have to explain themselves and people who could understand

them. In doing so, finding friendship in other survivors has been a valuable navigation strategy. The following section explores how women find solace in other survivors with whom they practised survivorship solidarity and resistance.

6.3.3.2 Survivor Friends: Finding Solace in the Familiar

Every survivor's story is different; however, there are shared experiences, and there is a unique understanding between survivors of certain aspects of life and survivorship, such as celebrating one another's accomplishments and understanding various struggles better than non-survivor friends, as **Ruby** expressed:

> I find that you can share the most experiences in life; they [survivors] celebrate your wins, and they know how hard it is just to hold down a job or get up in the morning… non-survivors don't really understand the fear you have about relationships, and I think they [survivors] kind of understand better, and I have found that with my non-survivor friends, they just… they might think that they are struggling and you might think that is not a struggle…

Or what a relief it is not to have to explain oneself to people all the time, as **Naita** narrated:

> You don't really have to explain everything, and people don't… like when I meet with other survivors, we don't really like to have to do all that explaining ourselves and then questioning each other. And things. It's just like… let's just figure out now.

People who are not judgmental of one's circumstances, as **Caitlin** stated, "When you reach out to other survivors, you have this kind of… I can talk to you because you are not in my space, and I can talk to you because you are not judgmental of me." Or the immense joy that accompanies achievements, such as the right to work after living in wait for so long, celebrating each other and encouraging one another to power through, as **Chioma** succinctly expressed:

> We will go out, we just buy some snacks to eat, we talk, we discuss, we talk about ourselves, we encourage ourselves, and even there is one I called yesterday. I told her that I have gotten my work permit, and she was so happy with telling me I should not give up, and very soon I will have my asylum. She hadn't even applied for her own work permit; I told her that she should apply they will give to her.

Alternatively, simply just being there for one another as they understand where people are coming from, as aptly expressed by **Khanyi** and **Nelao**, respectively:

> Because they are coming from where you are coming from. They have similar problems. When we meet each other, we encourage each other, laugh together, and talk together, freely talk to each other because then you know where you are coming from, you know where they are coming

> from. We help each other to feel better, to feel happy. We give each other the reason not to be carrying stress every time…. **Khanyi**.

> I have a friend now. She is from [country], but she is older than me. I think she is 45 years now, but to me I call her a friend because she is someone who understands me very well. She went through trafficking as well here in the UK, so at least we are on the same page. We can speak the same thing. She can understand when I feel off, so she is always there for me. Even when I'm sick, when I'm going to the hospital, she'll be there for my daughter, so that's it. **Nelao**.

For most women, their small circle of friends or one or two close friends are often other survivors, friendships made in Safehouses for those who lived there. As **Anna** stated, "My friends were the friends I had in the Safehouse, not like community, coz I was like, oh, maybe everyone knows I have been trafficked. I wasn't so comfortable…." Forming close connections with other survivors has given women a sense of freedom to be themselves, lifted the burden and shame of discussing their experiences with others, and spared them from explaining why certain victories, joys, and desires matter to them.

A preference for survivor affiliation does not mean that women do not associate with non-survivor friends. There are always exceptions once more, depending on each woman's circumstances. Some found a good balance in having survivor and non-survivor friendships. **Rose** already had non-survivor friendships before exploitation in the UK. She maintained and drew necessary support after exploitation from those connections. **Naita** has both survivor and non-survivor friends, narrating:

> I don't have a lot of survivor friends; I only have like one really close survivor friend, and people I know are probably more survivors than non-survivors. We are friends, but not close friends. But I don't have many close friends. I have like maybe three close non-survivor friends and one survivor friend like from before.

While there is an inclination to lean towards survivor friendships, there are no hard and fast rules of friendship, as women often choose to bring people into their lives who bring value. A similar approach emerged in how they navigated romantic relationships, where discernment and non-disclosure were prominent. Romantic relationships, as the next section reveals, are also complex but can also be sources of joy and support and a way to restore trust.

6.3.4 Navigating Intimacy: Love and Connection After MSHT

Rose stated, “Everybody wants someone. Everyone enjoys company. I think humans need human interaction around them.” The women’s approaches to relationships are multifaceted. It is not confined to what they have gone through during their time in exploitation but has also resulted from their prior experience. Therefore, the third aspect of relationships to be discussed is romantic relationships. Three categories emerged - the first is women who embrace romantic relationships and who are married or dating. The second group of women is those who avoid romantic relationships. The third group is those who aspire to settle down with a partner in the future, create a family, and build a home together.

6.3.4.1 Embracing Romantic Relationships

Mary spoke highly of her relationship with her husband. In describing her husband and their relationship, **Mary** narrated:

> He was there for me, and we started as friends, and I told him everything that I went through, so he has got a listening ear, and we became close. He offered if I can go and stay with him so I said why not and I was already in love with him… We both needed each other. He was doing the emotional and every other thing for me, and I was taking care of his house for him and doing every other thing, and before you know it, I got pregnant… I am also a victim of FGM [female genital mutilation], so I do have flashbacks, and it really affected me sexually, but I just thank God he understood. Most times when I think about all I went through, sometimes I don’t sleep at night, sometimes I get depressed… But like I said, he understands because I was truthful; I told him everything I went through, and it was not an easy thing to say, but I summoned up the courage, and I told him this is me. This is who I am, this is what I have done, and this is what I have gone through, and that’s my past. But this is my future.

Summoning up the courage to disclose her exploitation to her husband was difficult, but **Mary** was glad she did it. She said he was the best thing that ever happened to her.

Rose described her relationship as follows:

> It’s something that you just go into so much slower… my person has just been so patient, so incredibly patient, and it must have been so frustrating, like, you know, at times like, “Are you there? Are you here? Are we here?” and it’s like yeah, I am, but it’s just taking me longer for you to feel that I am… I think it’s just made me more cautious, but I think it just comes down to the individual that you meet, and they need to be healthy and hugely patient. And then you can start sort of rebuilding those bridges and sort of enjoyments… like for me personally, for my relationship to work, I’ve had to be transparent about it …in the long run, that transparency is just what brought us close together… And you’re like, this is me, and like this is happening, I can’t come and see you ‘cause I have a curfew…

For **Rose**, moving out of the Safehouse also allowed her relationship to flourish as she was no longer restricted to what she could and could not do.

While **Mary** and **Rose** could be transparent with their partners about their experiences, some women struggled with disclosure. **Parisha** was engaged at the time of her interview, and she feared her fiancé's reaction if she disclosed about her exploitation:

> I do respect him, and I do like him, but when it comes to trust, I still make sure I am safe because he is a good guy but still, I want to make sure that I am safe… he is a good person and no matter what religion, he is a good person, so that is something I really respect. But I don't speak about my past experience yet with him, not because I don't trust him but because I don't know how he is going to react, whether he is going to take it the right way or the wrong way….

Tiwa, despite some problematic past relationships, has finally met a man who changed her perspective about relationships, although she remains cautious with her trust, narrating:

> After my last partner, that spoiled my whole youth. I was done with men like nope, nope, nope, nope… I was done with men, honestly, but there was an event in my church I volunteered to help, and this other guy came from my neighbourhood at the time when I chose to help there, and we had just met. And he totally changed my perspective about love and relationships … it's a miracle, but I would say it happened to me. We are dating now. I mean, thanks to him, I'm hoping to get married now, even though it's still gonna take me a long time to trust and all of that, but he has been good…

Paloma and **Caitlin**'s relationships differed slightly from those mentioned above. **Paloma** was the only woman who maintained a relationship formed before her exploitation. She left her husband in her home country, narrating, "He is back home… we are still contacting each other, talking video calls, so I am fine about love… I am in a long-distance relationship, LDR."

Embracing relationships - for those who have - included considering various pertinent factors depending on every woman's experience and circumstances. **Mary** and **Rose** indicated that transparency and vulnerability worked well for their relationships. However, **Parisha** holds back on revealing her exploitation as she is still unsure how her partner will take it. Moving with caution is standard, as women want to safeguard themselves. Understanding, acceptance, patience, and support from the right partner can enhance healing and restore faith in romantic partnerships. **Paloma** did not have to start over, as she was married before becoming exploited, and **Caitlin** saw romantic relationships after exploitation as an element of achieving a "normal life."

Some women, however, choose to avoid relationships, often postponing them to a time when certain goals are achieved, such as healing, feeling settled, and meeting a culturally compatible partner, as discussed in the next section.

6.3.4.2 Avoiding Romantic Relationships

Those who avoided romantic relationships did so due to a constellation of factors. **Ruby** battles with explaining her surgeries to potential partners, but her relationship status has also been affected by the city she lives in. There is a dearth of men from a similar cultural background:

> I haven't really like dated because obviously, like, I have my surgery, and in terms of it's really hard to explain… It's quite difficult to date…so at first, I was like, okay, anyone that you're gonna date… you maybe don't look up like the red flags so much, so you're like… I want a guy that … can handle himself on the street, that kind of thing. And then I think slowly … I'm just like changing my perception; I think where I am in [city], it's quite hard to find someone. It's…not like I don't like the people, but I'm just not… here it's quite hard to find… I think someone that understands my culture. I'm willing to talk… I'm trying to, and I will. I think it's confidence as well because I just throw myself into work because at least then you're like, you know she's got something going for her, like whether it's a career or she can drive …

Nevertheless, **Ruby** remains hopeful that she will meet someone one day and have a family. **Nelao** found it difficult to explain her exploitation but also balances that with her negative experiences with romantic relationships and the lack of culturally aligned potential partners where she lives:

> All the time when a guy proposed me, I'll be like, oh… because he might be my future husband, so I need to share my experience with him, and then after that, I will be like, oh, this guy might think that I am a prostitute why you didn't run? Why it takes you all those years? That's my question running in my mind, so all those things stop me to date, honestly. It has totally turned me off to date because I judge myself, and I realise that because I had a bad experience in my experience started from my boyfriend, not someone stranger… so I don't trust anybody when it comes to men, and the thing is that I don't want to be with someone who is not my tribe because I am too much in culture. There was a time when I was saying like oh, let me just try to date even a White guy… Then I'll be like, no, that's not you…

Naita's negative experience with a romantic partner in the past also affected her approach to relationships:

> I kind of like avoid that [dating], especially because I was with a guy who like used to drink a lot. He wasn't violent, but he was maybe like he used to shout a lot and get really drunk and mad, and so I split up with him and like I still haven't been with anyone since. I am happier just being on my own.

Selma remains guarded because of shattered trust and fear of disappointment, indicating that dating another survivor might ease some pressures associated with dating.

> I think dating, I am scared because there is this guy I have been friends with ever since 2018, so he says he wants to get married and says all those nice things, and I am just looking at him like, "This guy. He wants to lie to me so that I fall for his lies, only to be heartbroken."

Other women have, however, suspended relationships because they want to focus on their current priorities. **Tara** provided:

> It's not my priority…. I've been in… I can say not a worst but worse relationship in [country of origin], so I left [country of origin], and my goal and my priority is my children, a decent job and a decent life for my children and that golden priority hasn't changed. Until now, it's always been my children. That's why I left. I Didn't leave my home country just to find a love life in another part of the world, no. I left my country because of my children. And I will go back to them.… I have met guys I have dated, and they have also shown interest, but no, it's not my priority.

Ginger wants to prioritise her healing before going into a romantic relationship:

> All I want to do is heal and meet people out there. But I have to becareful. Some of them are White... They're old; just come and say they want fun. Sometimes even old people can use someone - they want to marry you so that you look after them because they know they're gonna die. What I want is I want to meet someone … we get married, a real thing… I want someone who is going to love me and accept me for me … I need to face my traumas. I need to face my past. I want my past to be in the past…I am here to heal and recover. I want when somebody wants to take advantage of me. I can speak out and say no.

Abebi also hopes to be in a healthy relationship one day but wants to "be settled" first. **Diwata** also intends to focus on her goals, but due to age, she reserves no hope for a romantic relationship, stating, "I am focusing on my ambition. I think I am 52 years old now, and that department is lost to me now."

There are, therefore, various factors why women choose to stay away from romantic relationships. Shattered trust, fear of stigma and disappointment are a few of those reasons. Another reason is that women want to focus on their goals and priorities. Choosing to refrain from relationships doesn't necessarily imply a permanent decision. Some women hope for futures with partners and children. **Ruby**, **Abebi**, and **Ginger** demonstrated that meeting a compatible partner, being in a healthy relationship, and creating a life together are aspirations. However, doing so will only happen once they meet the right person.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined the third phase of women's journeys after exploitation concerning women's moving-on to independent living. It examined the transition into independent living and how women were still presented with obstacles in that phase. It revealed that regularising immigration status is only one of the significant steps women had to overcome and showed that citizenship doesn't always mean protection. The chapter also examined the women's relationships with their families, friends, and romantic partners, revealing the importance placed on self-preservation and cautiousness, redefining how they associate with others. The women have shown that they have taken back control of their lives by carefully deciding how they approach relationships with others. For many, relationships have caused them harm, but for others, relationships have been supportive and instrumental to their moving-on processes.

Chapter 7 Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The three preceding chapters provided the research findings. Chapter Four provided critical survivor perspectives on the labels of victims and survivors. It also revealed that the women played vital roles in their exits from exploitation and that social connections and non-governmental organisations play a significant role in assisting survivors in the immediate aftermath of leaving exploitation. Chapter Five delved into how the women experienced support systems, predominantly their experiences with the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). It revealed essential insights into how the women employed navigation strategies to manage the challenges they faced. Chapter Six explored the transition into independent living, indicating that some women's support still ended abruptly, causing them significant challenges during their transition. Chapter Six also delved extensively into the women's relationships, revealing how the women navigated said relationships.

This chapter ascribes significance to the findings by examining how the existing systems influenced the women's trajectories. It mainly explores their experiences from an insecure immigration perspective and a victimising standpoint, delving into the ways in which these systems subjected the women to further victimisation. The analysis is conducted through the lens of weathering, incorporating principles from both Black Feminism and postcolonial theory. It excavates the women's experiences through a human rights perspective that questions the continual passing of laws such as those passed under the UK's New Plan for Immigration. The chapter is divided into two parts:

- The first part interrogates how "landmines" are deliberately placed on women's journeys.
- The second part evaluates the role of current systems in perpetuating the victimisation of women even after they leave exploitation. It also examines the women's efforts to resist and redefine themselves through intentional involvement in private, everyday activities and purposeful decision-making to ensure their own safety.

7.2 Part One: Deliberately Placed "Landmines" in Life After MSHT

Chapter One explained the theoretical underpinnings of this research, situating weathering, a theory that incorporates others such as the Black feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and intersectionality—all of which derive meaning from the politics of resistance and liberation. Because of the complexity of lived experiences, multiple theories are at times necessary to elucidate comprehensive understanding (Brah, 1995, 2023). Weathering is used in this thesis to highlight that continuing exposure to social and economic adversity and discrimination can deteriorate survivors' trajectories as it underlines the role of structural racism, adversity, and discrimination as crucial determinants of survivors' trajectories, especially those with insecure immigration status in the UK.

Even though some assert that exiting exploitation should signal safety and stability (Rana & Bales, 2023), some women in this research did not experience this. Instead, they proved that assumptions that survivors could be returned to communities, exercise viable choices, and return to caring families and societies… are all simplistic and false (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2012). Much of the time, survivors are subjected to further suffering by the structures and systems in place. Their lack of formal belonging has either meant outright refusal of recognition and thus support by the UK government. Or they were given assistance that is subpar and only created cycles of dependence and a consignment to life in poverty, constraint, and constant struggling. Yuval-Davis (2011) urged that it is essential to differentiate between belonging and the politics of belonging – belonging is connected to emotional attachment, about "feeling at home", while the politics of belonging "comprise specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies which are themselves being constructed in those projects in very specific boundaries" (p. 23). The politics of belonging denote formal belonging. This is an important distinction for this thesis, as many of the struggles the non-British women in this research faced stemmed from the politics of belonging.

Instead of addressing the ramifications of systems that deny so many people access to legal migration and other rights and thus reproduce vulnerability, the MSHT discourse focuses on individual perpetrators and their victims' immense suffering (Martins Junior & O'Connell Davidson, 2022). Suchland (2015) argued that the overall portrayal of MSHT is represented by the individual victim being the site of the harm of trafficking -the

violence done to that individual is what we must see - therefore, we define MSHT as an issue focused on the individual. This obscures our attention from the structural problems that facilitate MSHT (Suchland, 2015). Similarly, instead of pointing to structural aspects that create vulnerability to exploitation and what led some to offend in this respect, the construction of the problem of MSHT is solely blamed on perpetrators of these crimes (Broad, 2018), again missing the role of structures and unequal societies. There is thus a need to move away from this tendency to individualise and deal with the unjust structures that produce state-mediated structural injustice, where legal laws and rules produce and reproduce patterns of unfairness that affect disadvantaged people in society based on their race, gender, or economic status (Mantouvalou, 2020, 2023).

Thinking about the afterlives of exploitation, as this research does, is impossible to do without considering the state violence meted out against survivors who are non-British, labelled as “Other”, and who are mainly from the Global South like most of the women who took part in this research. Understanding why this has been normalised is crucial; as Obama (2022, p. 87) stated, the obstacles some people face are usually deliberately placed as landmines “hidden inside of systems and structures whose power is premised on the belonging of some, but not all people”, and the women who participated in this research have shared journeys that demonstrated precisely this. Those who are non-British have deliberately been constantly subjected to suffering by systems eager to eject them based on their lack of formal belonging. However, this research has also shown that formal belonging is not enough, as the British women who participated in this research also faced systemic challenges. Most of the women thus exhibited high coping efforts and navigation strategies, which showed their resilience. However, the women have had to be “so extraordinarily resilient if they were to have any chance of succeeding in an indictment of systems that not only sets them up to fail but also sets up those few who beat the odds for a lifetime of obstacles” (Geronimus, 2023, p. 185).

Nevertheless, the underlying causes of their plights – the reach of the colonial past into the present – justify the passing of arbitrary laws and policies that ensure that their suffering continues to be sidelined. Instead, the plight intentionally placed on them is regarded as “the unintentional consequences of the different legal and policy regimes that have been put in place” (Balch, 2019, p. 91). That the problems plaguing the NRM are the result of a lack of policy implementation or the structural injustice that the state continues to nurture is the

consequences of legitimate aims, such as the aim to help people get back to work or an aim to control migration (Mantouvalou, 2020). Conversely, it is not recognised that the policies and laws in place are intentionally made that way so that some people's lives are a challenge to continue the UK government's efforts to control immigration. For instance, Broad and Gadd (2022, p. 23) noted that legislation such as the Modern Slavery Act (MSA) is mistakenly seen as a standalone piece of legislation as opposed to what it really is – "a core component of the hostile environment policy." Further, the treatment of asylum seekers who are detained, and some of whom are survivors of MSHT, indicates how:

> The Home Office's treatment of these women is not the result of individual caseworker incompetence or patchy implementation of new policies. Rather, these cases demonstrate that the Home Office is deliberately refusing to protect women who have experienced serious human rights abuses and is knowingly inflicting further harm and trauma on them.
> Lousely et al., (2019, p. 3).

The hostile environment was "deliberately created by the asylum and immigration regime" (O'Connell Davidson, 2022, p. 65), and the combination of the hostile environment and austerity policies increased the vulnerability of individuals without the legal right to work in the UK, making their lives more precarious and susceptible to exploitation (Gadd & Broad, 2023). Therefore, this thesis argues that if there are "unintended consequences" in these policies and laws, those are unintended for British nationals who become collateral damage in the war against irregular immigration, as the two British nationals who participated in this research's narrative showed - "The system is inadequate to the point of failing to assist both migrants and its own citizens," (Lazzarino et al., 2023, p. 13). However, the MSHT discourse often deflects attention away from the history and legacies of Atlantic slavery (Beutin, 2017) and, as such, from the relations and structures of domination, rooted in slavery and colonialism, that constrain some people's choices and underpin the violence some people face (O'Connell Davidson & Sanchez Taylor, 2023). However, acknowledging Britain's significant involvement in both the advancement and abolition of slavery, comprehending the interconnectedness of slavery and its abolition with the catalysts of mass migration, and realising that effective initiatives against practices reminiscent of historical slavery will thrive through national collaborations that aim to diminish rather than reinforce global inequalities is crucial (Gadd & Broad, 2018).

On this basis, it is essential to discuss rights and dignity as a starting point, with the understanding that human rights are crucial – for instance, human rights law can offer critical tools to scrutinise government action that creates vulnerability (Mantouvalou, 2023) – but also severely flawed due to practices of inclusion and exclusion of certain people. Thus, the discussion below is done in a fashion that recognises that dignity and rights are essential for the women's journeys in life after MSHT; however, it is part of a "total climate" that demonstrates how systems of domination from a past that is not past (Sharpe, 2016) deliberately place obstacles in the way of achieving dignity and rights for survivors, especially those who do not belong because of citizenship, which was the case for 17 of the 19 women interviewed in this research.

7.2.1 Human Rights, Citizenship and Exclusion

MSHT is recognised as a serious violation of human rights (Home Office, 2023b; Obokata, 2006). The discourse around human rights premise that human rights are liberatory and that freedom rests in the accumulation of rights (Kapur, 2018). Therefore, when survivors leave situations of MSHT, they seek to accumulate the rights they lost whilst in exploitation. Rights including, but not limited to, the right to liberty and personal security, to be treated humanely, freedom of speech and expression and to privacy. The right to work in just and favourable conditions, education, access to healthcare, adequate housing, and an adequate standard of living. The right to seek refuge, freedom of movement, access to justice and protection from discrimination, and the right to family life. However, claiming human rights is limited based on individual circumstances, such as where people come from. Thus, an essential right that Arendt (1951) identified is the right to have rights, one that hinges on citizenship and often leaves stateless people without rights"

The women in this research experienced this notion of being left without (some) rights, even after liberation from exploitation. Human rights are "universal ethical standards that affirm the equality and dignity of all individuals" (Bumiller, 2006, p. 327). When understood as inherent to all, they are natural rights that states should not restrict but protect (Keane, 2003; O'Byrne, 2005); however, while human rights theorising champions universalism, there are significant gaps between the commitment to human rights and the implementation thereof (de Felice & Graf, 2015).

The offshoots of transatlantic slavery and colonialism still reach into the present, problematising the universalisation of human rights. There is, thus, a complicated and troubling past that needs acknowledgement and interrogation (Gadd & Broad, 2018). African people and their descendants' lives have been and still are being affected by the legacy of transatlantic slavery and colonialism (Fanon, 1990/1961). Notably, while formal abolishment of the treatment of people as property has been achieved, numerous laws, customs and practices designed to designate Africans and their descendants as permanently dishonoured and subordinate subclass of human beings" (O'Connell Davidson, 2022, p. 56) still linger. Such laws, customs and practices continue to privilege white lives and devastate Black lives in the contemporary world, which the discourse of MSHT diverts attention away from (Gadd & Broad, 2018; O'Connell Davidson, 2017; O'Connell Davidson & Quirk, 2015). As Kempadoo and Shih (2023, p. 1) provided, "anti-trafficking has racialised effects and enables or supports racial and ethnic profiling, racial discrimination, and racial or ethnic othering".

Problems with the universalising of human rights further include having Western liberal implications whereby neocolonial power relations are imposed (Mohanty, 1988; Kapur, 2018). Human rights have had "exclusion clauses" that deny liberties to groups of people such as women, workers, racial "Others", and the colonised (Losurdo, 2011, p. 342). Survivors are thus divided into those whose human rights deserve protection and those who do not (Wijers, 2015). Therefore, who is deemed "human" in human rights is a vital consideration, as this determines who deserves them. Butler (2004), for instance, argues that some lives cannot be apprehended as living and thus cannot be apprehended as grievable or lost because there are subjects who are not quite—or are never — recognised as lives (Butler, 2009). Thus, the universality of human rights is not realisable for everyone.

Another issue with universalising the human rights approach has to do with one of the core elements of human rights– dignity. Dignity is said to be linked to the intrinsic worth of every person and is said to define a person's fundamental nature as an exceptional and self-determining being (Glensy, 2011). Thus, the restoration of dignity is one of the central aspects of the welfare of survivors of MSHT (Yea, 2020a). However, dignity's main axis – worth – is to be secured and protected by nation-states (Smith, 2019) that decide who is worthy (of protection, services, immigration status, identification as a victim of MSHT and so on) and who is

not. In this light, states ensure “which is threatening, dangerous and contaminating is not granted membership” (Kapur, 2015, p. 6). They have the “right” to determine who their nationals are, with rights only preserved for them (Sharma, 2020, p. 4), underscoring the idea that the existence of rights is contingent upon a political and legal framework that acknowledges and upholds such rights (Arendt, 1951). This has mainly been seen in terms of asylum seekers and migrants with insecure immigration status in the UK, who have always been seen as security threats to the UK and have thus frequently been detained and removed from the UK (Malloch & Stanley, 2005). The dignity of state sovereignty protects states by justifying certain actions that states take against persons, often undermining personal dignity and worth. State sovereignty permits nation-states to safeguard their territories to the detriment of individual human rights.

As a justification for inequality, instead of a resolution for the same, nation-states introduced citizenship (Bhambra, 2015), a high status of dignity - creating a special relationship between states and those they govern (Waldron, 2013). This makes room for shutting out the citizens of others (Kochenov, 2019) based on who is worthy and who is not, with some subjected to an enforced lack of worth and made into ‘*people out of place*’ (Sharma, 2020, p. 4 – emphasis in the original). When coming out of a situation of exploitation, a survivor might acknowledge their intrinsic value; nevertheless, this recognition must be reciprocated, not only by the individual but also by the state. Fukuyama (2018) noted that an inner sense of dignity needs to be publicly recognised, as it is not enough for one to realise one’s own worth if others do not acknowledge it or, worse, denigrate or ignore one’s existence.

This acknowledgement of not only one’s dignity publicly but also the recognition that one is human in the first place publicly by the state and others is critical because from that recognition or lack thereof stems almost everything else, such as the rights and entitlements one can access and how people are treated by broader society. Because from the human rights core value of dignity, “other derivative (un-enumerated) “daughter” rights arise (Smith, 2019, p. 4), the right to education, family life, and others mentioned above. For some women in this research, a lack of recognition of their worth and, worse, ignoring their existence saw them go years on end without being recognised as victims of MSHT by the state to be worthy of support through its systems. For example, **Tiwa**, **Abebi** and **Caitlin** were subjected to rejection and suffering by the state for over a

decade before they were recognised as victims of MSHT. Even after recognition, they still faced numerous obstacles in their journeys.

Thus, contemporarily, the issue of inherent worth and the deservedness of rights for the mere reason of being human is flawed because aspects such as state sovereignty and the ongoing coloniality of power[20] undermine this. These aspects continue to be pervasive today, continuing the "Othering" of people at the intersections of race, gender, and class. Such "Othering" continues to allow the passing of legislation and policy to the detriment of people such as people experiencing poverty, some migrants and asylum seekers, creating substantive obstacles for them.

Citizenship is, however, complicated and affects more than just non-citizens. British citizens **Caitlin** and **Ruby**'s stories have cemented this in the way their government treated them, as well as how, in general, British national survivors of MSHT have been ignored and thus subjected to suffering due to a lack of recognition as victims of MSHT in the UK over the years (Heys et al., 2022; Human Trafficking Foundation, 2021). Anderson's (2013, p. 17) concept of "fantasy citizenship" refers to "imagining that citizenship, if you have it, means equality. The fantasy citizenship of real inclusion promises that once you have permanent residence or citizenship, everything will be alright. But it will not." This has been visible in the difficulties some women in this research faced regardless of citizenship or after receiving secure immigration status.

There is thus more to citizenship than legal status because some citizens do not necessarily enjoy access to the same privileges as others, and the freedom that citizenship brings is qualified and limited by the sovereign state in various aspects. After all, citizenship is differentiated by gender, age, class, and race (Lister, 1997; Puwar, 2004), and therefore, it must require a broader understanding beyond legal status; it must be understood as inextricably bound up with the expectations and notions of dependence and independence that inform our experiences of "belonging" (Brace, 2015, p. 10).

The entanglements of citizenship with worth and human rights are a comprehensive web that cannot be exhaustedly unwoven here. However, it is an essential point of understanding because the women's journeys

[20] The coloniality of power refers to the enduring structures of power and domination that were established during the colonial period and continue to shape society social, economic, and political relations in the present day (Quijano, 2000).

have profoundly been shaped by their citizenship and belonging or lack thereof, which has legally justified their weathering. Their worth or perceived lack thereof has been a critical weighing tool for the support they received or did not receive. The state has become what Hodkinson et al. (2021, p. 76) term a "third party enslaver", and the shackles are, as Anderson (1993, p. 12) termed them, "made of passports, not iron".

Nevertheless, the human rights approach and its core value of dignity are essential, and it is recognised as a critical approach to advancing the women's lives in this research. For instance, the right to work, travel, own property, go to university, challenge judicial decisions about one's life, and so many others are all pertinent to the women's remodelling work. The women's journeys have aptly demonstrated how remodelling can almost not occur without acquiring these. Because "human rights mean voice and choice" (Brysk, 2012, p. 85). Furthermore, as Kapur (2006, p. 682) advanced, "We 'cannot not want' human rights. Rights are radical tools for those who have never had them. Though a flawed ideal, human rights seem preferable to no rights at all." Wijers (2015) advanced similar sentiments that even though human rights, trafficking and antitrafficking are fundamentally flawed, the human rights approach should not be denounced.

Nonetheless, human rights cannot be embraced uncritically, especially when those in question or concerned are women, non-White or experiencing poverty. Solutions are required because disturbing and striking similarities between the actions of past enslavement are visible in efforts to combat immigration today (Gadd & Broad, 2018). These have the object of denying mobility to some people and causing vulnerability to human rights violations, not protection (O'Connell Davidson, 2016a). Thus, while a genuine human rights approach that puts human rights above anything else is essential (Aradau, 2004), it is necessary to acknowledge and confront its "dark side" (Kapur, 2006, p. 628) mainly because the UK's response to MSHT has contradicted the human rights paradigm (Burland, 2015), with clear persistent "Othering" used as a justification of some people's suffering (Nelson & Kidd, 2018).

The UK has evidenced this in several legislative and policy instruments and continues to do so over the years, as aptly demonstrated by the implications of its New Plan for Immigration, discussed in this thesis as the "soft knife of policies that severely disrupt the life worlds of people" (Das & Kleinman, 2001, p. 1) below.

7.2.2 The Soft Knife of Laws and Policies

The UK government has taken a hostile approach towards irregular migration, which has and continues to significantly affect the lives of citizens of other countries within its territory. Immigration laws detrimental to survivors of MSHT in the UK have thus been routinely passed over the years and continue to be passed. Pervasive racism means that anti-immigration policies are better received than policies that promote and protect human rights (O'Connell Davidson, 2005). This is evidenced by how the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (NABA) and the Illegal Migration Act 2023 (IMA), which tighten immigration control and affect the identification of survivors of MSHT in the UK, were swiftly enacted. Conversely, in 2019, Lord McColl proposed the Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill, which offers better and longer-term support for survivors, including a 12-month automatic leave to remain provision and resources to address their support needs. However, as of 2023, this Bill had not even passed the second reading in the House of Lords.

Similarly, the Modern Slavery (Amendment) Bill, which would contain provisions for support of survivors, has only ever reached the first reading stage in the House of Lords on June 15, 2021, and no consultation has occurred on the section that would deal with survivor support. In contrast, the NABA and the IMA, both of which might limit survivors' probability of support, were swiftly enacted in Parliament. The NABA's first reading was in July 2021, and it received Royal Assent less than a year later in April 2022. The IMA's first reading was in March 2023, and in less than five months, it received Royal Assent in July 2023.

Amidst the myriad of laws and policies influencing the lives of survivors, three (the NABA, IMA, and the amendments to the Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance (the Guidance)) have been singled out for analysis in this chapter, being the most recent representation of the current immigration law and policy landscape that affects survivors of MSHT. This is discussed in terms of the UK's New Plan for Immigration below.

7.2.2.1 The UK's New Plan for Immigration

On 24th May 2021, the HO published its New Plan for Immigration 2021/2022, displaying the government's plans to transform the UK's immigration system. The New Plan for Immigration proposed a series of procedures to warrant the quick identification of potential victims of MSHT while tackling possible misuse of the system (Gov.UK, 2021a). The UK government has been adamant that there is an "alarming rise in people abusing our modern slavery system by posing as victims in order to prevent their removal and enable them stay in the country" (Home Office, 2021a, para. 2). Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman stated that "since entering the Home Office, I have seen egregious examples of convicted paedophiles and rapists trying to game the system. Making last-minute claims of modern slavery to block their removal from our country" (Conservatives, 2022, line. 69). Prime Minister Rishi Sunak joined the rhetoric, claiming that "one of the reasons we struggle to remove people is because they unfairly exploit our modern slavery system" (Gov.UK, 2022, line. 74). The evidence used to ascertain the abuse of the system has not been provided; in fact, the Home Office could not produce the data it used to conclude that the system is being abused upon several requests (Broad & Gadd, 2022; Frey, 2022; Joint Sector Letter, 2022). Nevertheless, NRM statistics increasingly show that more potential victims of MSHT are being referred to the NRM, and this should not be seen as an abuse of the system, instead that there is better awareness and understanding of MSHT, culminating in better identification and referral of potential victims (Frey, 2022; Van Dyke, 2019).

The NABA was the first legislative instrument to be passed as part of the New Plan for Immigration. At its Bill stage, it was described as the "cornerstone of the government's New Plan for Immigration, delivering the most comprehensive reform in decades to fix the broken asylum system" (Gov.UK, 2021c, para. 1). It was introduced to improve the early identification of victims, ensure that only "genuine" victims are identified and that those seen as misusing the NRM will be stopped. The IMA followed suit in 2023 to make provision for the removal of persons who arrived in the UK through irregular means. In the meantime, the Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance was updated with effect from 30th January and July 2023, respectively, reflecting several provisions of the NABA and IMA. These three aspects of the New Plan for Immigration will be discussed below to reveal

their detrimental effect on survivors' identification, support, and human rights, using examples of the women who participated in this research to highlight this detriment for survivors both presently and in the future.

According to the explanatory notes to the NABA, the Act has three main objectives: "To increase the fairness of the system to protect better and support those in need of asylum; to deter illegal entry into the United Kingdom, breaking the business model of people smuggling networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger, and to remove more easily those with no right to be in the United Kingdom." Overall, the Act tackles illegal migration, reforms the asylum system, and controls the UK borders. Nevertheless, this legislation demonstrates a return to previous patterns of including provisions of MSHT in legislation on immigration. Part five of the NABA is dedicated to MSHT, and it contains provisions that affect NRM decisions, making identifying victims of MSHT much more difficult. One of the various changes the NABA introduced is what some term "trauma deadlines" (Anonymous, 2022; Broad & Gadd, 2022, p. 16). Section 58 of the NABA provides that adult survivors can be served with a slavery or trafficking information notice, which is "a notice requiring the recipient to provide the Secretary of State (and any other competent authority specified in the notice), before the specified date, with any relevant status information the recipient has" (section 58 (2)). Late compliance with such notice will damage the individual's credibility (Section 59), which the competent authority must consider when determining whether to believe the individual or not unless good reasons have been provided (section 59 (2)). Notably, while not legislated before in terms of MSHT, placing timelines on survivors is not new. In the earliest articulations of providing support during the POPPY project, the Home Office had "trauma deadlines" in place whereby women only qualified for support through the POPPY Project if they came to the authorities within 30 days of leaving sexual exploitation (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2006).

These provisions are hugely problematic. Leaving exploitation, accessing support, and everything else to do with women's journeys depends on a constellation of factors that cannot be limited to time. All 19 women's stories here have aptly demonstrated that a time factor cannot be placed on anything because all their experiences have been unique. Their experiences were often shaped by factors such as how they exited exploitation, who they encountered, what information was available to them, and what their immigration status was. The competent authority is directed to consider "good reasons" provided for a delay. However,

survivors are already disbelieved in general, and there is no telling whether their reasons for potential delays in furnishing information will be believed to be good enough. Some of the women in this research have already lived through the rejection and disbelief of coming forward "too late" and were instead turned away and not assisted. **Tiwa** and **Abebi** are cases in point. Having to fight for over a decade each to be believed and supported. **Abebi** was blatantly asked why she did not come forward when she was a child in school. Even those who did not delay going to the authorities, like **Selma**, were still disbelieved and viewed with suspicions of providing false information to stay in the UK.

The NABA also introduced firmer language in identifying victims of MSHT. Section 60 amends the modern slavery statutory guidance (the guidance) in terms of section 49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (MSA) to change from a more permissible language such as "may be" to "are" a victim of modern slavery. The recovery period was also amended from 45 days to 30 days (section 61). Other notable changes are disqualifications from protection (section 63) and provisions on leave to remain (section 65). To bring all these legislative provisions into a more practical manner, the Guidance was updated on 30 January 2023 to give effect to the various changes introduced by the NABA. Section 49 of the MSA makes provision for the secretary of state to issue guidance about identifying and supporting victims of MSHT, which the secretary of state may revise as appropriate (section 49 (2)).

Initially, the guidance was amended to require Competent Authorities (CAs), when making reasonable grounds (RG) decisions, to consider objective factors that fall short of conclusive proof based on fact, such as a police report, medical examination report, or witness testimony. Survivors' narration of their own experience would no longer have been acceptable to receive a favourable RG. This requirement would have firmly legitimised the culture of disbelief in policy because the relevant CA was directed to disbelieve survivors' stories of exploitation, further delegitimising survivors as knowers, agents, and legitimate authors and protagonists of their own experiences. Realistically, this may have required a survivor to return to places or people who were part of their exploitation for this evidence, which is impossible for some, as the ways of leaving in Chapter Four demonstrated that sometimes women cross borders to liberate themselves and may leave behind any tangible evidence of exploitation.

The Home Secretary modified this provision slightly (see section 2.4.2), not eliminating the need for substantiating evidence but providing that the decision maker (the CA) should take into consideration "all of the information available, including the victim's account and any other relevant information that supports or undermines it…" (Home Office, 2023b, para. 14.53). Whether further information such as "eyewitness testimony, medical or expert reports, travel records, police investigations, general evidence such as Country Reports, or supporting evidence of the person's exploitation the First Responder provides, such as observed modern slavery indicators" (Home Office, 2023b, para. 14.53) will be required is left in the hands of the decision-makers. While it would undoubtedly be better than completely discounting the individual's account altogether, it is difficult to reconcile the likelihood of requiring these forms of evidence from survivors. Firstly, it is troubling that this decision is to be made by CAs who have been responsible for previous flawed decision-making concerning people's exploitation (see section 2.4). Secondly, should a decision maker decide that supporting evidence is required, this leaves survivors who only have their story to tell and not much else in an unfavourable position.

Taking examples from the women who participated in this research, if they were subjected to these changes, to demonstrate the potential problems of this requirement, even after revision, women like **Nelao**, **Mary** and **Chioma**, who travelled to the UK to escape exploitation, experienced elsewhere with nothing but their stories, would most likely not meet the new RG threshold, if for argument's sake the decision maker in their cases required them. Interestingly, **Nelao** had received an unfavourable CG prior to our interview, predating this amendment, primarily because of insufficient supporting evidence. She said that she had no more evidence than her body. However, even her body would probably not suffice because, at that time, she had been out of her situation for some time. Any brutalities her body experienced would likely have healed in the physical sense. Others, like **Tara**, ran away with nothing, leaving her with no objective evidence to qualify her account. **Caitlin**, a British national who was overlooked as a victim of MSHT for over 20 years, will likely also not possess any tangible evidence of her exploitation other than her story.

These laws and policies are regressive and encourage restrictive efforts to keep people from accessing support. They continue to associate MSHT with immigration and have not only created an environment for

MSHT to flourish (Heys, 2023; O'Connell Davidson, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2022) but have also created an environment of persistent suffering even after people escape exploitation. Likewise, there is continued suffering within support systems that are restrictive and narrow in the support provided, where people are not only left waiting for lengthy periods of uncertainty but are made to wait without being given appropriate tools to remodel their lives. For instance, the women with insecure immigration status are not permitted to work for a portion of their wait, depending on their circumstances or attend higher education. These are instrumental aspects of their moving-on journeys, which not only make their transition into independence challenging but also constrict them to a state of limbo whilst waiting.

Another justification for the New Plan for Immigration was to make removing non-British nationals with no legal right to be in the UK easier. Therefore, just as the changes introduced by the NABA were being felt, on March 7th 2023, the UK Government introduced the Illegal Migration Bill, which became law in July 2023. The Illegal Migration Act 2023 (IMA) aims to go:

> Considerably further than any previous immigration bill. For the first time, it will prevent those who travel via safe countries and enter the UK illegally from having their asylum claim considered by the UK and stops illegal migrants from being able to access our modern slavery system (Home Office, 2023c, para. 3).

While the NABA introduced restrictions, the IMA introduced complete denials. The focus is to remove people who enter the UK through irregular means as quickly as possible, including those seeking refuge and those who have survived MSHT. If they claim asylum, their claims will not be considered at all, while the NABA would at least have processed their claims speedily. They will not have access to the MSHT system, whereas the NABA still gave people access to it, even in a streamlined manner. The IMA does not give the Home Secretary discretion to remove people or not; it places a legal duty on her to do so. People should be sent to their home country or a "safe third country". This safe third country, now at the time of writing, has been identified as Rwanda, which the Court of Appeal found unsafe and thus unlawful following the case of R (on the application of AAA and others) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (2023).[21]

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[21] see section 2.4.2.

Anyone removed under these clauses will be permanently barred from entering the UK without "compelling circumstances". People seeking refuge can no longer cite the unsafe nature of their home countries (for them) as a reason for seeking refuge. The determination of whether a state is "safe" is interestingly made based on the broader territory, on the protections a state can widely give to its citizens, which is a curious diversion from the usual individualisation of modern slavery, i.e., claims that the danger lies with traffickers, child rapists and other "bad" people who organise themselves into criminal syndicates (Broad & Gadd, 2022). This logic, therefore, grants that if a survivor deems their country unsafe because of their trafficker, family or other individuals and thus deems it necessary to flee the whole country at large, their claim may be inadmissible if their country is "safe" according to the UK government's standards. Using **Nelao** and **Mary** as examples, they came to the UK to escape their situations of exploitation and to escape their traffickers. Their countries may not be unsafe in general, but they were unsafe **for them**.

The Act grants the Secretary of State powers to forego regionally and internationally recognised human rights obligations regarding humanitarian protection. These include those that affect family life; for instance, the Act intends to "disapply the duty on the Secretary of State to consult the Independent Family Returns Panel (IFRP)[22] about the detention of families with children under the powers conferred by the Act" (UK Parliament, 2023b, p. 3). Further, persons awaiting their conclusive grounds decisions (CGs) may not be removed from the UK before receiving this decision as per the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking (ECAT); however, the IMA makes this provision fluid in that the Secretary of State will have the power to suspend the provision. It may apply to those cooperating with police investigations, thus upholding the status quo of making protection conditional to criminal investigations.

The culmination of the above is that insecure immigration status will remain an acute obstruction to survivors' journeys after leaving MSHT. Identification, which can be a crucial first step towards formal support through the government, is affected in that non-British survivors will continue to be seen as immigrants first and victims later (ATMG, n.d.). They are regarded as a suspect population, driven by the motivation to avoid

[22] The IFRP was established to provide an independent and impartial assessment of cases or in reviewing cases where the government considered the removal of families with children from the UK, looking at how to best safeguard children's welfare during a family's enforced return. (Gov.UK, 2023).

criminalisation or deportation as immigration offenders (IASC, 2020, 2022). Most likely, some may never be seen as victims, as they will not enter the NRM if they arrive in the UK through unauthorised methods. Although it is acknowledged that not all non-British national survivors wish to remain in the UK forever - for instance, **Tara** and **Paloma** wish to work, save money, and go back to their countries of origin, others might have to remain, as going “back home” is not a viable option for them (see section 2.4.3). **Nelao**, for instance, wishes to leave the UK to join her children but understands that her country of origin has ceased to be safe for her and her children. Olivia (SM/CW), for instance, explained:

> I have some survivors who miss home, but they don’t miss home enough that they still don’t feel like it’s safe. I have one who’s got refugee status. She knows that she can’t, and to be fair, like that client, I’ve got two sisters who are service users, and one of them would love to go back but knows that she’s unable to do it, but it’s just like nostalgia thing you know, wasn’t home for so long whereas the other one said absolutely not like it’s too dangerous and they were both similar situations, so I guess that also depends on how the individual feels or measures risk...

It is not farfetched to conclude that considering the women’s experiences and the laws and policies that acutely affect their abilities to remodel their lives, especially non-British nationals, the terrain for remodelling life after exploitation is intentionally laden with landmines intended to push them out of the UK because they do not belong. The systems in place, especially the MSHT system, have been said to be broken, not fit for purpose, punishing survivors instead of protecting them, abandoning survivors and much more (ASI et al., 2021, p. 5; Beddoe et al., 2015; Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, 2016; Kalayaan, 2019, 2023; Murphy, 2018, 2020). This thesis argues the systems are not broken. Rather, they form part of the hostile environment (Broad & Gadd, 2022). They were never intact in the first place and was not meant to be, owing to a strong intent to keep the “Other” out through restrictive immigration measures that reinforce a formal lack of belonging through citizenship.

The literature has shown that the reluctance to sign international treaties to protect survivors, the snail pace and scattered establishment of legal and policy protective measures for them, and the restrictions placed on the protections eventually introduced are all indicative of a system that was never intact to begin with. How protection and assistance have constantly been made conditional and subjected to restrictions, as the developments surrounding immigration and asylum have demonstrated, as indicated in Chapter Two, all point to a system that was never whole to begin with. The New Plan for Immigration, as discussed above, firmly

cements that there is no intention by the UK government to have a modern slavery system that is functioning as a cohesive entity by taking regressive steps through the NABA and IMA. The same can be said for the asylum and immigration systems. The systems result from ideas that demonise the "Other", whereby legal responses that promote imprisonment, detention and even obliteration or elimination are encouraged (Kapur, 2012, p. 33). Therefore, the systems are not broken; they are working exactly how they were designed - to keep the "undesirable Others out". The desired (i.e., some citizens) who suffer through this are, as argued previously, collateral damage. The following part delves deeper into how the existing systems directly impact survivors' personal trajectories.

7.3 Part Two: A Continuum of Victimisation

Some researchers articulate that exiting exploitation means gaining "freedom from a deeply exploitative and traumatic situation. It is a new beginning or a return to normal life" (Surtees, 2017, p. 273). Leaving exploitation is, however, not necessarily "a joyous escape from enslavement" (Nicholson, 2022, p. 11) and indeed, as the women's narratives revealed in this thesis, freedom can be challenging even after a person escapes enslavement (Murphy, 2014). For the women in this research, freedom has been "a constant struggle" (Davis, 2016, p. 28).

Even though the women in this research attained liberation from exploitation, many found themselves embroiled in a subsequent struggle for survival. For some, like **Tiwa**, **Abebi** and **Caitlin**, existing systems failed to acknowledge them as victims deserving of support (Chapkis, 2004) after escaping exploitation. They had to seek survival through alternate means, and when the MSHT system eventually accepted them, the assistance provided proved largely insufficient. This compelled the women to devise alternative methods to address the gaps the systems left, as detailed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Therefore, victimisation, oppression and suffering did not stop when they exited exploitation, demonstrating that suffering is not confined to MSHT situations and is thus not ceased by emancipation (O'Connell Davidson, 2015). Instead, exploitation was replaced by something similar, a different type of unfreedom and suffering perpetrated by the systems in place. While meant to support them, systems such as the NRM, asylum and mainstream support systems reinforced survivors' victimisation.

Challenges followed them into independent living, where their transition was hoped to be smooth but presented fresh obstacles instead. Some of the women who participated in this research are now living independently but did not benefit from long-term support in independent living. They had to figure out how to navigate mainstream systems on their own.

In this part, it is argued that many of the survivors who participated in this research were kept in victimhood by the systems in place, whereby those systems sometimes inadvertently (and at other times intentionally) introduced more and more obstacles. Keeping survivors in victimhood extends beyond support; it persists as they transition into independent living. This ongoing dynamic imposes limitations on women, constraining them to specific societal roles and dictating the parameters of their lives. This dynamic is closely related to Derrida's (2000) concept of "*hostipitality*" - a portmanteau (a blend of words) combining "hostility" and "hospitality". It is often used to describe a paradoxical or ambivalent attitude that involves both welcoming and hostile environments. *Hostipitality* explores the dual nature of hospitality, where the act of hosting and welcoming guests can also harbour elements of aggression or tension (Derrida, 2000). *Hostipitality* further suggests that acts of hospitality may conceal hidden motives, power dynamics, or conflicts beneath the surface and invite reflection on the potential contradictions within seemingly welcoming gestures, questioning the sincerity and motivations behind acts of hospitality in various social, cultural, or political settings (Derrida, 2000).

In the context of MSHT, once the state accepted to "host" the non-British women, that is, to give them secure immigration, it controlled what assistance they received and what their outcomes would be. For instance, the state controls who can receive accommodation through local authorities by deciding who could be considered a priority. It controlled what type of accommodation one receives and its location. Analysing hospitality from the lens of how the "Other" is treated, Derrida argues that hospitality attracts feelings of contradiction between the host and the hosted, whereby questions such as who should adapt to whom and whether the guest can prevail over the host's requirements abound (Dervin & Layne, 2013). Staying on the topic of accommodation, if a woman refuses the accommodation she is given, she risks homelessness, as was seen in **Selma**'s case. The accommodation is to be accepted as given. For instance, where it does not suit the woman's

circumstances, the woman would have to take it or risk homelessness. This was seen in **Naita**'s case, who was given a flat on the third floor of a building with no elevator, and she could not walk, so she ended up housebound for a year. *Hostipitality* can also be extended to understanding the system of identification of MSHT survivors, whereby the state appears to accept to "host" survivors by accepting them into its NRM but then subjecting them to much hostility, as discussed in the preceding chapters of this thesis. Therefore, there is no hospitality without hostility, as there is power related to rights, duties, and obligations at play, resulting in the hosted always being "under control" (Derrida, 2000, p. 4). In this thesis, the control that Derrida refers to – whereby the host asserts control by limiting where the hosted can go, for instance, forms part of what constitutes a complex network of victimisation in life after MSHT for some women, subjecting them to various types of violence, including "the *violences* of everyday life" (Kleinman, 2000, p. 228)[23]. The violences of everyday life encompasses subtle and often unnoticeable forms of violence that affect people in their daily lives, stemming from the consequences of social power. These do not necessarily need to affect people physically, sometimes people are affected psychologically (Kleinman, 2000). Leaving people waiting for lengthy periods with no idea of what is going to happen to them, subjecting them to what Head (1995, p. 125) termed living "a precarious existence, never knowing from one day to the next whether I shall be forced into an unwelcomed and painful exile..." is an apt example of this form of violence. The women were subjected to continual victimisation (albeit different from their victimisation while in exploitation), as analysed below through the image of the MSHT victim.

7.3.1 The Dominant Image of the Victim of MSHT

Survivors are expected to conform to the confines of a predetermined "ideal victim" of crime, succinctly described by Christie (1986) as how society decides how the person or a group of people who, when subjected to crime, are readily given the status of being a victim. The "ideal victim" is a far cry from what Christie refers to as the "real victim" and is embedded in social stereotypes and falsehoods, whereas the "real victim" is a victim found in the real world (Fohring, 2018).

[23] Emphasis in original.

The dominant image of a victim of MSHT resembles the "ideal victim" in addition to constructions made during the "white slave trade" discussed in Section 1.5. The dominant figure of the victim of MSHT creates a single story of a trafficked woman – one who is young, innocent, female, foreign woman who is tricked into prostitution abroad and eventually rescued (Andrijasevic, 2014; Bernstein, 2010; Soderlund, 2005)[24]. Adichie (2009) indicated that single stories are dangerous because they rob people of dignity and develop stereotypes that are not always untrue but are always incomplete, often making one story the only story. Stereotypes simplify, but life and reality are not simple (Levi, 2013/1988), and simplification is blinding (Stringer, 2014). For this and other reasons, the dominant image of the victim of MSHT has been subject to criticism scholars have been attempting to dislodge it from its position of dominance, but this image remains prominent in public and policy discourses today (Andrijasevic, 2014; Jobe, 2020; Kempadoo & Shih, 2023).

For those who participated in this research, this image persisted into life after MSHT, where the support they received at specific points required them to meet criteria under this trope, such as weakness, sometimes even sickness, and a lack of agency. Some of the characteristics assigned to "ideal victims" of MSHT are briefly described below, with the women's experiences evidencing the continued reach of the characteristics of ideal victims and those who fit the dominant image of the popular trafficking victim into life after MSHT.

7.3.1.1 She is (NOT) "Rescued"

Being a thesis predicated on life after MSHT, it is fitting to commence with the element of "rescue". There are false assumptions that sinister perpetrators thoroughly control most victims of trafficking, who are only liberated when the police dramatically intervene to save them (Broad & Gadd, 2022; Spencer & Broad, 2012), but most survivors will not be "rescued" by law enforcement (Lightowlers et al., 2022; UNODC, 2022). Those who "rescue" themselves may, however, be deemed dishonest, inventing stories of exploitation to garner immigration support, and those who are "rescued" by law enforcement officials have a greater chance of being certified "genuine" victims and thus eligible for support (Haynes, 2007; Jobe, 2020). The findings of this

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[24] See also section 1.5.

research also confirmed this but provided new insights into the various ways of leaving and the significant role the women themselves have played in their exits.

Chapter Four illustrated that the women's ways of leaving MSHT were multifaceted. Even when assisted to leave by authorities such as the police, women still played vital roles in such leaving. These ways of leaving and decisions and actions taken demonstrate the uniqueness of every woman's journey and that the women are not passive victims waiting to be "rescued." They are intelligent, agentic, resourceful, and courageous individuals who defied the odds to liberate themselves despite circumstances that forced them into victimisation. Out of the 19 women interviewed, only five - **Ginger**, **Paloma**, **Parisha**, **Ruby**, and **Anna** were aided in their liberation by the police and other authorities, and even then, this was done in partnership with those women and, at times, other parties. The women were consulted along the way and sometimes determined the pace of the liberation. While these women were "rescued", in MSHT speak, they played a role in these "rescues". They were not weak or passive. The rest of the women liberated themselves or were supported to leave by third parties such as family and friends, showing ingenuity, resolve and wit, an incredible disruption of the "she is rescued" narrative.

Overall, the women's exit strategies do not tell tales of passive, weak, agentless women waiting to be "rescued"; some set plans for their liberation in motion, and those aided to leave by authorities also played active roles in their liberation. This research, however, cements the notion that those assisted to leave by authorities were better off in accessing support (Jobe, 2008). They entered the NRM immediately and were connected to other support services. Notably, some of those who liberated themselves struggled to get support, and some, like **Abebi**, **Tiwa** and **Caitlin**, spent numerous years without support primarily because of a lack of knowledge of the systems in place but also due to not being believed once they presented themselves to the police, the HO and other authorities.

The way the women left exploitation in concert with others indicates how survival is a concerted effort that requires various parties' involvement, calling for a need for a whole systems perspective that considers all actors (Gardner, 2019). Social connections were instrumental in aiding women's liberation and the aftermath of such liberation, providing primary needs such as accommodation, food, clothes, reassurance, information,

places and spaces of safety, trust, and care for mental and physical health. These support systems also helped some women build a sense of belonging through communities and gave them a place to go when needed during their journeys. In a nutshell, their social connections were performing what hooks (2001)[25] termed an ethic of love that sustains life but also gives hope.

Support from social connections and other members of communities is also an apt demonstration of the lived experience of *Ubuntu* (Tamale, 2020). *Ubuntu* is an African philosophy that centres on the interconnectedness, interdependence, solidarity, and mutual recognition of humanity in a community, emphasising that a human being is a human being through other human beings (Ndeunyema, 2021; Ngomane, 2019; Tamale, 2020). In the same way that *Ubuntu* deviates from individualism, so did some of the women's experiences in this research. The assistance they received from others in whatever capacity deviates from the individualisation that the MSHT discourse often places on the survivor journey. In MSHT, the focus is usually on individual victims and individual perpetrators, with the usual sidelining of broader structures and systems that create vulnerabilities (Suchland, 2015) and cause structural violence but also missing a crucial element of teamwork that comes from various players.

Granted, it is not argued here that all social connections and community assistance are positive. Brennan (2014, p. 161) found that relationships survivors form with individuals from the community can "turn negative". This is affirmed in this research, where not all encounters with social connections and others in the broader communities were positive for some women, as some women experienced harm from individuals who purported to support them. For instance, **Tiwa** and **Naita** ended up being abused by people who were seemingly supporting them in their initial stages of leaving. Knowing this should not lead to a broad assumption that community support is universally negative, nor should it serve as a warning for women to avoid seeking support from social connections or their communities for their own "protection." Instead, this

[25] bell hooks was born Gloria Jean Watkins, but chose her great-grandmother's name, Bell Blair Hooks, borrowing only bell hooks, as her pseudonym. As a prominent cultural critic, black feminist theorist, and author, hooks deliberately chose lowercase spelling for her name to direct attention towards her work rather than her personal identity and as a symbolic reflection of her dedication to feminism and her critique of established power structures.

knowledge should be utilised to innovatively design awareness campaigns and training programs aimed at individuals emerging from exploitative situations and those seeking to assist them.

The strengthening of community-based support will create avenues for communities to better support survivors by developing and strengthening community-based approaches that not only combat MSHT but also support survivors in life after MSHT. The importance of communities is part of the "total climate" of life after MSHT, as communities are an essential "pillar of survival, resilience and resistance" (Geronimus, 2023, p. 117). Gardner et al. (2021) also found that community-based approaches to MSHT are crucial in building resilience against exploitation.

The advocacy for enhancing community-based support systems does not suggest an excessive dependence on these systems. Instead, it highlights the significance of recognising their benefit at certain times and underscores the need to reinforce and fortify them. Support for communities should include training programmes that go beyond training people to "spot the signs of modern slavery" (UNSEEN, n.d.), as these are, at times, misguided (Gadd & Broad, 2023). Limiting this to spotting the signs can possibly continue to cement the dominant image of a victim of MSHT and create anti-immigration whistleblowing communities, with the potential of causing more harm than good. They will perpetuate what Yuval-Davis et al. (2018, p. 228) termed "everyday bordering, in which ordinary citizens are demanded to become either border-guards and/or suspected illegitimate border crossers….". Because increasingly, there are calls for a transition toward a human-centred, social justice-oriented approach that is less responsive to political agendas and more attuned to the needs of communities facing exploitation (Giammarinaro, 2020).

Murphy (2014) revealed the importance of collective action and how such action can influence the structures of power that maintain exploitation. Engaging in the arts and humanities as forms of creative practice presents opportunities for making gradual changes or offering alternative insights into how situations can be approached differently and challenges power dynamics and knowledge production (Balch & Mhishi, 2021; Mhishi, 2020). Engaging communities in artistic endeavours, such as crafting murals, producing music, staging theatrical performances, creating films or photography, and participating in visual arts, alongside involving them in history, heritage projects, and community participation in law, politics, and policy development, are all

methods through which the arts and humanities can be utilised to educate and empower communities (Mhishi, 2020).

Coming back to the continual victimisation of women considering the “ideal victim” or the dominant image of the victim of MSHT, physical appearance (mostly surrounding health and well-being) is another factor transposed into life after MSHT as a marker of who deserves support. As Festa (2010, p. 4) poignantly provided, antislavery sentimentality produces a subject who “is granted only a diluted form of humanity grounded in pain and victimhood…” This sometimes manifests in the body in pain (Aradau, 2004), which, as part of the dominant image of the MSHT victim, is discussed hereunder, and examples from this research are analysed alongside it.

7.3.1.2 The Body in Pain

The Violence Against Women movement (VAW) popularised the image of the torture of prostituted women and girls, with their campaign materials reflecting the prostitute as an object, victim, and enslaved person, illustrating this by featuring graphic depictions of the violence and harm associated with prostitution (O’Connell Davidson, 2006). The VAW movement marked significant strides in women’s rights, such as in the 1970s when women’s activism brought attention to violence in the home (Schechter, 1983); however, it also attracted significant losses for women. For instance, as Bumiller (2008, p. xii) provided, the feminist movement, most of which rallied against VAW, “became a partner in the unforeseen growth of a criminalised society, a phenomenon with negative consequences…” The VAW movement devised a victim-subject strategy, setting up a disempowered and helpless subject that succeeded partly due to its victim-subject appeal. Exclusive reliance on the victim subject has had severe limitations for advancing women’s rights (Kapur, 2002). This victim subject and its focus on VAW have further attracted solutions that do not necessarily promote women’s rights but instead invited a spate of domestic and international reforms that prioritise criminal law, used to justify state restrictions on women’s rights for the “protection” of women (Kapur, 2002). Campaigns against VAW “made extensive use of a symbol of the body in pain: pierced, bleeding, and defenceless” (Aradau, 2004, p. 262). The stories of the suffering that women have endured are essential to the creation of “an iconic image of a trafficked person” (Brennan, 2014, p. 30). These campaigns have placed tensions

between highlighting bodies, pathology and suffering against identifying conditions for participation, agency, and collectivities (Miller, 2004).

Connecting the brutalised body in pain to life after MSHT, the women who participated in this research also revealed similar requirements of physical ailment to qualify for certain types of support. For instance, physical suffering is used as a marker for one of the most salient support needs women have throughout their journeys: accommodation. **Tiwa** and **Ruby**'s stories illustrated this when local authorities sent them away as they did not meet their "priority requirement". **Tiwa** believed that because she faced some health issues and was formally identified as a victim of MSHT, she would be prioritised for local authority accommodation. When she approached her local authority seeking accommodation, however, she was informed she was not a priority even for temporary accommodation because she was not ill enough, was single and reasonably self-reliant, such that she did not need personal care. Steve (ASBM) explained that if people seeking accommodation looked clean, healthy, and well, which is typical of people coming from NRM and asylum accommodation, they would not immediately qualify for accommodation. This undermines survivors' moving-on processes because it takes survivors back to cycles they left behind, such as those facing homelessness once again and relying on social connections for assistance.

Emphasising violence completes the victimisation of the woman - the more violence, the more helpless and indeed victimised she is (Doezema, 1999). The same goes for some women in life after exploitation – the more ill and helpless they seem, the better their chance of receiving certain support. A twist, however, occurred for some women in this research in that those who were afflicted by severe health complications were turned away from support because the system did not have the tools to support them. Apparently, women needed to be ill but not too ill to qualify for some mainstream support. To substantiate, **Ruby** needed complicated surgery because of an injury sustained in exploitation. The local authority she sought support from after leaving the NRM denied her accommodation because they did not have the proper facilities. She was not referred somewhere else; she was sent away. Further, **Caitlin** was turned away from mental health support services because she was "too complicated to help." While the brutalised body is an essential marker of victimhood in the dominant image of the victim of MSHT, it is also one for support, if it is not too complicated

to deal with, which exposes the holes within the system and further discredits the “ideal victim” or survivor. People need support depending on their circumstances, a recognition introduced in the MSHT policy as the Recovery Needs Assessment (RNA) (see section 2.4.3), which has already been identified as failing survivors (Hutchison et al., 2022).

The final aspect of the dominant image of the victim of MSHT to be addressed herein is how the “ideal victim” of trafficking should not be too strong; otherwise, they will either not receive support or lose the support they have. Additionally, there were instances of rejection or surprise when some women in this research dared to be strong and powerful, as discussed below.

7.3.1.3 Rising Strong and Daring to Be Powerful

For survivors, regaining power and authority over their lives is difficult but important, especially after numerous years of abuse (Flasch et al., 2015). Brown (2015) described rising strongly as the process of facing adversity, overcoming failure, and getting back up stronger. Rising strong is closely related to daring to be powerful, to rise above in the face of adversity and to challenge the status quo. It is firmly rooted in Black feminist thought, popularised by Black feminist thinkers such as Audre Lorde, who celebrate female strength and solidarity and advocate for speaking out against those who work to silence the “Other” (Lorde, 2019/1984). Rising strong is inevitably related to life after MSHT as to remodel life, to live liberated and ideally thrive (Brown, 2021), not only coping and surviving (Das et al., 2001) after the interruption (Brennan, 2014) of exploitation is to rise strong.

For some survivors in this research, rising strong and thus daring to be powerful means pursuing self-sufficiency and being as independent as possible, which may mean that, at times, they will not accept assistance or they will challenge the type of assistance offered in pursuance of autonomy. Indeed, the restoration of dignity, empowerment and the construction of resilience (Knight et al., 2021; Yea, 2020a) has been recognised as crucial for survivors. However, some women in this research experienced expectancies of complacency - to be silent and grateful, or they would be ignored, labelled, or any support received would be limited and sometimes stopped altogether.

Christie (1986) stated that the “ideal victim” should have enough strength to speak and be heard but not enough to pose a threat to other vital interests. If they are too strong, they will not garner public sympathy associated with being a victim. Further, Christie indicated that the “ideal victim” should not speak too loudly because, when she does, she shows strength and loses support. Thus, sometimes, exercising agency can lead to being labelled as the wrong sort of victim (De Angelis, 2016). For example, the UK government has routinely treated Nigerian women as “deserving of it” (their exploitation) and did not fit the criteria of a victim as they could speak English, voiced their opinions, and thus often failed to be identified as victims in the NRM (Kenway, 2021, p. 74). In the context of this thesis, they become the wrong kind of survivor who does not deserve support. While the rhetoric is that support is provided to aid survivors in becoming independent and empowered, it is tightly controlled with certain parameters. Women who spoke out or expressed their unhappiness with some of their circumstances in support, be it during their time in the NRM or when they sought support from mainstream support, exposed problems and, in doing so, they became the problems. Ahmed (2023, p. 18) explains this in this way: “If you expose a problem, you pose a problem; if you pose a problem, you become the problem”. Therefore, as Hooks (1989, p. 18) emphasised, “When we dare to speak in a liberatory voice, we threaten even those who may initially claim to want our words.” There are levels of control whereby the systems decide what the women need. For instance, **Ruby** provided that those systems asserted control by deciding what “recovery” entailed – for instance, if a woman was placed in a Safehouse, that was sufficient for her recovery.

A similar experience was observed in cases of survivors of rape and domestic violence, where opportunities for meaningful choices and autonomy remain elusive (Chiu, 2001). While said systems are asserted to be there to assist women in being autonomous and meeting their goals, the systems within which said support is provided do not encourage the type of autonomy and personal freedom women exercise in everyday life (Bumiller, 2008). Indeed, Agustín (2007, p. 7) found there is a “desire first to know and then to control people whose activities are considered deviant”, and this has manifested in how some women were problematised upon rising strongly during their time in support. Because the idea of agency and survivors of MSHT is almost inconceivable (De Angelis, 2016). For instance, **Rose**’s financial assistance was reduced because she had two part-time jobs, even though she was not working enough hours to earn enough money to meet all her needs.

Tara's financial assistance was completely stopped when she refused to move out of a particular city and opted to move in with friends instead to safeguard her sense of belonging. The implication is that either the women settle with utterly depending on the meagre financial assistance provided by the state weekly, which continues to place them as "'dependant subjects' of the state" (Bumiller, 2008, p. 98) or lose it and struggle on their own or fall into other cycles of dependency such as having to rely on social connections and non-governmental organisations.

The Modern Slavery Statutory guidance provides that people supported under the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC) received variable rates of financial support depending on their accommodation status. A survivor in MSVCC accommodation received financial support of £65 per week, while others who lived elsewhere or were homeless were only entitled to £40.85 per week. This position changed following a judicial review of the matter. The financial assistance changed to £71.14 per week, regardless of survivors' living arrangements, as of the 1st of March 2023 (Matrix Chambers, 2023). This rate has also been confirmed for survivors seeking asylum. It must, however, be noted that surviving on such a meagre amount can be challenging. People are often unable to meet their basic needs with limited financial assistance (Mantouvalou, 2020; Mayblin et al., 2020), yet restrictions on work are placed on them, especially for those with an insecure immigration status who may not work for a certain period or while waiting for NRM or asylum decisions.

Caitlin detailed her incredible efforts to rise strong in Chapter Six but has been severely let down by systems, kept in victimisation, and forced to be in a continued relationship of dependency with the state (Bumiller, 2008). **Caitlin** defied incredible odds to acquire qualifications that she was, in the end, unable to use to secure employment. A criminal record obtained during exploitation still holds her back because it is deemed too historic to expunge. Her criminalisation does not fall under the potential protections of section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act (MSA), which provides survivors possible protection against criminalisation where they committed a criminal offence as a direct consequence of their exploitation. Because the trials for which **Caitlin** was convicted occurred before the MSA, and section 45 has no retrospective effect (Parpworth, 2021), **Caitlin** is stuck with this criminal record that has prevented her from gaining employment in the field she worked extremely hard to qualify in. These convictions show up on her Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, as

she indicated in Chapter Six. Her remodelling work is entirely affected by this, and her incredible effort to qualify while mothering five children and dealing with the aftereffects of exploitation to rise above have been undermined by this, whereby after all her effort, she is forced to resign to a life of welfare supplemented by part-time roles. She has effectively been condemned to a life of poverty and dependence.

Bumiller (2008) contends that the methods employed in addressing both rape and domestic violence can contribute to problematic state control over the disrupted lives of victims. A similar pattern is observed in the lives of the women in this research who set out to rise strong and dare to be powerful, but the state's methods in dealing with MSHT do not let them. The state, which initially neglected to aid some women, possibly due to immigration concerns and suspicions, now seems reluctant to release its hold on them. Aradau (2004, p. 254) provided that the political agency of women exploited in this way is wholly divorced from them, including the possibility of its existence because its existence removes them from the humanitarian frame that emphasises that they are victims of human rights violation and must be seen through the lens of a "politics of pity". They must be seen as suffering, and when they are not, they become risky beings who trigger the security regime that sees them through the lens of the "politics of risk." Aradau uses this "politics of pity" and the "politics of risk" paradigm to examine the identification of people as victims of MSHT. The subsequent section examines this intricate interplay between victimisation and agency, underscoring the existing literature's contention that simplistic binaries are inadequate.

7.3.2 Victims and Agents: Adaptability in Different Circumstances

The women, through their journeys of navigating systems that weather, demonstrated that agency and victimhood are not mutually exclusive (De Angelis, 2016). They have shown that "victims are also agents who can change their lives and affect other lives in radical ways" (Nnaemeka, 1997, p. 3). This position is related to the African literary concept of *Ngambika*, a Tshiluba term translating to "help me balance/carry this load" (Davies & Graves, 1986, p. vi). *Ngambika*, which severs victimhood from powerlessness, forcefully articulates agency in victimhood by demanding assistance, not removing the load. *Ngambika* reveals not the absence but the limitation of agency, saying, "I can carry this load only if you can balance it for me" (Nnaemeka, 1997, p. 3).

The load within the context of this thesis would be the women's lived experiences of exploitation, which cannot be taken away, as the women demonstrated. However, with adequate support, women can remodel their lives effectively. While some have learned to live with the fact that they have been exploited, they can never say that that experience will never affect them again or that they will never be triggered again or have flashbacks or low mood or battle occasional decline in health. However, as **Naita** and **Ruby** provided, the hope is to know that despite living along all those negative aspects of their experience, they can still have meaningful lives.

However, a crucial balance must occur, which must be facilitated by external forces, such as recognising that the systems in place will be incapable of deviating from putting victimisation at the forefront until a holistic approach is taken. A holistic approach includes firstly addressing the reach of the past into the present in all spheres and abandoning the idea that survivors are abstracted from the legal, political, and economic structures that facilitate their exploitation (O'Connell Davidson, 2016b). Secondly, it is essential to change the aspects of the laws and policies in place that affect survivors negatively and cease to introduce new ones that continue to disempower, marginalise and "Other" women so that they are constantly surviving and coping, not thriving. Thirdly, acknowledging and valuing the moments when women dare to be strong and powerful, when they strive for autonomy, raising problems and breaking free from dependency should not be viewed as a challenge to support or a sense of non-appreciation of support. Instead, it presents an opportunity to glean insights from survivors and adapt support services while challenging the prevailing notion of the dominant image of a victim/survivor of MSHT.

Therefore, a robust questioning of the insistence on "straitjacketing the complex web of issues" (Nnaemeka, 1997, p. 2) that characterise lived experience into oppositional binaries such as agent/victim, subjects/objects, victims/survivors, losers/winners, victim/perpetrators; freedom/unfreedom and good/bad (Doezema, 2001; Nnaemeka, 1997; O'Connell Davidson, 2014, 2015; O'Connell Davidson & Sanchez Taylor, 2023; Stringer, 2014; Suchland, 2015), is necessary because these binaries are harmful to survivors' journeys. They continue an "emergency, self-justifying anti-MSHT system" (Lazzarino et al., 2023, p.2). As opposed to one truly dedicated to genuinely supporting survivors by learning from them through the acceptance that lived experience, as

scholars observed and as the women in this research also demonstrated, disrupts these binaries. A woman, for instance, can be a victim, survivor and agent at the same time. They can be a worker and a mother at the same time, and so much more.

Additionally, the women in this research also revealed that whether they are victims, survivors, both, or none depends on the circumstances and what they are experiencing at the time. For instance, as some revealed in Chapter Four, the mere act of leaving exploitation does not equate to the embodiment of the survivor status because, often, leaving exploitation has meant moving from one bad situation to another. **Tiwa,** for instance, narrated that being in the NRM, even though she is out of exploitation, can feel like one "is a victim of so many things."

Tara demonstrated the fluidity between victimhood and survivorship by drawing lines between her identity as a mother and her identity as a worker. She stated that she is a survivor because she survived her situation of exploitation. However, she remained a victim as she has been unable to work and thus unable to provide for her children. When she became eligible to work and was employed, she became a survivor again.

Per *Ngambika*, victims can be agents, too, as the women aptly demonstrated that while the processes in place after exploitation victimised them, they still emerged strong, resisting, and daring greatly (Brown, 2013) as well as empower others through knowledge exchange, material assistance, and altruism. For context, because of various failings of the NRM, women supported one another and others by stepping in to fill the gaps or inadequacies of the system. The women continued to empower and support one another and others in independent living by supporting one another to overcome issues such as homelessness, as well as dedicating their lives to altruistic professions to continue changing lives. It is, therefore, clear once again that there is a continuum of victimisation, and a system of victimising exists all around, from the micro to the macro level; however, the women, while so victimised, have proven that they are agents whose agency existed alongside their victimisation. Therefore, one can be a victim and an agent at the same time or a victim at one time and an agent at another (O'Connell Davidson, 1998). They also expressed this fluidity in the representation spectrum in Chapter Four, demonstrating that representation is complex and changes over the course of life, with women alternating between the victim and survivor identities and some discarding both identities.

There was also an embrace of victimhood, either coupled with survivorship or on its own. This is important because, as Koyama (2011, para. 2) argued, in the neoliberal capitalist environment of "compulsory hopefulness and optimism" where "healing is not optional but is a mandatory process by which a "victim" is transformed into a "survivor"; the failure to successfully complete this transformation results in victim-blaming and sanctions." Koyama does not avoid victimhood or erase disadvantage and adversity. She argues that feminists should "embrace unproductive whining and complaining as legitimate means of survival in a world that cannot be made just by simply changing our individual mentalities" (para. 10). Despite the reality that victims who "whine and complain" (instead of being grateful for the help they get) are blamed for causing their own suffering (Koyama, 2011) and in this context, they are deprived of the support they need or are ignored.

Embracing both victimhood and survivorship together or separately are elements of political rebellion (Stringer, 2014). The women are not resigning to picking and choosing labels as the discourse often dictates, and as Hutchison and Esiovwa (2021) pointed out. They are staying true to what is happening in their lives and associating that with structural effects on their lives. In this way, they are resisting frameworks that attempt to downplay or reject expressions of political agency formed under situations of hardship (Butler, 2016). Those who rejected victimhood and survivorship were also performing politics of resistance, not giving into neoliberalism that emphasises personal responsibility and viewing disadvantage and violence as opportunities for personal growth (Baker, 2008). Instead, they recognised the harm that exists in embracing these labels and chose to self-preserve.

Women express their identities as victims or survivors or distance themselves from these labels. They do not align these expressions with the prevailing narrative of victimhood in the context of MSHT, characterised by hopelessness, helplessness, and naivety (as a personal issue). Principally, they disrupt the homogenising aspect of the dominant victim trope by demonstrating that their representation depends on individual circumstances. Such circumstances are dictated by limitations imposed by structural elements of their journeys. For instance, being in the NRM is limiting, thus victimising, as the women provided in Chapter Five, but it was also during

the NRM that the women resisted the most in search of self-determination and showed how victimhood ran alongside agency and how, at times, these aspects ran at different times.

However, “neither victimisation nor agency should be glorified, understood as static, viewed in isolation, or perceived as an individual or personal issue because gender subordination must be understood as a systematic and collective problem—one in which women experience both oppression and resistance” (Schneider, 2000, p. 76). The oppression is clear in the women’s narratives, as is their resistance, which is anchored in their quests for self-determination. The women’s quests for self-determination began well before they exited exploitation; their ways of leaving exploitation and their determination to make it were visible throughout their journeys, as demonstrated, for instance, through the careful planning of some to leave exploitation and the resistance strategies they employed in the aftermath of leaving exploitation as well as during time in support and into independent living. The women also actively pursued opportunities to improve themselves through whatever educational training opportunities they could get, even if those opportunities for learning and training came from amongst themselves.

Repeatedly, the women have identified autonomy as the most crucial aspiration of their journeys. Their ability to govern their lives and get out of cycles of dependence on the state and non-governmental organisations, such as when **Tara** and **Paloma** emphasised that they did not want to live on state benefits or be supported by anyone else. They want labour rights protections, to work in a safe environment, earn a good wage, and have the freedom to travel to visit their families when they are able. Getting out of reliance on strangers, friends, FBOs, and various others is essential to them. They further reveal that there are “more realistic narratives, where the situated identities of women emerge as a complex negotiation of familial responsibilities, reasoned decision-making and responses to neglect or violence… accompanied by emerging hopes and aspirations” (Russel, 2014, p. 539). In doing so, they demonstrated that their identity is firstly centred on their strength, will, and determination to make it, to survive, and to continue surviving. However, it also responds to the limitations imposed on their lives after exploitation by structures that limit their capabilities. Accepting that “women are both, at different times, and in different ways, victims and agents, and victims and survivors” (Jobe, 2008, p. 13) gives a more nuanced understanding of how to support their journeys further by not only

the service provided to them but by laws and policies that speak to this to allow women to remodel their lives. In this way, *Ngambika*, weathering and Black feminism speak to each other. They advocate for an awareness that there are broader factors that erode people's prospects and trajectories. At the same time, they recognise that those very same people use strength, resistance, and resilience to push back against such systems. *Ngambika* links to this by emphasising that these very same people can carry their loads, but they need assistance. In the MSHT context, weathering, Black feminism and *Ngambika* emphasise that the systems in place need revision to address survivors' needs better so that they are not permanently reduced to high coping and debilitation (Geronimus, 2023) but are also empowered to firmly stand on their own feet despite what they have gone through.

The women have proven this complicated nexus between victimhood, survivorship, and agency throughout their journeys. An important but often overlooked aspect is the way they prove or show this complex affair, which is how they took control of their daily lives at whatever stage they found themselves. Remodelling life is not only about defeating or surviving systems. It is also about intimate achievements in personal lives. It is about "everyday lifework" (Brennan, 2014, p. 17) to "resume the task of living (not only surviving)" (Das & Kleinman, 2001, p. 4). Doing this varies from person to person. However, for many of the women who participated in this research, life did not come to a standstill despite the need to await decisions from systems determining their ability to work, study or remain in the UK. Their everyday lives were shaped by intentional decisions made either to endure circumstances during the wait or to navigate their lives into independent living. These decisions varied from engaging or disengaging from social activities and relationships with others.

This is one of the most significant contributions to knowledge that this thesis makes, as survivors' experiences on a more personal and everyday basis are often not addressed in the UK. Understanding survivors' private lives matters as Camp (2004) argued that everyday private, concealed, and even intimate worlds of survivors are essential to pay attention to as it is through them that we understand that resistance, especially for women, is not only crucial in the public realm but also in the private realm. Camp adds that this reveals exciting connections that enhance understanding of actions that might be trivialised. Actions that may be

trivial but nonetheless important in this research were how the women made deliberate decisions to shape their lives despite their circumstances. These are briefly discussed below.

7.3.3 Survivors Shaping Deliberate Lives

The women repeatedly showed that giving up is not an option for them; consequently, they have been intentional throughout their journeys regarding many aspects of their lives. Some have families to care for, and all of them have hopes and dreams to achieve. They intend on “making it” to see these goals through. Giving up is a “luxury only the unintentional can afford, and the unintentional are those who do not wish to guide their destinies” (Lorde, 2019/1984, p. 44). Thriving under a system of oppression requires intentionality, the hope of freeing oneself from predefined notions of identity and embodying an identity that is a vessel of joy (Salami, 2020). The women’s intentionality has been rooted in the politics of Black joy, of experiencing hardship, yet forging on and finding pockets of joy and its “accompanying sentiments of creativity, hope, ease, security and freedom” (Salami, 2020). This joy embraces the “total climate” of their circumstances yet resolves to forge on—embracing the challenges, the accomplishments, and the political struggle with a willingness to grow because it is necessary to envision a future beyond survival and cultivate a culture of joy (Brinhurst-Cuff & Sotire, 2021).

In this context, the word joy is utilised in line with Black feminist thought. It is not used in its dictionary meaning, for instance, “a feeling of great pleasure or happiness that comes from success, good fortune, or a sense of well-being” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). Black feminist thought expresses itself in a unique language, where words are not ordinarily attributed to their dictionary or conventional meaning, attributing certain meanings to certain phrases to serve as means to express and empower, as well as to articulate experiences unique to Black women as formed by the intersections of different axes of differentiation, such as race, sex, class and so on. On language, hooks (1989, p. 28-29) provided:

> Language is a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves- to rewrite, to reconcile, to renew. Our words are not without meaning. They are an action- a resistance … the most important of our work of liberation demands of us that we make a new language, that we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice.

Therefore, the use of language, of words such as resistance, joy, and transcendence in ways that go over and above traditional dictionary meanings is not only intentional to exude the self-expression of those previously oppressed and dehumanised (hooks, 1989), but it is also a form of self-assertion and discovery. Additionally, in some instances, feminism has made new words to propose there are difficulties with the old ways of doing things (Ahmed, 2023).

The politics of Black joy is rooted in how Black people often negotiate the tension arising from facing adversity in their lives but also choosing said adversity not to take hold of their lives (Stewart, 2021). The joy referred to here differs from happiness but arises from intentions set internally about one's purpose, even amid adversity (Cooper, 2018; Salami, 2020). It is used in line with the Black feminist praxis of "understanding joy and pleasure as forms of resistance, self-care, and power" (Baker, 2021, p. 459). Not that misery, depression, ailment, suffering, and "despair, anger, and sorrow" (Salami, 2020, p. 78) have been absent, but that the women have intentionally chosen joy and used this joy as "an act of resistance" (Dericotte, 2008, p. 22).

When Lorde (2019/1984, p. 48) wrote about the uses of the erotic, she powerfully pointed to the strength of coming back to one's internal self to resist conforming to a structure that is not based on human need. Lorde posited that coming back to oneself acts against oppression and becomes integral to the self, motivated and empowered from within. She wrote: "In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial." This self-connection is a recognition of their underlying capacity for joy (Lorde, 2019/1984); therefore, it is a strong determination not only to endure adversity but also to pursue alternative paths and accomplish their goals proactively.

The women in this research recognised the systems for what they were - elements of oppression and a lack of choices because "they understand their contact with the system as part of their process of victimisation" (Bumiller, 2008). Striving for joy meant looking at or identifying the positives amid the negatives and "creating opportunities within constraints" (Le, 2017, p. 515). Le relates to the opportunities women created for themselves to leave trafficking situations, which was also observed in this research in the women's ways of

leaving in Chapter Four. However, a similar pattern emerged when the women were stuck in support systems and when they moved into independent living.

The women adjusted to some conditions as necessary because they understood that to make everyday life bearable, they needed to make necessary adjustments. That is why they left the Safehouses temporarily or permanently when they could, for instance. If this was not possible, they went into isolation and at other times, they fought back by demanding change, as some did in their Safehouses, or they refused assigned accommodation that would disrupt their constructions of belonging (Yuva-Davis, 2006a). Nicholson (2022, p. 128) describes similar actions as the "interplay between agency and responsibility" wherein survivors are challenged to grow (forcefully so) as the systems of support are non-existent or inadequate.

The women in this research were similarly challenged. Because of their refusal to give up, they bore the responsibility to make things happen for themselves. They did their own research, requested change, and educated themselves in various aspects. Nicholson (2022) found that survivors bear not only this responsibility for themselves but also for others. The survivors in this research demonstrated the same trend, where they used their knowledge to empower other survivors. For instance, **Tiwa** has made it her life's mission to inform survivors who are still going through the NRM and the asylum system to prepare for life in independent living by taking advantage of every self-improvement opportunity available, such as finding a job as soon as they are allowed to work so that they can give themselves an economic advantage when they transition into independent living. The women also extended this responsibility to their wider communities, aiding where possible – for instance, in her free time, **Diwata** visits her friends in their homes to extend her support.

Nevertheless, the women acknowledged the need for assistance from systems but refrained from simply sitting back and idly waiting for that support. In this way, the sense of responsibility the women employed herein is not an acceptance of or giving into neoliberalism – that success and failure are determined by personal skills and shortcomings (Baker, 2008). The women were working for a greater purpose, recognising that they could carry their "loads". They could take action for themselves as far as they could, but they still recognised they needed some assistance. Their desire for self-improvement is rooted in eventually defeating the systems in place and becoming fully autonomous individuals. The final aspects of the women's intentional

everyday actions that demonstrate their agency were how they reclaimed joy through pastimes and building (or destroying) bonds with others, as discussed below.

7.3.3.1 Reclaiming Joy Through Leisurely Pursuits and Re/Building Bonds

The women actively pursued various pastimes daily to fulfil diverse objectives. Some of these objectives included passing the time and healing and dealing with their experiences of exploitation and some negative ones in life after MSHT. Survivors often undergo processes such as seeking safety, managing emotions, grieving, and achieving emancipation as part of their journey (Bills, 2003). They do this by engaging in solitary activities or finding creative ways to pass the time during waiting periods in the NRM and asylum systems. **Nelao**, for example, finds solace and purpose in writing during her free time, using it to mitigate the adverse effects of the extended waiting period she experienced in the NRM and her living situation. **Parisha**, now living independently, takes joy in cleaning, cherishing a tidy living space and educating herself as much as possible. **Chioma** seeks joy by watching movies from her home country and listening to music daily, providing a source of comfort amidst the challenges within her Safehouse. Some women choose to socialise, going out to nightclubs or staying out late with friends. **Rose**, for instance, enjoys the freedom to go out at night.

Engaging in leisurely activities involves purposefully connecting with oneself and actively responding to self-awareness through thoughtful choices in leisure (Arai et al., 2008). Some women extended these thoughtful choices to engaging with others. Engagement with others was multifaceted. It encompassed the acquisition of knowledge and companionship through communities of practice after leaving exploitation, during support systems and in independent living. Communities of practice are everywhere, and most people belong to one or more. They are groups of people who share a common interest, experience, passion, or other commonalities and who join to learn from one another, share experiences, and grow collectively in various domains (Wenger, 2000). Most women in this research had no friends or family with them when they exited exploitation, which remained the case for some when they started living independently, and they had to start "building a sense of place and home on their own" (Brennan, 2014, p. 115). For some of them, communities of practice were found with other survivors, and others were not. Some were physical, and others were not. For instance, there was a time when **Caitlin** found solace in other survivors via an online platform who helped

create a non-physical “home place” and a sense of belonging for her, reinforcing Sotire’s (2021) claim that joy can be found in non-physical communities.

Others found communities of practice with whom they could create physical “home places”. **Ginger** would leave the Safehouse to crochet, catch up, and talk to a survivor friend who was already living independently. **Chioma** would frequently meet up with survivor friends at the mall and other public spaces to exchange information, motivate and celebrate one another. This concept of “home place” as a space of resistance was developed by hooks (1990), who proposed that historically, African-Americans struggled to make and sustain a home place and community that offered more than providing for their daily needs; it also had a “radical political dimension… despite the reality of domination, one’s ‘home place’ was the one site where one could freely confront the issues of dehumanisation, where one could resist” (p. 42). This concept is tied up with belonging when taken in this section to refer to emotional attachment, feeling at home, and being safe (Yuval-Davis, 2006a). Some women found in communities of practice, “home places” in motherhood groups around where they lived. Often, they met mothers who had lived experiences of exploitation or other similar experiences and shared knowledge about mothering and navigating life in the UK for those who are non-British. There were also groups intentionally established by organisations for survivors to support one another. **Tiwa** mobilised other survivors to learn from one another, dancing, singing and so on. Some believed in God and found their “home places” within the church and other FBOs. Some survivors place importance on religious worship as well as spirituality for their recovery, and FBOs have been found to play vital roles in survivors’ journeys (Lewis et al., 2020). Women in this research, such as **Abebi**, benefited not only from her FBO, but her FBO benefited from her as well. She took on the essential role of mentoring and tutoring young persons in her FBO. Communities of practice and “home places” were not only places of joy, but they were also spaces of resistance.

Apart from their wider communities, the women also had to make important decisions regarding their intimate lives, which included relationships with family, friends, and partners. Relationships with others are inherently complex, and the women revealed these complexities were enhanced by their lived experience of exploitation and life after exploitation, where shame, stigma and severely broken trust have constantly

featured. However, the women showed that their experiences of exploitation and life after exploitation shaped how they engage in relationships with others, the decisions they made to re/negotiate, maintain, and re/create a sense of self, identity and belonging with family, friends, acquaintances, and romantic partners.

As hooks (2001, p. 12) provided, “Love is our hope and our salvation.” The love of and from family, friends, lovers, and others in the community is important to the women. However, it was approached variably among the women. The love recognised in the women’s journeys aligns with hooks’ (2001, p. 5) definition of love: a combination of “care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust.” She added later that “we cannot effectively resist domination if our efforts to create meaningful, lasting personal and social change are not grounded in a love ethic” (hooks, 2001, p. 11). Care and affection were provided by some friends, family, and romantic partners. These dimensions are vastly underrepresented in the MSHT literature in the UK. A significant revelation regarding making new connections with friends and others within the community or entering new romantic relationships is that this is complex and is affected by multiple factors, as found in relation to survivors of domestic violence (Flasch, 2015). The women exhibited how they took charge of whom to be in relationships with and whom not. These decisions were curated by their lived experience of exploitation and were stressed by their lived experiences of the systems in place. Being in romantic relationships also formed a significant part of women’s future hopes and dreams of finding a partner and creating their own families. Not all the women desired romantic connections. Some, due to experience or the goals they have for their lives, forgo relationships altogether.

7.4 Conclusion

Securing rights, including the legal right to reside, work, pursue higher education, access welfare, secure housing, and many others, significantly affect survivors’ trajectories after MSHT. Achieving these rights proves challenging because of the UK’s deliberate efforts to make it tough for individuals with insecure immigration status. This intentional difficulty, aimed at protecting territorial boundaries and excluding the “Other”, constitutes the erosion and debilitation weathering refers to. The struggles, anguish, and victimisation experienced by survivors after MSHT are solidified by legislative actions, revealing a deliberate intent. The UK government’s assertion of state power over individual human rights exposes the contradiction within human

rights principles, even undermining international instruments designed to safeguard survivors' rights. While legal challenges against the Home Office can reverse some decisions, this can be arduous and add to the long list of fighting survivors must do. Legal challenges are also exceptional, typically arising from cases that reach the appellate courts. However, not all survivors can bring their cases to court, and not all survivors choose to confront and challenge their mistreatment actively. Enacting laws and policies that make people's lives difficult should not be done in the first instance. Because weathering covers broad terrain, including laws and policies, this part intentionally took a broader analysis of the systems that curtail some survivors' possibilities after MSHT.

The systems the women in this research negotiated have done little to aid their remodelling work. Instead, they imposed the first part of weathering on the women (erosion and deterioration) by placing them on a continuum of victimisation, transposing the dominant image of a victim of MSHT into life after MSHT. This worked to present various never-ending obstacles alongside the women's journeys, which were detrimental in several ways. The women, on the other hand, demonstrated their strength and endurance by disrupting the dominant image by simultaneously showing they were victims and agents and, at times, only victims or agents or disidentified from any labels who nevertheless fought back and resisted some of the erosion and erasure they were subjected to.

While the women were weathered by the systems in place, they also used strength, creativity, and determination to transcend these systems. Every day, they made intentional choices to refuse to give up and stay focused and hopeful. Joy was cultivated in various places – it was in what they did in their everyday lives, how they spent their free time, and how they navigated relationships with others. However, it is essential to note that their efforts to live in joy and let their experiences and identities guide them should not be romanticised. Only celebrating their agency and resilience is insufficient to make meaningful changes to the discourse of MSHT to improve their lives (O'Connell Davidson, 2015), as their steady efforts, alone or collectively, as Geronimus (2023) provided, keep people going, floating, where the alternative would be drowning, but factors such as systematic racism and classism keep them from swimming to shore.

Using the theory of weathering to capture the "total climate" of life after MSHT in the UK for the women who participated in this research provides new critical insight into the survivor journey. Essential aspects such as broader conceptualisations of the human rights project[26], laws and policies on MSHT and the women's experiences in practice have been interrogated to answer the first question in this research: what happened to the women after leaving exploitation? Excavating these complicated yet central aspects that inform belonging revealed what happened to the women is that they were exposed to systems that weathered them down, yet they forged on.

Significant contributions to knowledge revealed in this chapter are that the harmful trope of the dominant image of a victim of MSHT has been transposed into support systems, requirements to look and behave like a victim were utilised, stifling survivors' strength and agency, and causing harm to their remodelling work. How women remodel their lives after leaving MSHT in the UK is imbued in resistance and a solid determination to forge forward despite the continued constant struggle for freedom. However, the women chose joy, love, and actions guided by their lived experiences and survivor identities to guide them through relationships and other respects on their ongoing journey. Autonomy and independence, especially from the state and other entities, have been a hard-won battle, with some still amidst that battle. The next chapter will conclude the thesis and provide recommendations for the way forward, including recommendations put forward by some of the women in their voices during the interviews. This deviation from the norm of limiting interview quotations to the findings chapters is intentional and done in the continued spirit of giving voice in feminist praxis.

[26] In this thesis, the "human rights project/paradigm" refers to a coordinated and organised effort aimed at promoting, protecting, or advancing human rights, including the collection of norms, processes, and institutions such as those created under the United Nations, drawing inspiration from the Universal declaration of human rights and the Charter of the United Nations (see Mutua, 2001; Weissman, 2004).

Chapter 8 Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of women after leaving situations of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) and who are now navigating life in the UK. To accomplish this goal, the research involved conducting semi-structured interviews with women who had experienced exploitation and practitioners who supported survivors in various capacities within the UK. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two reaffirmed that the discourse on MSHT often neglects to acknowledge survivors' efforts and actions, focusing instead on portraying them as weathered and dehumanised individuals who are assisted in rebuilding their lives by organisations and external entities. However, it is essential to recognise that survivors play the most crucial roles in their journeys. Their determination to resist resignation in the face of oppressive systems, their resilience and endurance, and their everyday, seemingly ordinary but profoundly influential acts are pivotal in helping them move forward and transcend the challenges posed by the existing systems. This has been the main contribution to knowledge in this research. This chapter serves as the conclusion to the thesis, commencing with an overview of each preceding chapter and the resulting contributions to knowledge. Furthermore, it provides policy and future practice recommendations derived from the research findings and those directly derived from the input of the women who participated in this research, some of which are presented in their own words. Finally, the chapter closes off the thesis by addressing the research limitations and offers suggestions for future research endeavours.

8.1 Overview of Chapters and Contribution to Knowledge

Chapter One introduced the thesis, the primary focus, objectives, research questions, methodology, and theoretical underpinnings. It explored the thesis's rationale behind the exclusive focus on women and delved into various definitions relevant to the research, grappling with controversial terminology and laying the groundwork for the subsequent literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Chapter Two reviewed the available literature, which revealed that much of the literature on life after MSHT in the UK focuses on the second stage of the women's journeys, that is, how they access support services, but more significantly, where support provision lacks and needs improvement. This chapter revealed that gaps in knowledge lay in the roles that survivors play in their journeys, how they navigate inadequate systems and what they do to endure the

experiences imposed upon them by said systems. Chapter Three charted the methodology and research journey, revealing how the research process took shape, the development of the research questions and the research methods, the early plans in the research, how those plans changed and why, who the participants were, how they were contacted, how the interviews were conducted and how the data was analysed. It revealed the ethical challenges and limitations of the research as well as a reflexive account that included positionality. The themes derived from the procedures expounded in Chapter Three significantly facilitated the presentation of the research findings in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

Chapter Four described the women's exits from exploitation, their varied ways of leaving and what happened in the immediate and gradual aftermath of their liberation from exploitation. The women's exits and what happened thereafter revealed how intricate those processes were. The noteworthy contribution of Chapter Four to knowledge is the women's active roles in their liberation and how they found their way thereafter. It underscored the pertinent role social connections and society at large played in the immediate aftermath of leaving exploitation. But it also cemented that leaving exploitation does not lead to instant freedom for all. Instead, some women go for lengthy periods trying to prove they deserve support. This chapter also contributed a survivor-centred perspective on the contested terminology of victims and survivors. Life after MSHT in the UK is inherently complicated right from the outset, and a comprehensive understanding of these journeys necessitates the consideration of all facets of this complexity. It underscored the uniqueness of each woman's journey, emphasising that no one-factor explanation can encapsulate their experiences. The chapter also underlined that women have actively engaged in their liberation and the aftermath of that liberation.

Chapter Five examined the women's experiences with the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), bringing in rare insights into the experiences of two women who did not go through that system. The chapter highlighted that women faced persistent challenges even within support systems. Immigration status remained a significant obstacle to progress for those with insecure immigration status; however, the British nationals similarly experienced challenges. A substantial contribution of Chapter Five to knowledge is that even though the women faced multiple barriers within the NRM and other support systems, predominantly stemming from their accommodation experiences, they found ways to cope and endure those challenges in their everyday

lives. The women employed self-preserving strategies such as refusing Safehouse accommodation or leaving the Safehouse temporarily or permanently, keeping to themselves in the safe house to avoid problems with other residents. The women also employed resistance strategies such as fighting back against unjust treatment and so on, delving into self-improvement activities such as education of whatever nature and giving back to their communities by helping those in need or making other meaningful contributions. Self-motivation and faith in God also played a role in coping with challenges encountered during their waiting period.

Chapter Six addressed the transition into independent living. It covered various aspects of independent living, such as the intricacies of the transition from NRM and other support to mainstream support. It revealed the continued impact immigration status had on non-British survivors' lives. This chapter revealed that secure immigration status did not immediately solve the women's problems, as those whose immigration status was finally regularised still faced challenges regarding accessing rights and benefits such as housing through local authorities. The chapter also examined the women's relationships and thus its crucial contribution to knowledge is how women navigated their relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. Some women's relationships with their original families disintegrated completely, while others were maintained but changed as far as revealing their exploitation and disclosing other experiences following that is concerned. The women approached relationships with friends and romantic partners differently. However, a key aspect is that they exercise extreme caution regarding whom they let close to for self-preservation.

Chapter Seven analysed the findings presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, employing the theory of weathering to comprehensively understand how women's journeys were shaped. This chapter contended that women's experiences after MSHT were marred by strategically placed obstacles that impeded their efforts to remodel their lives, subjecting them to debilitation and suffering. Nonetheless, the women were also proactive agents who, driven by strength and determination, discovered ways to circumvent these barriers. By utilising the theory of weathering, which integrates elements of postcolonial theory and Black feminist theory, this chapter revealed the inherent flaws in the notion of universal human rights. It demonstrated how these rights are undermined by considerations such as state sovereignty, the intrinsic definition of who qualifies as a human under the human rights framework, and the subsequent determination of protection or consignment

to suffering, along with justifications thereof. The final argument presented in this chapter emphasised that although they endured debilitation, rejection, victimisation, and dehumanisation by the systems meant to support them, the women who participated in this research transcended these challenges. They consciously chose joy, akin to the Black feminist praxis of joy, which differs from mere happiness. It signifies that despite their hardships, their intentional daily practices brought them closer to their goals. They exhibited creative survival and harnessed their experiences of exploitation and the existing systems to effect positive changes in their lives and the lives of those around them.

The following section provides the recommendations presented in this thesis. It acknowledges that recommendations alone will be inadequate if they do not address the complex and deeply ingrained inclinations to exclude the "Other" in the laws and policies in place.

8.2 The Caveat: An Impactful Rethinking of Freedom from Exploitation

Spencer and Broad (2012, p. 278) provided:

> We seem to be in an intellectual 'Groundhog Day'; we cover the same ground and end up where we began, and then we start all over again. The problem is not that we have yet to find the way out of the circle or that somehow we have missed our intellectual way in the debate but that we need to step outside of the 'trafficking circle' and re-think the problem.

This research posits that rethinking the problem of MSHT, as well as the afterlives of MSHT, requires, amongst others, the acknowledgement of racism and coloniality of power. Significant change remains elusive if the racist, colonial, and discriminatory practices within law, policy, and treatment of survivors, mainly non-British nationals, are not acknowledged, confronted, and resolved. Addressing these structural factors will take political will, which Mantouvalou (2018) identified was lacking. Additionally, Findlay (2022) aptly pointed out that proposing policy changes to enhance support, such as what is offered under the NRM, implies faith in the government's intentions and alignment with its stated claims, where the NRM's outcomes are deliberate. However, as the women illustrated in this research, giving up is not an option, even though it is difficult to persevere in the face of systems that refuse change. Therefore, the fight for survivors, led by survivors, must endure. Following Barat's (Davis, 2016, p. ix) encouragement:

> It is trying and trying and trying again and never stopping. That is victory in itself. Everyone and everything tells you that outside, you will not succeed. That it is too late. That we live in an epoch where radical change does not happen anymore. Radical changes are a thing of the past. You can be an outsider, but not outside the system…

Consequently, as we continue accentuating that these systems' outcomes stem from a deliberate exclusion of the "Other", we will also endure in advocating for changes to the system. Some of these changes may require a wide-ranging restructuring of the systems to align with a re-evaluation of liberation from exploitation rooted in a framework that acknowledges the significance of human rights, the inadequacies in their implementation, and the influence of neoliberal perspectives. However, this re-evaluation requires a commitment to "thinking with complexity" (Masamha, 2020, p. 122) as a preliminary step before addressing improvements to current policies.

The women's experiences in this research, though unique in various ways, have demonstrated and cemented that leaving exploitation is equivalent to leaving one form of unfreedom to step into another. Stepping into a form of subjugation, limitation and control, state-sanctioned suffering and dismissal of survivors as whole persons, as human beings who are affected by the total climate of an unjust society. Confronted with broader structures and systems that continue their suffering and castrate their opportunities to remodel their lives by granting them viable choices and options. This thesis has argued that just as it is contended that structures and systems make people vulnerable to exploitation, it is also maintained that life after MSHT is similarly affected by structures and systems in place that create conditions that do not permit people to remodel their lives at their own pace. Instead, it either forces them into continual states of dependency on various actors, including the state or abandons them into lives of destitution and continual suffering. It is impossible to imagine people as free after exiting exploitation without considering the structures that continue to oppress them and thus move them into another form of unfreedom. Many of the issues that the women identified in this research stem from exactly these structures because they are non-citizens who do not belong and whose non-belonging has consistently been used to place obstacles in their paths intentionally.

There is no doubt that human rights are a core element of remodelling work; however, the exclusions within the human rights paradigm and the wanton disregard for human rights by states need addressing. This cannot be done without recognising that the primary roots of why some people are treated the way they are treated,

i.e., how Black people and other People of Colour, and especially women, are disenfranchised in society, are deeply rooted in a terrible past that lingers. Coloniality of power cannot be ignored when issues such as these are at hand. O'Connell Davidson (2022) argued that finding solutions to and repairing any damage or atoning for ongoing sins is impossible. Hierarchies are impossible to remedy without engaging in a larger political struggle for freedom and equality.

Like McGhee (2021) and the women who participated in this research, I am hopeful and know that decisions made the world as it is. Better decisions can change it - "Nothing about our situation is inevitable or immutable, but you can't solve a problem with the consciousness that created it" (McGhee, 2021, p. xxiii). The existence of privilege and marginalising systems cannot be dismissed through mere wishes; hence, it is imperative to thoroughly examine and challenge them (Bunting et al., 2023). In the same vein, history is shaped by both men and women and can similarly be unmade (Said, 2003/1978). Without deciding to change those core beliefs alongside the systems and structures that come with them that categorise some people as non-human, subhuman, "Other", the second sex (de Beauvoir, 2011/1949) and thus deserving of treatment that dehumanises them, no policy recommendation or suggestion will bring about substantive change for all and all changes made will only fix the surface but not the deeply rooted problems that follow people in the life course.

As emphasised by Winfrey and Perry (2021), even the currently popular concepts of implementing trauma-informed approaches and systems will fall short unless we acknowledge our inherent biases, the systemic biases within our structures, and the biases related to race, gender, and other intersecting aspects. Authentic trauma-informed practices cannot be achieved without this recognition. Individuals marginalised and excluded have experienced trauma. Since humans are fundamentally relational beings, exclusion or dehumanisation within a community or organisation leads to enduring, uncontrollable stress. Marginalisation, in essence, is a fundamental form of trauma. Therefore, a trauma-informed system inherently promotes anti-racism.

While acknowledging that the hope for a brighter and transformed future for survivors of MSHT may seem somewhat utopian, it is upon this hope that the following recommendations for policy and practice are founded. These recommendations commence with the pivotal recognition of the "sum of us" – the

fundamental understanding that we are all impacted by racism, given our profound interconnectedness as human beings (Brah, 2022; McGhee, 2021). Said (2003/1978, p. xxii) uses the term humanism to describe the interrelatedness of the world and proffers that humanism, which is "centred upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority…is the only, and…the final, resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history".

8.3 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The recommendations offered in this section, most of which are based on the women's own recommendations, while others are drawn from broader research findings, commence with the pivotal recognition of the "sum of us" – the fundamental understanding that we are all impacted by racism, given our profound interconnectedness as human beings (Brah, 2022; McGhee, 2021).

The concept of "The Sum of Us," as described by McGhee (2021, p. xx) to account for the hidden costs of racism affecting us all, is a significant factor to bear in mind when considering laws and policies that subject certain individuals to precarious and challenging situations. As Brah (1996) pointed out, the "Other" may be distinct from oneself but remains essential to one's own existence. In seeking ways to establish an ethical world where equality and diversity can coexist through mutual understanding and compassion, we address a crucial aspect of humanity (Brah, 2022). Said (2003/1978) defines the fact that every domain of our society is linked, and nothing goes on isolated from the rest of the world as humanism. Therefore, it is in the best interest of everyone if **ALL** people are cared for and supported to advance in life, given viable options and opportunities to do so at the earliest possible opportunity.

Survivors should thus not be left languishing away in systems such as the NRM without work or access to tertiary education and other pertinent resources. The idea of providing people with the best support possible is that even if they leave the UK voluntarily or otherwise, they will be in a better position to start over in their home countries or elsewhere. It is counterproductive to send people back to similar or worse conditions than they left, as this may lead to further harm and a waste of resources. However, giving people a fighting chance, such as allowing them to work to save up some money or to enable them to send remittances home, is crucial to "The Sum of Us". Work benefits not only survivors and their loved ones but also society at large through

payments such as income tax and national insurance. Shafik (2021) provides that for those who are able, working and paying taxes for the common good is the most important way people engage with the social contract – and contribute to society. Indeed, it has been estimated that if asylum seekers were to be permitted to work, the UK economy could benefit £97.8 million yearly (Lift the Ban, n.d.). Further, a cost-benefit analysis of the Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill was conducted, and the findings were that had the Bill been enacted in 2017, there would have been a direct financial benefit of implementing its section 48B, which extends support for survivors (with a positive conclusive grounds decision) for 12 months after exiting the NRM (Nicholson et al., 2019). These financial benefits outweigh the costs of implementing section 48B, which also brings a net economic benefit estimated at between £815 and £4,771 per conclusive victim (Nicholson et al., 2019).

Survivors are not what happened to them. Exploitation is not who they are. Those experiences are interruptions and disruptions to their lives (Brennan, 2014; Lazzarino et al., 2023). They are individuals whose life worlds are rich and vast. This is an important recognition to have and a compass to direct every effort in anti-MSHT work. Therefore, their full humanity, regardless of citizenship, immigration status, class, gender, race, or motherhood, must be recognised—as complete human beings who deserve the same opportunities. Based on this understanding, below are the most significant recommendations that came out of this research in terms of improving support and addressing related matters for survivors of MSHT in the UK. These recommendations encapsulate the voices of the women who contributed to the research.

1. **Equitable treatment of ALL survivors**

Survivors want to be treated fairly and equally. **Ginger** and **Naomi** recommended:

> What I would love to see change is the way we are treated as survivors just because we don't have documents. A person who is not in trafficking and dealing with immigration and a person who is in trafficking and immigration are two different people. Not compare their status when they were here to apply to stay with us. **Ginger**.

> They should not treat migrants [non-UK national survivors] as slaves; really, that's the main thing because migrants are being treated as slaves like they are nobody. You can't talk. This is not your country. You have to accept what we give you; you have no choice. I think everybody should be treated fairly regardless of their ethnicity or status… **Naomi**.

2. **Do not Make Assumptions About the needs of Survivors. Instead, Inquire Directly and Offer Practical Assistance. Allocate Funds to Support the Appropriate Projects**

Ruby recommended:

> …They just assume like, I said 'cause you are working 'cause you're driving because you can say things articulately that you are healed they need to change that perception. I think people need to stop trying to … there is so much research about survivors and why it happens. And I know you're doing research, but it's like putting it into practice, so you don't need to know more about why we wanna know like what they gonna do and the money like I was so shocked to find out how much money goes into research projects. And you know, like studies, and it's like it's kind of give that money to maybe survivors or into survivor programmes, and I think although, for example, about recovery, there is not enough opportunity for survivors to work, and luckily, I had my papers, and I did feel like I'm one of the blessed ones. Because I know so many other people, you know they need to start from scratch, so while they are in the NRM, why can't they get access to education like even if they're doing like English or maths or you know like the basics, and I think as well that goes that the system kind of tells you what recovery is so you know if you're working if you can live by yourself and I think around the mental health services sometimes cause like recovery is when they put you in a safe house.

3. **Give Survivors the Right to Work**

Paloma and **Chioma** recommended the following:

> I think NRM is not suitable for us actually because we are workers. We need proper rights to work, proper visa, we need a renewing of visa, indefinite leave to remain or a British settlement because we are workers. We don't need the benefits. We have rights, we have hands to work, we have minds to work, we have feet to work so we are fit to work, but they put us in the NRM that the government will give you benefits, the government will pay for you this, but it's not good actually. What if you give us the right to have a proper visa that can be able to contribute to the government to pay tax, NI and everything? But at least we are not a burden to your government, to your country and… we are workers … We don't only need benefits … NRM is not good. **Paloma**.

> It is not good to keep them in the house because they have gone through a lot. They have gone through a lot; there is no point in keeping them in the house; give them a work permit because when they are in the house, they are not free to go out to work, they are not free to go out on their own when they go out at least the support worker will be asking, calling them, calling us not them, I am included, calling us where you are? Why are you not in the house? Why are you this and that? It will drive somebody crazy. You try and help the survivors because they have gone through a lot, there is no point in keeping them in the house doing nothing. Help the survivors, to give them a permit to work to keep them busy, you know, if they are in the house, they would be thinking about what has happened before them in the past, most of them can even commit suicide. **Chioma**.

4. **Holistic Support by Diverse Service Providers**

Women must be supported to deal with – in conjunction with their hopes and aspirations and informed by what they deem necessary for their lives – the effects of exploitation in totality, such as effects on well-being,

mental health, physical health, economic impact, personal development impact inclusive of education and training. **Caitlin** raised the following:

> I think when the decisions are being made by the Home Office modern slavery unit that, those involved when they're making decisions those decisions are made by civil servants, mostly in London or city-based. Those people have no comprehension whatsoever of how it feels to have those challenges and those barriers. They take it for granted that you can open your front door and jump on a bus. They take it for granted that you have access to multiple Internet providers, so, for example, because of where I live, I can only have Internet supplied by Virgin or Vt. They have the highest and most expensive providers. They take it for granted that you can go walk down the road and buy clothes from a charity shop… Or you can have access to all this stuff, or you can have appointments with GPs. And that isn't the case for a lot of people. No, when you put mental health on top of that, and you put trafficking on top of that and think about Just opening your front door, it can take you a whole day just to get yourself in a position that you feel strong enough just to walk down the street, you know? They have not got a clue, and the best way to address that is to have people be more inclusive. Inclusive of survivors, not just survivors but also people from different backgrounds, disabilities, genders, race, and geographical locations now and have input from people from all over, not just London, not just Manchester, or I know Sheffield, there's a lot in Sheffield, but it's just not inclusive of everybody. And there's absolutely no consideration whatsoever for single parents. I feel like I'm being discriminated against because I'm a single parent, really.

5. **Provide Long - Term Support for Meaningful Lives and Do Not Limit Survivors**

Support should be long-term in nature because women can still have meaningful lives alongside their struggles.

Naita explained:

> I don't think there is a getting there [complete healing]. I have kind of come to accept that now as having trauma or whatever is like an ongoing thing, and it's like having a long-term illness. But it doesn't mean you can't live your life and be satisfied with your life, you can, but it's like you also have this at the same time. It's like being disabled, like I can still have a quality life, and I can still have the job that I want and do the things that I enjoy doing most; I just have this to deal with at the same time… I have kinda got to the point of accepting that this is just part of who I am, and so I don't think there is any getting there.

Ruby also provided:

> Recovery is like a journey, so … even like I didn't speak, and I didn't cry for like eight months, I never emotionally cry about that like ever, and it's because you never really had space to … I think like if survivors wanna talk about it they should be able to but also not to like limit them to say well you are a survivor so you know you can go and work now in a warehouse because maybe survivors wanna be doctors or engineers. So, it's like they kind of limit what you can do, and sometimes people will be like, "Oh wow, that's amazing that you are working." Like, "Oh wow, you're driving", and I look at them shocked, like, why wouldn't I? And then it can be really patronising, like, "Oh wow, you wanna do a PhD that's amazing", or "You are really an

> inspiration”, and I’m like, why wouldn’t the other survivors not do that? Or can they not do that if that’s what they wanna do?

6. Keep Survivors Informed Every Step of the Way

During their time in support, survivors should not have to go through the process of actively seeking out information and entitlements concerning their support. This should be readily provided by all who work to support them. Similarly, survivors should be informed about the realities of independent living, as **Tiwa** noted: “You know they don’t tell us, modern slavery survivors, to adapt to the world. They just go like, no, you are part of the world now, so you are just like us.”

7. Anti-trafficking initiatives should be Wary of Emulating the Prominent Image of the Victim of MSHT

Support providers across the board must be aware of biases that may lead to further victimising of survivors or forcing them into a particular narrative during support, as this curtails their independence and ability to do things for themselves.

8. Investment in Communities to Support Survivors

Members of communities, whether they are socially connected to survivors, well-intentioned individuals, or other members of society, can play a vital role in survivors’ journeys after MSHT. Their contribution is significant in bolstering resilience (as noted by Gardner et al., 2019) and addressing the gaps in support that formal support systems may leave, as Chapters Four, Five, and Six have highlighted. Therefore, these support networks must be well-prepared to assist survivors. This preparation should encompass training, not solely focused on efforts to prevent MSHT – which is undeniably crucial – or on spotting “the signs” or “indicators of modern slavery” and reporting them, but also on understanding how to provide day-to-day support to survivors to the best of their abilities. These forms of training can be embedded into local programmes that people in the community frequent, such as community centres and areas of arts and humanities, as proposed in Chapter Seven. The media, which has become a phenomenal source of information, can also be utilised to get the message out to communities.

8.4 Research Limitations and Further Research

This research has been conducted within a rapidly evolving legal and policy landscape. While recent years have seen only modest changes, as highlighted in Chapter Two, there has been a consistent evolution in the laws and policies governing the treatment of MSHT survivors in the UK. For example, a significant portion of the women participating in this research did not benefit from the Recovery Needs Assessment due to its relatively recent introduction. However, it remains a fact that individuals with precarious immigration statuses continue to face similar and, at times, even more stringent restrictions in their journeys following MSHT. While challenging in aligning current policies with the experiences of the women in this study, this dynamic also underscores the persistently negative experiences encountered by many survivors in the face of the constant and rapid changes in the legal and policy landscape pertaining to MSHT.

The diversity within the sample of participants presented both limitations and strengths. It was predominantly representative of non-British women, which may have somewhat restricted focused attention on the experiences of British nationals. However, this composition also served as a strength by highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by non-British national survivors in the aftermath of MSHT.

Notably, the sample primarily consisted of women who had undergone the NRM process, received favourable decisions, including positive immigration outcomes, and received additional support from charitable organisations. As a result, the voices of survivors who did not go through the NRM or receive assistance from any organisation were not as prominent. Nevertheless, these voices are indispensable for understanding the experiences of individuals who navigate the aftermath of exploitation without formal support, essentially weathering it on their own.

There is a compelling need for future research to delve into the circumstances of survivors who do not undergo the NRM or receive assistance from any relevant organisations and support systems. This segment of survivors, their challenges, and their unmet needs requires closer examination to inform more comprehensive and inclusive strategies for addressing the aftermath of MSHT.

Nonetheless, this thesis has uncovered crucial and unique insights into the personal journeys of survivors. It prioritised their voices throughout, acknowledging survivors as the authors and protagonists of their narratives. This emphasis is pivotal and ought to be integrated into future research endeavours to ensure survivors continue to play a vital role as knowledge producers in anti-slavery initiatives. As highlighted in this thesis, survivors often find themselves entangled in complex systems of victimisation during their journeys. Nevertheless, they exhibit resilience, courageously embracing strength in the face of adversity and steadfastly resisting surrender in systems that frequently attempt to undermine them. While this resilience is commendable, the support provided to survivors should ideally eliminate the necessity for them to be daring or engage in forms of resistance. Instead, survivors should be equipped with the necessary tools for their transformative journey, promoting their ability to move forward with rights and dignity. Achieving this goal necessitates dismantling dehumanising systems that marginalise and oppress people.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval

ETHICAL PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING

PERMISSION TO PROCEED WITH RESEARCH: ETHICAL APPROVAL AS OUTLINED IN APPLICATION

Name: Ndiweteko Nghishitende

Research Area/Title: Life After Modern Slavery: The long-term experiences of women and young survivors of modern slavery in the United Kingdom

Date Approved by Ethics Committee: 03/09/2021

Reference Number: 2122PGR01

Contact the FACE Research Office at face.research@hull.ac.uk for further information or clarification.

Appendix B: Call for Participants

Calling on women and young survivors of modern slavery and those who support them in the UK.

ABOUT ME

- My name is Jen Nghishitende, and I am a PhD student at the University of Hull.
- My PhD is focused on researching the journeys of survivors of modern slavery in the UK, after exiting situations falling under modern slavery – in particular those of women and young people
- Informed by survivors' experiences, my research aims to contribute to policy and practice regarding life after modern slavery in the UK.

CALLING ON

WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE?

- If you are a survivor of modern slavery, or an agency worker supporting survivors, I'd be really interested to speak to you about your experiences.
- If you would like more information or to share your experiences, please contact me.
- We will then organise a convenient time and place (this could be online) for us to meet to discuss your experiences.
- Our conversation will take about 30 to 60 minutes.

CONTACT

Jen Nghishitende
University of Hull
Email: N.J.NGHISHITENDE-2020@hull.ac.uk

As a token of appreciation, I am able to provide a £10 amazon gift card to contributors to my research who are survivors.

Thank you for reading this and I really look forward to hearing from you.

- This study has been ethically approved.
- I have been DBS checked

Appendix C: Information Sheet: Survivors

1. Research title

Life After Modern Slavery: The long-term experiences of women and young survivors of modern slavery in the United Kingdom

2. Invitation

I want to invite you to participate in my PhD research. Before you decide to participate, it is essential that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information by contacting me at N.J.NGHISHITENDE-2020@hull.ac.uk. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. The information contained herein will further be discussed with you before the beginning of the interview on the day of the interview.

Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the purpose of the research?

My research is on life after modern slavery, specifically focusing on the long-term journeys of women and young people who exited situations falling under modern slavery (which include human trafficking, forced labour, domestic servitude, debt bondage/bonded labour, child and early marriage, and so forth) in the UK.

It aims to gain an understanding of people's experiences in the long term after leaving these situations by looking at how they move forward, exploring how they access support or why they refuse to do so after exploitation, how they settle into communities, find work, reunite with family and friends (if applicable), form new families and friendships/relationships, deal with any challenges they may experience and many other aspects. It will also examine the processes and support systems women and young people may go through during their journeys.

4. Who is organising the interview?

I am the sole researcher. However, my supervisors, Dr Alicia Heys and Professor Helen Johnston, will oversee the research, production, and use of the data I will collect.

5. Why have you been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to participate in this research because you have lived through the experience of modern slavery, which is essential to this research. You can help me understand your experience after exiting exploitation and share with me what your life is like now. You can also share with me what aspects you would like to see changed about what you have experienced.

6. Do I have to take part?

Taking part is entirely voluntary. I will not ask you to explain why you want to withdraw, and you will have no consequences if you decide to withdraw. If you choose to participate, you will be able to keep a copy of this information sheet and confirm your agreement by signing the attached consent form. You can still withdraw at any time, even if you agree and sign a consent form, but change your mind later. You can also withdraw your participation during or after the interview. Still, you cannot withdraw after I have anonymised and analysed the data. The last withdrawal date will be no later than 8 (eight) weeks after the interview. Any information collected from you will not be used if you withdraw on time; it will be destroyed.

7. What will be required of me during the interview?

You will be asked to attend a one-on-one interview with me. You will answer questions about what your journey has been like so far, what you have experienced after leaving exploitation and how life is for you now. I will also ask for your thoughts on how you would like to see things change due to what you have experienced during your journey. The conversation will last between 30 to 60 minutes. Depending on the interview's circumstances, such as if we use an interpreter, this period can be less or longer.

8. How will the interview be carried out?

I will contact you, your social worker, or your guardian (whichever is applicable) so that we can arrange a suitable time and location to hold the interview. Only the two of us will be present at the interview, but a

third party, such as a guardian or caretaker, can be present if you feel more comfortable that way. If you need an interpreter, one will also be present as a third party. Any additional people present at the interview will sign a document stating they will keep all the information they learned from the interview private. The discussion will be recorded using an audio recording device, and this recording will be stored safely on my secure university server called Box.

Suppose there are restrictions due to COVID-19, or do you prefer it this way? In that case, the interview will be carried out online using platforms such as Microsoft Teams, zoom, skype, WhatsApp or other suitable platforms. We can also decide on telephone interviews if that will be better for you. I will cover any costs related to these methods.

I will then transcribe the interview and send you the transcription to confirm that it is a true reflection of what you have said during the interview if you agree to do so. After I have anonymised your identifying details and analysed the information, I will use that information in my thesis and other journal articles I may write. I may also use this information at presentations at conferences.

9. Will my taking part in this research be kept confidential?

All the information I collect about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. I will give you and any locations associated with you a false name so that no one can tell that the information is from you. Any data collected from you during the interviews will be stored in a folder that is protected by passwords and other relevant security processes and technologies. This data will only be held on the Box server mentioned above.

Handwritten notes I will make during the interview will be kept in a locked drawer on my office table at the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation (WISE). I will be the only person who will have access to this drawer. They will be transported in a locked bag from the interview site to my office at WISE. These will also be scanned and stored on Box.

10. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

This topic may be upsetting to some people. You should tell me any time during the interview if you feel you are getting upset so we can take a break or even stop altogether. You can withdraw from the research at any time during the interview. I will have some water available throughout the interview if you need any. I can change some questions, or you can refuse to answer specific questions. Additionally, suppose you tell me something that causes me to be worried about your well-being or that of others. In that case, I may be required to describe someone who may be able to help you or anyone else who may be at risk.

11. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Research is aimed at benefiting society by providing new knowledge. This research hopes to improve and develop policy and practice in the area of life after modern slavery in the UK. By participating in this research, you will allow me to collect valuable data as well as help me to complete research for my PhD thesis. You may not benefit personally from being a part of this study. Still, some participants in other studies report that being involved in research helped them by allowing them to share their experiences and potentially help others.

12. What will happen to the finalised research?

Once finalised, the research will be published in my thesis (a document submitted in support of my PhD degree) and in some journals. It will also be presented at academic conferences. You will not be identified in any report or publication.

13. Will you receive anything for being in this study?

After the first interview is complete, you will receive a £10 gift card to Amazon for taking part in this research study. No gift cards or other form of incentive will be given for follow-up interviews.

14. Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

There will be no costs for being in the study. If there are any costs such as transport and so forth, those will be covered by me.

15. Approval of the research:

This research has been ethically approved by the **Faculty of Arts Cultures and Education** of the University of Hull on __03/09/2021_____.

16. Contact Information:

Please get in touch with me at N.J.NGHISHITENDE-2020@hull.ac.uk if you have any questions or require more information about the study. Suppose there are any concerns about my conduct during this research, or you would like to contact somebody other than myself. In that case, you can contact one of my supervisors, Dr Alicia Kidd, at alicia.kidd@hull.ac.uk or the Faculty of Arts Cultures and Education (FACE) Ethics Committee secretary Chris Preston at Tel: 01482 462083 or email C.Preston@hull.ac.uk or face-ethics@hull.ac.uk.

17. Correspondence address:

C/O Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation 27 High Street, Hull HU1 1NE17.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

Appendix D: Consent Form

Please complete this form after you have read the attached Information Sheet.

Thank you for considering taking part in my research. The researcher will explain the project to you before you agree to take part.

If you have any questions regarding any aspect of the research/study, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to participate.

You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep for future reference.

I……………………………………………………………………………………………….

of address: ………………………………………………………………………………

Hereby give consent to be a participant in the study to be undertaken by:

Ndiweteko Jennifer Nghishitende, a PhD candidate at the Wilberforce Institute, Hull

I understand that the purpose of the research is:

To gain an understanding of women and young people's experiences in the long term after leaving situations of modern slavery by looking at how they move forward, exploring things like accessing support, settling into communities, finding work, reuniting with family and friends (if any), forming new families and friendships/relationships, any challenges faced and so forth). It will also examine the processes and support systems that women and young people go through or choose not to go through on their moving-on journeys.

By signing this form, I confirm and agree that:

1. The aims, methods, anticipated benefits, and possible hazards/risks of the research study have been explained to me.
2. I voluntarily and without pressure give my consent to participate in such a research study.
3. I understand that aggregated findings will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals, conferences, the researcher's thesis, and other platforms.
4. I understand that individual results will not be released to any person, including medical practitioners.
5. I understand that all data will be anonymised by giving false names to people and locations and stored using secure servers and password-protected devices.
6. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately stop, and any information obtained will not be used. However, I understand that withdrawal will not be possible after the data collected has been anonymised, which will be no later than 8 (eight) weeks after the interview.

Signature: …………………………… Date: ……………………………….

The contact details of the researcher are: N.J.NGHISHITENDE-2020@hull.ac.uk

And one of her supervisors, Dr Lorena Arocha, at Lorena.Arocha@hull.ac.uk

The contact details of the secretary to the Faculty of Arts Cultures and Education (FACE) Ethics Committee are:

Chris Preston, FACE, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX. Tel. 01482 462083. Email: C.Preston@hull.ac.uk or face-ethics@hull.ac.uk

Appendix E: Example Interview Questions for Survivors

1. About them:
    a) Please tell me about yourself.
    b) What do you usually do during the day?
2. About their experiences after exiting situations of ‘modern slavery’:
    a) Can you please tell me how long it has been since you left?
    b) Please tell me what you remember about what happened when you just left that situation.
    c) How did this make you feel?
    d) What happened after that?
    e) What was good about your experience after leaving that situation?
    f) Why was this good?
    g) What was bad about it?
    h) Why was this bad?
    i) How could things be changed about that?
    j) And how is life for you now?
    k) What are the good things about life now?
    l) Why do you consider these things good?
    m) What are the bad things about life now?
    n) Why do you consider these things bad?
    o) Can you tell me about your relationships?
    p) What would you like your life to be like in the coming years?
    q) What needs to happen for you to get to the way you want your life to be like?
3. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your journey so far?

    Further Interviews:

a) Do you know anyone else who might be willing to share their experiences after leaving exploitation with me?