'I'm overcoming it through this':
Activism and Psychological Wellbeing for Queer and/or Trans People of Colour Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK

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Jessica MacIntyre

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Abstract

This qualitative study seeks to explore the effects of activism on the psychological wellbeing of queer and/or trans refugees who are also people of colour (QTPOCRAS) in postcolonial Britain. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants recruited from a QTPOCRAS community group in Leeds. Davis' (2017) queerly raced hermeneutic phenomenological analysis was used as a tool through which to explore the meaning-making of activism and intersectional subjectivity. Analysis revealed themes of embodied 'space', '(dis)orientation' and 'purpose' to be integral to the phenomenon. It was concluded that the risks of increased visibility and psychological fatigue of burnout had negative effects on psychological wellbeing, but that these factors sat alongside the profound psychological benefits of empowerment, community building, self-discovery, and uncovering purpose in visions of their activist futures.

Definition of terms and acronyms

For the sake of brevity, the acronyms below will be used throughout this study.

LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, + others
SO/GI	Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity
POC	Person of Colour
QTPOC	Queer and/or Trans People of Colour
QTPOCRAS	Queer and/or Trans People of Colour Refugees and/or Asylum Seekers
RAS	Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Asylum Seeker	An individual who has fled their country of origin due to persecution and lodged an application to receive protection under the remit of the Refugee Convention (1951), but are awaiting a decision.
Refugee	A person whose asylum claim has been successful and who is granted temporary or permanent leave to remain.

1: Overview

1.1 LGBTQ+ asylum in the UK

At the time of writing, 74 countries criminalised same-sex relations worldwide (Carroll & Mendes, 2017), with many more imposing discriminatory and persecutory attitudes and treatment onto lesbian, gay and bisexual people, who face unequal access to human rights protections. Discrimination towards trans and gender-nonconforming individuals in writ-law is less common and documentable, though social violence towards those whose expressions transgress gender norms are no less pervasive (Godoy, 2015). For those queer and/or trans people who fear persecution in their homelands, claiming asylum in a country that affords LGBTQ+ people legal protection is one option for seeking safety.

It is an unsavoury irony that some of the world's largest LGBTQ+ asylum seeker producing countries are former European colonies that did not possess negative attitudes to sexual or gender non-conformity until hetero-and gender-normative ideals were exported by colonialism in the conquest and taming of the primitive racial 'Other' (Alldred & Fox, 2015). As Murray & Roscoe (1999) note, *"colonialists did not introduce homosexuality to Africa but rather intolerance of it - and systems of surveillance and regulation for suppressing it"* (p.xvi). Interventions to liberalise former colonies' attitudes to sexual and gender minorities by present-day Western human rights agendas have armed populist rhetoric with arguments of neo-colonialism and European liberal imperialism which serve to harm LGBTQ+ populations in these nations (Mwakasungula, 2013).

The lives that LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers (RAS) build upon arriving in the UK are far from without structural violence and oppression. Especially for those RAS who are also people of colour (POC), the experience of racism in postcolonial Brexit-Britain is a double-edged sword when intersectionally combined with the oppression of queer and trans people in what is still a hetero-

and gender-normative society (Bennett & Thomas, 2013). Queer and/or trans people of colour (QTPOC) support and activist networks seek to address the gaps left between the invisibility of queer and/or trans people in POC communities (Dudley, 2013) and the xenophobia and racism felt in mainstream white-centric LGBTQ+ spaces (Giwa & Greensmith, 2012). Though LGBTQ+ 'tolerance' and societal appreciation of 'diversity' has gained traction in the UK in the past decade, there is false impression of the homogeneity of an 'LGBTQ+' community: This 'false umbrella' is used to homogenise queer people of all races, ethnicities and classes, whilst ironing out and reducing the different experiences of navigating the world as one and the same (Anzaldúa, 1991).

In the wake of Brexit and the rise of the 'British values' discourse (Burnett, 2017), pinkwashing and homonormativity – the triangulation of the West as 'progressive' and the post-colonial world as 'lagging' through its treatment of LGBTQ+ rights - are common ways of constructing the British objective subject and the migrant 'other' (Ahmed, 2013; Puar, 2007; Quijano, 2007; Rahman, 2014). Queer and/or trans people of colour refugees and asylum seekers (QTPOCRAS, for the sake of brevity) therefore face particular challenges, as their lived experiences find themselves at the intersectional marginality of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and forced migrancy (Crenshaw, 1989).

1.2 'Trauma' and 'resilience' in QTPOC and RAS research

Given the forced and often violent circumstances under which RAS leave their countries of origin, it is perhaps not surprising that psychological research with RAS participants has primarily relied on a trauma-based psychiatric model (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). This clinical model has strong utility in documenting the anxiety, depression and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) experienced by survivors of human rights abuses (Steel, Mares, Newman, Blick, & Dudley, 2004), and for making strong cases for more accessible specialist psychological treatment and support for these communities. Similarly, the minority stress model (Brooks, 1981) was

developed to explain the prevalence of mental health issues in marginalised populations, including QTPOC.

Whilst the contribution of trauma and minority stress research have been enormous in their efforts to highlight the psychological and physiological consequences of discrimination, the framework within which this research is located has been criticised for its reliance on a biomedical model, and calls have been made to study the wellbeing of these communities with a positive psychology lens (Meyer, 2014). As such, a concerted move was made towards studying resilience and post-traumatic growth in intersectionally marginalised communities. Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) define resilience as a *"dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity"* (p.543). Quantitative resilience research with QTPOC participants reports individual and community factors that confer protective factors against mental health issues (Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014). Similarly, Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) developed a post-traumatic growth scale to measure the possible positive impacts of negative events, and found a strengthening in participants' perceptions of self, others and life's meaning after experiencing trauma.

Miller & Rasco (2004) and Schweitzer & Steel (2008) note the limitations of relying on quantitative methodologies in attempting to understand the complex social, political and historical factors embedded in the lived experiences of RAS, which privilege a Western-orientated individualistic approach and negate the *"full richness and complexity"* of RAS subjectivities (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p.xiv). Furthermore, dominant explanations for psychopathology originate from the white, heterosexual, cisgender man as the prototype-patient, and may not adequately capture or explain the mental health struggles or resiliencies of QTPOCRAS (Dominguez, 2017).

1.3 Activism and the positive psychological effects of 'organising'

Research on activism, volunteering and community-based organising suggests that engaging in these activities may benefit psychological wellbeing, even if the attainment of the political goals sought through these practices are not met (Klar & Kasser, 2009). Building on Foucault's observation *"where there is power there is resistance"* (1980, p.95), 'liberation psychologists' have also noted that *"power is a problem not only when it is abusively used, in a dominant and oppressive way, but also when one ignores that one possess it"* (Montero, 2003, p.142). Community gathering in solidarity has long been acknowledged as a primary way of countering oppressive regimes of power, especially for LGBTQ+ people and POC. Davis (2017), in her research on the experiences of QTPOC in postcolonial Britain, noted the sense of inclusion, belonging and the development of a critical consciousness that participants reported from being a member of QTPOC-designated spaces. However, there is a remaining gap in research regarding the specific experiences of QTPOCRAS community organising, whether this be 'homeland activism' - campaigning for the rights of other sexual and gender minorities in their countries of origin (Banki, 2013) - or organising for improved living conditions and access to security within a fairer UK asylum system.

1.4 The research question

Research on LGBTQ+ asylum seekers is generally located in the fields of human rights law, and focuses on the jurisprudence and systems that make asylum (im)possible for persecuted individuals. Very little research has been conducted on the intersectional lived experiences of this population, much less within the context of psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, the majority of psychological research with RAS in general does not seek to ask questions about sexual orientation or gender identity (SO/GI) of its participants, and these integral aspects of a person are therefore concealed, unrecognised and excluded (Mertens, 2014). This study hopes to bridge this gap in knowledge, through pursuing the research question: *'What effect does activism have on*

queer and/or trans people of colour refugee and asylum seekers' psychological wellbeing?'

1.5 Structure

The following chapter will start by detailing the methodology used in this study. The queerly raced hermeneutic phenomenology (Davis, forthcoming) will be explained and its pertinence as a form of analysis for this study will be justified. Chapter 2 will also detail the selection and recruitment of participants, the procedure used in collecting and analysing the data, and the ethical considerations applied in the study. Chapter 2 will conclude with a personal researcher reflexivity to document the inter-subjective experience of conducting this research in my role as queer scholar-activist. Chapter 3 will explore the three superordinate themes to emerge in the analysis of the data: 'space', (dis)orientation and purpose. The final chapter will conclude with an overview of the findings, a review of the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research directions.

2. Methodology

2.1 Methodology

2.1a A phenomenological starting point

Phenomenology can be summarised as the 'study of experience' – what the essence of human experience is like and how we make sense of our 'being' in the world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Husserl formulated phenomenology in the early twentieth century, concerned with returning to the phenomena themselves, identifying what is essential about them, and considering how the individual perceives them (Willig, 2013). Central to Husserl's epistemology was the concept of *'epoche'*, or 'bracketing', in which the researcher should set aside any preconceived notion about what they believe they already know about the phenomena in question. Husserl was therefore concerned with the 'eidetic reduction' (Smith et al., 2009) getting at the 'pure essence' of something – unadulterated by human pre-judgement (Moran 2011).

Heidegger developed Husserl's more abstract, theoretical phenomenology into hermeneutic phenomenology – concerned with how humans interpret the world around them. For Heidegger, it was important to acknowledge the impossibility for the researcher to approach their data whilst bracketing off their own subjectivity. As Willig (2013) notes, Heidegger posited that what the researcher brings to the text constitutes *"an integral part of phenomenological analysis"* (p.85). One of Heidegger's principle contributions to phenomenology was the concept of *'Dasein'* – literally translated from German into 'there-being'. Dasein *"refers to the uniquely situated quality of being a human in the world" (*Smith et al., 2009, p.16), the ontological question of existence, and how it is meaningful. Using a hermeneutic phenomenology, Dasein calls on the researcher to approach their study with their own reflexive awareness, as one is *"always already thrown into this pre-existing world of people and objects, language and culture, and cannot be meaningfully detached from it"* (Smith et al., 2009, p.17). That is to say, the concept of bracketing is wholly rejected, and is instead replaced with the notion of intersubjectivity – the fundamentally layered and

overlapping nature of our own communal experiences. Intersubjectivity describes how our own personal subjectivities – our consciousnesses, our personhoods – are related, intertwined, and make sense of one another. Laverty (2003) describes a hermeneutic phenomenological view of *"people and the world as indissolubly related in cultural, in social and in historical contexts"* and that *"nothing can be encountered without reference to a person's background understanding"* (p.8).

2.1b Employing a critical lens

One of the key reasons for choosing a hermeneutic phenomenological reading when designing this study is its emphasis on believing that truth can be found in any individual's account of their own experience. By using this qualitative methodology, questions of external validity are made redundant, as Willig (2013) notes that phenomenological research is *"interested in the experiential world of the participant rather than the 'real' (material, social or psychological)"* objective reasons behind their experience (p.16). This is especially pertinent when conducting social science research with marginalised groups - whether it be queer and trans people, POC, RAS, or the intersectional combination of the above. Gender- and heteronormativity, eurocentrism and racism are all based on the premise of the sub-altern as being invalid and 'outlying' the normative experience. Using a methodology that sees innate truth in the texture of each individual's experience and attends to the participant with unconditional positive regard is vital in attempting transformational psychological research with a social justice lens.

Psychological knowledge, born is positivistic schools of scientific empiricism, is largely produced and reproduced in heteronormative, patriarchal and Eurocentric ways. It produces and perpetuates power disparities between the objective Western researcher and *his* abnormal, immature or incapable subjects: *"affirming the maxim of working for the good of the subjects, psychological research and practices (which are deeply connected) delimit*

places of oppression and silence, establishing who is authorised to speak for the 'others'" (Mattos, 2015, p.330).

In order for this aforementioned pathologising gaze to be dismantled, critical perspectives are paramount to social justice researchers, because *"the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (*Lorde, 2017, p.16). In considering a methodology for this study, the perspectives of feminist, liberation, post-colonial, queer and community psychologies were critically engaged with. Ultimately, a 'queerly raced hermeneutic phenomenology' (Davis, forthcoming) was decided upon as aptly capturing the merits of each of the aforementioned critical schools, whilst maintaining a truly intersectional lens, as is appropriate for engaging with the experiences of participants that are managing multiple minority identities.

2.1c Davis' 'queerly raced hermeneutic phenomenology

Davis' (2017) innovative slant on hermeneutic phenomenology weaves together critical race and queer theory in a lens through which she explores QTPOC's lived experiences within the British post-colonial context. Following Heidegger's thoughts on hermeneutics, Davis argues that 'bracketing' historical, social and political aspects from our own subjectivities is impossible and that these factors inextricably mould our own interpretations and meaning making (p.88). Following phenomenological developments utilised by Fanon (1986) and Ahmed (2006), Davis added three further dimensions into the methodology in order to create a queerly raced hermeneutic phenomenology: the orientation of 'disorientation', historicity and corporeality and embodiment. This analysis focuses on the embodied lived experiences of the research participants, and the way in which QTPOC inhabit disorientation as sexual/gender minorities and racialised others in the post-colonial context.

2.1d A note on subjectivity and intersectionality

Subjectivity refers to our lived experience; it is the way *"the voices in our heads and the feelings in our bodies are linked to political, cultural, and historical contexts"* (Ellis & Flaherty, 1993, p.4). Mama (1995), in her critical writing on gender and racism in psychology, studies the subjectivities of black British women in feminist movements. She theorises that subjectivity is constituted out of collective historical experience, meaning, *"subjectivity can only be approached through the particular histories of those being studied"* (p.98). Furthermore, Mama refers to the *"multiplicity of subjectivity"* (p.117), and the ways in which subject positionings are often overlapping and coexisting. Crenshaw (1989), in her coining of the term 'intersectionality', underscored the *"multidimensionality"* (p.139) of marginalised people's lived experiences, noting that for black women and other multiply marginalised groups, subjectivities are constituted by *"mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality"* (Nash, 2008, p.4), and I would add citizenship and migrancy as further factors influencing our being-in-the-world. Intersectionality and the subjectivity play major roles in the development of this research, which seeks to address the ways participants' historicities and experiencing of multiple oppressions interact to shape their lived experiences.

2.2 Selection

This study aimed to recruit between three to five participants who self-identified as QTPOCRAS in the UK. To be clear, there are people who claim asylum on the grounds of SO/GI who do not self-identify as POC, and are not treated as such by others. For the purposes of this study, it was important to capture QTPOCRAS experiences due to the extra layer that race plays in intersectional subjectivity.

2.3 Recruitment

Prior to engaging in this research process, I was an active member of a number of queer migrant activist circles, and maintained strong links with other organisers in groups around the UK. One of these groups, which I co-founded

in 2013, is 'the Leeds Group'[1], a small charity that provides support, capacity building and advocacy for QTPOCRAS. In early 2018, I formally resigned from any activity in this organisation and it was taken over by another activist network who, as QTPOCRAS themselves, were better placed to represent and run the Leeds Group.

My initial plans for participant recruitment, as articulated in my ethics application (Appendix A) did not work out the way I had hoped due to time constraints. Therefore, after seeking approval from my supervisor, a QTPOCRAS organisation in Leeds that I co-founded became the site of recruitment for this study. I had significant ethical concerns about recruiting participants for this research that I had previously supported in my role at the Leeds Group. I therefore took several measures to reduce the likelihood that members would feel pressured to take part in my research. First, I sent out resignation messages on social media platforms where the group would communicate, and left these groups so that I was no longer privy to conversations on these forums. Following this, and after a few months passed, I got in touch with one of the key organisers of the group as the gatekeeper for recruiting participants, explained my intentions for the research and asked if she would be willing to help me advertise my research and call for participants amongst the group's Whatsapp chat, their primary way of communicating.

After sending her a copy of the consent form and information sheet, she agreed to send a short advert via the Whatsapp group with my university email address. Though this network has members all across the UK, only individuals from Leeds ended up expressing their interest in the study. I anticipate that this was due to suspicion from members of other branches that did not know me, and that in this instance my proximity to the Leeds members enabled them to trust me, whereas a protective distance is normally kept from researchers by these circles, who are frequently inundated with requests for research access.

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[1] A mutually agreed pseudonym between the eventual participants of this research.

Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym, and state their country of origin, SO/GI, and pronouns. The participants were:

Pseudonym	Country of origin	SO/GI	Pronouns
Aditi	Gambia	Bisexual woman	She/her/hers
Christina	Trinidad & Tobago	Non-binary gay person	She/her/hers and he/him/his
Caramelizcious	Trinidad & Tobago	Trans feminine person	She/her/hers
Blue-Ivy	Uganda	Lesbian woman	She/her/hers

2.4 Procedure and Ethics

Application for ethical clearance was approved from the University of East London School of Psychology Ethics Committee (Appendix B). Participants emailed me expressing their interest using the advert that was circulated in their Whatsapp group. One week prior to the scheduled interview date, they were sent the consent form, information sheet and debrief information give them a 'cooling off' period after receiving these documents and to decide whether or not they still wanted to participate.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in a hired meeting room in Leeds that was centrally located to promote ease of access. Participants were not paid, but their travel expenses were reimbursed and lunch was provided to minimise any practical burden of participating. A list of ten interview questions were drafted to structure the interview (Appendix F), derived from Tedeschi & Calhoun's (1996) post-traumatic growth inventory. These items, though quantitative in nature, were applicable to the current research to give a good structuring of the interview schedule and create a framework through which the effect of activism on psychological wellbeing could be explored. Following Willig's (2013) guide to applying a phenomenological analysis, each interview question was open-ended and non-directive in order yield idiographic data whereby the participant felt able to share their authentic personal experience, and to reduce demand characteristics.

Occasionally, focused questions were used in follow-up to the broader interview questions in order to prompt further detail or to query the meaning of words used. After each interview, participants were asked if they had anything they wanted to add on their own accord, and each participant spoke freely about something that was significant to their experience that had not yet been captured.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, with rigorous attention paid to detailing the exact verbal and non-verbal expressions used, such as sighs and pauses, so as not to lose the participants' authentic voice. Each participant was sent a copy of the transcript and given the opportunity to revise any of the data. None of the participants responded with any revisions. Subsequently, the textual and audio data was analysed in accordance with Smith et al.'s (2009) guide to using phenomenological analysis.

2.5 Data analysis

Transcripts were read and re-read whilst listening to the accompanying audio – slowing down the analysis to avoid a 'quick and dirty' synopsis or reduction (Smith et al., 2009). Listening to the audio and reading the text simultaneously, rather than relying purely on the textual transcribed data, allowed a full immersion of the participants' experience within the context of the speaker's voice and mannerisms, and encouraged active engagement with the data.

Initial notes were handwritten in the right-hand margin of each page for the first stage of analysis, using different colours to distinguish between descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments (as advised by Smith et al., 2009). Categorising notes along these lines allowed for even the smallest 'unit' of experience to be captured, switching between micro- and macro- level engagement with the exact expression of the participant, reading the presentation of their experience as deliberate.

The second stage of analysis involved observing developing emergent themes and noting them in the left-hand margin of the transcript, labelling them according to broad psychological concepts, paying attention to the experiential quality of what was being described (Willig, 2013). The third stage involved gradually clustering these conceptual themes in a hierarchical system of super- and subordinate themes, illustrated using *in vivo* keywords. This was done to return to the voice of the participant and prevent the loss of meaning, using their own words to condense their own experience. Finally, a summary table (Appendix G) of super- and subordinate themes was created with accompanying quotes and references to page and line numbers for each piece of corresponding data in each transcript.

The table below shows a summary of the themes that will be elaborated on in the discussion of analysis (chapter 3).

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes
1. Space	1. Taking up space as embodied protest
	2. Creating safe space
	3. Precarious space
2. (Dis) Orientation	1. Estrangement and empathetic re-orientation
	2. Activism as ironic safety
3. Purpose	1. Self-discovery & reconciliation of identity
	2. Fighting for voiceless
	3. Burnout

2.6 Researcher Reflexivity

In this section I will attempt to turn a critical gaze towards myself and the role of queer activist-scholar I have self-assumed in this study. Durdella (2019)

advises readers in qualitative methodologies to acknowledge personal and professional roles and the way in which they are tethered to the research context. This positioning has affected the way I have navigated the literature informing the background of the study, as well as my approach to the adopted methodology and subsequent analysis. As Willig (2013) acknowledges, the inter-subjective experience of conducting psychological research can enrich, as well as limit a qualitative study. By recognising what, as the scientific method has taught us, our own 'biases' are as research practitioners, we are able to offer insights to the analysis that is uniquely personal and intimate. This enmeshment exists, of course, in research as well as in clinical practice. The psychoanalytic concept of countertransference highlights the way the psychotherapist is emotionally respondent to what the client brings into the room.

Willig queries the notion that the research practitioner ought to remain *"detached, neutral and unbiased"* (2013, p.25), as this could limit the potential for reactions to the context that would glean certain specific insights only available to that person as researcher in that specific research environment. In chapter 2, I explained the emphasis on subjectivity in this study – the relationship between being a QTPOCRAS and the self. For the sake of reflexivity, it is also important to interrogate the role of subjective whiteness I bring to this study. Academia and psychology are both fields imbued with structural white supremacy. Studies on POC lived experiences are framed within the locus of a white gaze, studying the 'other'. Reading Alcoff (2015), normative whiteness is disrupted as being a *"racially unmarked experience, despite the fact that whiteness has been taken as the default position of the human"* (p.84). The only way forward as a white scholar engaged in anti-racist work is to render our *"epistemologies of ignorance"* (p.84) visible, giving space for reflexive practice and evaluation.

In this vein, the position from which I write does not claim to be objective, nor do I attempt to speak for my participants. Their voices are their own, and I have handled their narratives with great care, being conscious of even the smallest unit of intentional expression, even when this was uncomfortable for me to write

about from my positionality. By doing this, and by using Davis' (2017) guidance on weaving queer and critical race theory into a phenomenological framework of analysis, I hope to create a reflexive structure that could be helpful for future white students exploring social science research in general, and with POC communities in particular.

In Pat Parker's (2000) poem, 'For The White Person Who Wants To Know How To Be My Friend', she captures in two powerful lines the paradoxical 'how' of acknowledging the meaningfulness and significance of racial difference without contributing to the reduction of an individual as racially 'other':

"The first thing you do is forget that I'm black.
Second, you must never forget that I'm black" (p.73).

This research was not conducted in a vacuum, and as such, my own subjectivity and historicity translates into *"issues of identity, power and conflict that emerge in the context of data collection"* (Durdella, 2019, p.243). As a white scholar conducting research with POC on their lived experiences, I have felt tremendous anxiety about misrepresenting their truths. Though I have tried to mitigate the effect of my privilege on the participants in order to produce interpretations that have not been filtered through the myopic sieve of white subjectivity, *"we cannot always choose when our identities are politically salient, or how they are salient, or how much"* (Alcoff, 2015, p.45). As Alcoff explains, this is true not only for identities that have been historically marginalised and denigrated, but also for those whose identities carry discursive dominance. Schmitz (2010) encourages the weariness that results from the necessary discomfort about talking about whiteness. To truly understand the feelings of unease I have in doubting whether or not I am intellectually adequate to write about this topic leads me to confront the fact that my whiteness does not routinely cause me to feel inadequate in academia, a reality that students of colour do not readily experience (Ahmed, 2012; Back, 2004; Eddo-Lodge, 2018; Harper, 2012).

In interrogating my societally ascribed and academically achieved identities that have conferred status on my positionality, I am drawn to Muhammed et al.'s (2015) notes on the intersubjective: *"Identity is not a static concept, and insider-outsider boundaries are ever-shifting with tensions continually navigated"* (p.8). I am white, educated, cisgender and middle class and have previously worked with my research participants in an advocacy role where I was relied upon and therefore held power. At the same time, interrupting the orbit of my privilege (Schmitz, 2010), I am a lesbian woman, a fellow activist and have also experienced violence because of my sexual orientation. Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freedman (2017) criticise the frequently reductive 'insider-outsider' dynamic commonly discussed in qualitative inquiry: *"by acknowledging the limits of dichotomies we can challenge essentialist and static understandings of positionality that have neglected the voices of those in between groups and on the margins"* (p.391).

Davis (2017) notes the imperative on the researcher to *"understand the dialectic between the personal, activist, political and academic"* (p.110). There is an extent to which social science research in general, and qualitative psychology fieldwork in particular, speaks to the sensibilities of the researcher themselves. That is, much research in this field is 'me-search' and scholars are drawn to formulate research questions out of personal as well as intellectual curiosity. My reason for approaching this research topic was similar to my reasons for approaching migrant justice and queer community organising as an undergraduate. Through immersing myself in social justice work, I was able to find solidarity, responsibility, pride and purpose as a young woman who had experienced significant trauma as a child. Through being accountable to others in an activist network, I was able to rely on myself and build a resilience and *raison d'être* that did not belong to me prior to engaging in this work. I was able to channel anger in a politically productive way, challenging patriarchal and heteronormative systems of oppression that were complicit in my own suffering. Through this work I was also able to gain a critical consciousness about my relative privilege as a cisgender, white, able-bodied citizen, and was able to use this privilege to position my body protectively in front of those who were more policed and brutalised than my own. In the context of this current study and my

positionality as queer-activist-scholar, I am accountable to my work and community if I am using my voice to disrupt the white supremacist and heteronormative (re)production of psychological knowledge. Keeping a research diary and bringing my thoughts on this into my own psychotherapeutic journey helped me to refine which of these vulnerabilities I ought to include in my reflexivity.

3. Discussion of analysis

The data gleaned from the interviews was rich and vast in nature, and it was at times difficult to stay focused on the research question *'what effect does activism have on QTPOCRAS psychological wellbeing?'*. I wavered between answering this question and the alternative *'what are the mental health effects of claiming asylum for a QTPOC?'*. I chose to stay true to the original research question as this would garner more novel findings as a topic untouched in existing literature, though the alternative question was still a part of the interview schedule in order to establish information about what the baseline of people's sense of their psychological wellbeing was before they engaged in community organising.

All four participants recounted that the asylum process negatively affected their mental health. Responses to this question ranged from descriptions of depression, anxiety, panic attacks, trauma flashbacks and dissociation, suicidal ideation and active attempts, stress-induced eating disorders, feelings of anger and aggression, self-harm, and wanting to return home even though home felt like a 'death wish'. Participants also described the retraumatisation of telling and retelling their stories of persecution, having to wait indefinitely in limbo, the invalidation of disbelief, and fear of authority figures. Whilst these disclosures are worthy of their own analyses, they do belong to the analysis of the alternative research question, which I am unable to explore due to the length restrictions of this thesis.

The themes derived from research question were therefore centred on how activism in itself impacted psychological wellbeing. As mentioned in chapter 1.2, psychological research with refugee communities, POC, and queer/trans people tends to focus on a 'deficit perspective' – only highlighting the negative mental health effects experienced in these communities, rather than their strengths, joys and resiliencies (Chiu, 2003; Mertens, 2008). Chiu (2003) argues that a deficit perspective in health research with women of colour *"not only hinder[s] a wider theoretical understanding of the problems, but also has…the effect of perpetuating ineffective health promotion practice"* (p.167)

by propagating the idea that the research can help solve a given 'problem' or pathology in the community. Guided by an anti-colonial lens that has sought to ask questions around resilience rather than trauma, resistance rather than powerlessness, I have intended to reveal a 'whole' psychological frame that is needed to achieve social change (Mertens, 2008).

Analysis was a critically challenging process, being cautious not to over-emphasise or underplay patterns of meaning. This task became clearer with the repetitive task of going back to the text for final readings, even after coding. The following three superordinate themes were finally revealed: Space, (Dis)orientation, and Purpose. These will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

3.1 Superordinate theme 1- Space

Through analyses of the interview transcripts, superordinate themes developed in an overlapping way, as did the subordinate themes within them. Using the overarching theme of 'Space', this section will explore the ways in which physical and metaphorical safe and representative spaces were located in the Leeds Group, in contrast to the precarious spaces that participants inhabited as QTPOCRAS.

3.1a Taking up space as embodied protest

Our bodies are experienced bi-directionally: as vehicles of consciousness and somatic objects by ourselves, and symbolically by others (Graham, 2012). This chapter will consider the ways in which the physical spatial positioning of marginalised bodies has great symbolic resonance with regard to power and resistance. Resistance is in the taking up of space itself, and this action is a means and an end for collective gain.

"Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonised people" (hooks, 1985, p.205). Taking up space

becomes one way that the marginalised body can persist, both temporally and spatially – when other resources and means for wielding voice and power are denied (Butler, 2011). This bodily protest is less about the attainment of specific goals, and more about the embodied and spatial practice of protest *ipso facto.* For QTPOCRAS, existence itself is precarious and threatened, and the movement of their bodies through public and private space is literally and figuratively surveilled and controlled by the state, as will be expanded upon in section 3.1c – 'Precarious Space'.

Christina and Caramelizcious use dichotomies of 'silence and voice', and 'hiding and openness' to denote the act of expanding themselves and growing into their own space and strength:

> [Accessing activist networks] made a big difference, because I would have probably been still hiding, I probably would have just been silent, I wouldn't even be saying anything it probably would have…. I probably would not have been going out that much to even say something. I think that would have just made me shut, I'd have probably been a different person as well, no socialising (252-258).

Here, Caramelizcious makes sense of using her voice as fighting oppressive silence, and links this directly to using her voice to communicate with others. Her voice is her bodily and linguistic location of her right to have rights (Butler, 2011), and she does not look to a legitimizing state apparatus to confer these rights upon her. By leaving her accommodation and 'opening' herself, she is fighting the pressure to stay 'shut', and by socialising she is able to reveal herself, coming out of her hiding place.

Christina alludes to similar sentiments of locating her personal identity within the context of the group: *"I always knew I was a strong person but like I said well I'm stronger now. I mean being all out and open, I was never me… I was trying to hide it"* (Christina, 243-245).

Through connecting with other QTPOCRAS and using her voice to claim space, she discovers the extent of her own strength. Before the group she was not

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able to be her authentic, open self. Engaging in this space allowed her to discover herself. Similarly, by sharing space with other QTPOCRAS, Aditi depicts the whole self she was able to locate: *"I'm not just an asylum seeker, I'm Aditi and it feels good"* (Aditi, 25). Though the expression was not captured verbally, when Aditi uttered this sentence she sat up straight, leant back in her chair and relaxed her shoulders, taking a deep breath and expanding her chest. She conveyed confidence and became physically larger in the space she occupied before me.

The process of claiming asylum is in its nature reductive. One's own personal identity is subsumed by a government's categorisation. As an asylum seeker in the UK, one is subject to restrictions on movement and activity that can manifest as an identity-eroding experience: one is forbidden from seeking employment or studying. With £36 per week to live on, socialising becomes almost impossible. Blue-Ivy also spoke to the identity-eroding experience of seeking asylum, but expressed that being a member of the Leeds Group enabled her to find her own whole self again:

> And actually, am not an asylum seeker, I'm a person who sought asylum. I am Blue-Ivy first. I am more than asylum seeker and literally people took time to know like I am more than my sexuality. I may be Blue-Ivy, I am a lesbian, I'm from Uganda, but I am Blue-Ivy who is a friend, who is more knowledgeable about other things. My sexuality and my seeking asylum do not to make all of me (Blue-Ivy, 133-141).

Blue-Ivy is pointing to the reductive nature of being-in-the-world as an asylum seeker in the UK, and the way in which her fellow activists helped her to unfurl her identity and take up more space as a whole person without compartmentalising herself. At a later point in the interview, she came back to this sentiment by adding: *"It's that being part of the group encourages you to be more empowered in your personal identity"* (263-264). Here, Blue-Ivy refers to the intersubjective space that is created through the act of meeting in public with other QTPOCRAS.

Arendt (1958), in her analysis of the private and public realms in the Greek Polis, discusses the politics of 'appearance' for the migrant, slave and

barbarian, who were excluded from public space: *"it is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men* [sic] *exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly"* (p.198). This explicit appearance-making is a form of resistance, of taking up space through daring to appear in public when ones status is relegated to the private domain as sub-citizen. Through appearing to others, one's body and existence cannot be denied, as theirs cannot be denied by appearing to you. Collective appearance therefore collects the space itself (Butler, 2011).

Caramelizcious noted the imperative to make spaces where there aren't any:

> I think everyone should have their space, they should be able to have their space, because we're already existing in the world, as I always say, if you can't find space create it, create your own space (97-100).

Here, Caramelizcious ties her entitlement to space to her very existence. She speaks about her being-in-the-world with a sense of defiance, as if her existence is the one thing that cannot be taken away from her. Creating space is her way of resisting, of placing her corporeality in focus as the physical evidence of her survival. She also speaks with dynamism, calling space-making into action for others who do not feel accommodated in already-established spaces. By meeting as a group and embodying the protest, the members are re-writing the parameters of the space allotted to them as queer and/or trans migrant bodies in a post-colonial context. As Moore (2013) observes, *"when bodies gather together in and claim space, publicly and collectively, they open up political possibilities for the future at the same time as oppose the politics of the present"* (p.16). This is the performative embodiment of political claim-making. In the next subordinate theme, 'Creating Safe Space', I will address the expressed need for QTPOC and QTPOCRAS-only spaces.

3.1b Creating Safe Space

This subordinate theme emerged so prominently from the transcript analysis that it could be further subcategorised into creating emotional safe spaces, and creating spaces that are physically safe for QTPOC in general and QTPOCRAS in particular.

Addressing the former, all participants described a sense of relief when they discovered the emotional safety that was created through the commonality of shared experience in the Leeds Group. Aditi describes the reciprocal support she received from other group members as making a *"huge difference"* (231) to her ability to cope with the asylum system. The camaraderie offered more to her sense of wellbeing than seeing a counsellor, through whom she only felt relief with when she was engaged in the counselling session:

> Like I said, I think the amount of help I get from (the Leeds Group) I didn't get it from (counsellor). (Counsellor) was, you know… was quite helpful like I said it was just when I was there. But with (the Leeds Group) I got to be myself and you know met people with similar situations and getting all the support and advice from some of my friends. So, all of that make a huge, huge difference and it contributes like really during the asylum process because there comes a time where I wasn't even thinking about asylum thing. I just think of okay (the Leeds Group), (the Leeds Group), and seeing friends, so I completely distracted my mind off the asylum process (231-244).

For Aditi, the peer support available through QTPOCRAS-only groups carries a different kind of emotional validation than seeking professional help from a counsellor, who could only intellectually understand Aditi's experiences. The specific subjectivity of a marginalised raced, queer, migrant identity was something that she felt like she could only receive form others who lived at this same location. Blue-Ivy also refers to the sense of isolation that was broken through connecting with other group members: *"First it makes you know that you're not alone, it's a brilliant thing"* (825-826).

As queer and/or trans people, we grow up knowing that we exist outside of a hetero-/gender-normative matrix (Butler, 1999). POC already face oppression in structurally racist institutions, and navigating everyday life can be further

isolating when the often 'hidden' marginalisation of queerness is layered on top. The term 'hidden' in this context refers to the ways in which queerness is frequently invisible to others, only socially digested when the queer person disrupts the heteronormative assumptions around them. Without 'coming out', heterosexuality and cisgenderism are the perceived status-quo, placing the weight of disclosure on the individual that transgresses these norms. Of course, this 'invisibility' could also be a relative privilege from the perspective of trans people who visible transgress cissexist gender norms, and have no option to hide their transness. For many queer/trans people, especially those who are also POC, this can feel isolating, and navigating this intersection exhausting (Crenshaw, 1989). Studies on the minority stress model (Brooks, 1981) suggest that peer support from other members in the minority group and the subsequent creation of a positive identity is one of the strongest factors contributing to resilience and wellbeing of sexual and gender minorities in general (Fingerhut, 2010; Kelleher, 2009; Lick et al., 2013; Meyer, 2003) and QTPOC in particular (Balsam, 2011; Bowleg, 2003, Cyrus, 2017; Meyer 2010).

The importance of strong relationships for people who have experienced acute or complex trauma has also been noted by clinicians working in recovery: *"Having a good support network constitutes the single most powerful protection against becoming traumatised"* (van der Kolk, 2014, p.210). Caramelizcious notes that engaging in activism has improved her relationships in general, and attributes this to the confidence gained from positive identity formation within the group:

> The relationships that I have with people is stronger, and I like the idea of this because I get to meet more people who are within my community, and we share success stories sometimes we have sad stories, but I look forward to the future of hearing a lot of success stories (266-270).

This optimism is one not frequently reported in mental health research, which tends to document POC or queer/trans communities in the context of (physical and) mental health deficits and disparities (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). During the course of these interviews, I felt the tensions between articulated pride and exhaustion, resistance and weariness, hopefulness and despair, alluding to the

grey space in between the dichotomy of trauma and resilience. However, when asked why safe QTPOC-only spaces were important for wellbeing, all participants responded with fervour, and spoke of experiences of racism, queer and/or transphobia, and anti-immigrant rhetoric they encountered within white-centric LGBTQ+ spaces.

> B.I: What it gives me is gaining family, there's nothing as isolating as being an LGBTQ asylum seeker in this country or maybe in other countries but this one is so isolating because you cannot fit in the same. No matter how much you go, it's not easy to get into the community, LGBT community in Leeds.
> J: Because it's racist?
> B.I: It is racist. I've been on the scene and I went into [gay club] and someone asked me "what are you doing here?". I wanted to visit [gay bar] just to be someone else, and somebody asked me "what are you doing?" And I said: "what do you think I'm doing here?" They said "It's a gay bar" and I said "I know!". So, the fact that even when it's… for example like this lesbian social group, they go there on such a day that everyone is interacting they say come on interact and you realise that no one is actually talking to you to that point where the leader of the group comes around but also because they know me, gives you the seal of approval. So that it doesn't make anyone suspicious. So, nobody sees you there other than some black bastard and it's as if you have to be white to be queer. But it doesn't make sense.
> J: Have there been places other than that group that you have felt visible as a queer black woman?
> B.I: Not unless it is with other QTPOC. So, you end up only when are with other people of colour.
> J: Only in the self-defined spaces.
> B.I: Yeah. Am I feel comfortable in the rest? No (Blue-Ivy, 270-304).

In the above excerpt, Blue-Ivy makes reference to several points that were echoed by other participants, which can be summarised as 'not belonging'. Not only is she frequently identified as being physically out of place in the space she occupies in predominantly white LGBTQ+ spaces, she feels excluded, as if she can't 'get in' to these spaces, and is rejected without the external validation of a white gatekeeper of that space. Nobody sees her for who she is, as a lesbian who has equal claim to a lesbian space. She is reduced to being a 'black bastard', an illegitimate body in a space where whiteness in compulsory. Outside of QTPOC spaces, Blue-Ivy feels like she has to manage monolithic identities – as there is only one way to embody queerness, and it is not whilst also embodying blackness. Through this embodied dialectic with the

space around her, Blue-Ivy only feels a sense of belonging with other QTPOC. This is reflective of Ahmed's (2006) understanding of queer bodies as being disorientated in a world that constructs its compass around heteronormativity. Adding to this disorientation is the racist post-colonial context of Brexit-Britain, which further dislocates POC and forced migrant subjectivity. This will be further explored in the next chapter, (Dis)Orientation.

Further disconnection from white queer spaces was expressed by Blue-Ivy in her frustration with the ways in which her credibility as a lesbian was assessed by the Home Office through her familiarity with Western queer culture:

> B.I: it's the kind of typical thing they come up with to being LGBTQ like I know my friend told me they asked her, like where are your tattoos? She is like what do you mean? I'm like does it mean all I watch is it Queer Eye?!
> J: Right [laughs]…Do you think that's because stereotypes are based on white queer culture? Do you think that's the cause?
> B.I: Yeah!! It's what they have in their heads of knowing everybody will go watch Queer Eye, Orange Is the New Black, yes, I've watched it but that's like 4 series ago.
> J: It wasn't very good [laughs].
> B.I: It was interesting then but then it got worse, things changed, basically, our lives are filled with more. We have real challenges to deal with them having money for a tattoo and I don't know. Maybe I don't like tattoos. Maybe I'm alive and that's enough for me that doesn't mean I have to know everything. Like they say name musicians I'm like, why? I don't enjoy music. So, it's damaging on mental health because it's something they have to live up to those stereotypes (450-481).

Home Office questioning around 'gay credibility' is well known to be culturally incompetent, homophobic, and often voyeuristic, violating even official internally-established guidelines - to the extent that an inquiry was carried out by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration following a leak of sexually-explicit questioning in 2014 (Vine, 2014). Whilst Blue-Ivy is relaying less invasive, violating questions than those reported by the independent inquiry, the harmful effects of these stereotypes on her mental health and sense of identity are noted. Being assessed by Eurocentric ideas of what it means to be queer compound the sense of 'not belonging' that QTPOCRAS experience, disorientated through being put on trial with Western LGBTQ+ culture as the

benchmark. The invalidation of not meeting this benchmark serves as a violation of the self. Frosch (2013), in his reading of psychoanalysis and post-colonial theory, notes that colonial power is located in *"The capacity of the coloniser to remove the source of subjecthood from the colonised"* (p.147). When Blue-Ivy asserts *"maybe I'm alive and that's enough for me"* (476-477), she is proclaiming that her existence and survival as a destitute Ugandan lesbian asylum seeker in the UK has been enough of a challenge to her life, without having to meet arbitrary, ill-informed and unfamiliar stereotypes to secure credibility and satisfy the Home Office. Her life is testament to her authenticity, and that should be enough.

Spaces centred on QTPOC representation and visibility become a safe refuge from the mainstream 'scene'. Every participant was asked about their perception of the importance of QTPOC spaces, though I sensed Aditi, Christina and Caramelizcious hesitated to speak freely about this, which I attributed to their attempt to take care of me in the conversation as a white woman. Blue-Ivy, however, drew attention to me on her own accord, and through 'calling out' my whiteness, was able to point to the dimorphic subjectivity between us:

> B.I: I think it's just a shame there are very few…we just get one Black Pride. Now Sheffield has come up, I'm like OK another Black Pride. It's a shame because I went to London Black Pride and I was like: where were all these lovely people?
> J: Right, in your life day-to-day.
> B.I: We never get to see them, so…
> J: Why is Black Pride important to you? Why is that space so important for you?
> B.I: Is very important especially when you're with people who are like you, you identify with… It's one thing to know you [points at J] but then you may never understand my struggles. Amazingly you may find whichever black family, maybe from Jamaica or Africa you will all know that mother [laughs], how that mother screams [laughs]. Like 'that' black woman, you know the…. you all know that reaction, you all know…. It's amazing (843-863).

Blue-Ivy's reaction reminded me that she was having a different experience in the interview than I was. We had connected at earlier points in the interview around experiences of homophobia and sexism that we could both relate to,

nodding, rolling our eyes and knowingly smiling at each other. This lulled me into a sense of ease with her, as if our roles of researcher and participant were shifting (Deutsch, 2004) to expose the ways in which our social positioning was shared: as lesbian women. This rapport set the tone of the rest of the conversation, which felt connected and flowed easily. Through rightly calling out my whiteness and putting me in my place as observer, the illusion of commonality and horizontal power-relations between us was dismantled, and I realised that I was wrongly trying to put her at ease through minimising our intersubjective differences, a habit that causes Blue-Ivy to only feel like her 'whole self' with other QTPOC in the first place.

In the above excerpt, Blue-Ivy also speaks to the joy of congregating with other QTPOC at events such as Black Pride, and the comfort of familiarity she shares with the *"lovely people"* she feels orientated around. Drawing on the archetypical black mother, she clutched her belly and laughed, this image resonating deeply with her. Though she lovingly refers to the punitive scream of this familiar woman, what she is alluding to is the universality of this mother, that only other POC can understand as their own. Being around other QTPOC is like being around siblings, sharing an inside joke about their parent. These designated spaces enable the growth of family relationships, which most QTPOCRAS have had to leave behind, or have been severed from.

3.1c Precarious space

The final subordinate theme to emerge under the overarching concept of 'Space' was one of a dichotomous relationship between QTPOCRAS activist spaces as safe, and the material and structural spaces that the participants inhabited outside of these groups as volatile and precarious.

Blue-Ivy, Caramelizcious and Christina all make explicit reference to the lack of agency they experience in their movement and residence as asylum seekers. Blue-Ivy describes the way her British partner observes her to be *"a prisoner"* (801) in Leeds, her movement restricted through needing to be available to

'sign' at Home Office at any time. Caramelizcious and Christina both make reference to their Home Office housing provider policing the way they move in and around their accommodation.

Caramelizcious describes having to lie to the Home Office and private security housing provider that she is still residing in the accommodation that she was sexually assaulted in, as she would otherwise be in violation of her housing contract. She feared that reporting the assault would lead to the refusal of her asylum claim. Christina makes reference to secretly spending time at another group member's accommodation, and having houseguests of her own even though this is forbidden by the housing provider. Foucault (1980), through the concept of 'biopower' explains the ways in which bodies become self-surveilling, self-policing and self-disciplining in the context of external institutional surveillance, policing and disciplining. The State asserts this control over its subjects in order to *"discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, extort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility, integrate it into systems of efficient and economic controls"* (1980, p.139). Whilst direct opposition to these housing restrictions would be entirely unsafe for the participants, who would face destitution if they did not abide by the rules of their housing contracts, gathering in these contested, policed spaces is a way of using the body in collective dissent (Moore, 2013).

Both Aditi and Caramelizcious reported experiencing queer/transphobia and racism in their Home Office accommodations. It was when talking about the violence in these homes that participants talked most explicitly about their negative mental health outcomes. Aditi recalls her housemates verbally attacking her after finding out that she attended the Leeds Group, and this being *"really, really, really tough"* on her wellbeing (448-449), eventually leading her to seek medical help and counselling after struggling with self harm and suicidality. Similarly, Caramelizcious was hospitalised for depression resulting from her housemate sexually assaulting her for being trans: *"I was hospitalised recently because I stayed in the house where it was getting me sick every single day because I keep having flashbacks"* (17-20).

In an analysis of community spaces inhabited by people experiencing mental health issues, McGrath & Reavey (2015) demonstrate that a secure, private space is germane to the sense of safety and wellbeing for people experiencing mental distress, from anxiety to PTSD. Participants in McGrath et al.'s (2008) study reported retreating to the safe haven of their homes after experiencing hostility in public spaces as a means to *"stabilise experiences of insecure bodily boundaries"* (McGrath & Reavey, 2015, p.116). Addressing the body after trauma, van der Kolk (2014) asserts that a grounded knowledge of the space that the body inhabits and the boundaries of that space are necessary to effectively self-regulate and regain a sense of safety.

Whilst Caramelizcious describes the toxic and violent environment of her accommodation as making her *"sick"* (19), Blue-Ivy spoke at length about the *"tortures"* of destitution (106). There are many reasons why asylum seekers – even those whose claims have not been refused by the Home Office – end up slipping through the gaps of accommodation support and end up destitute (Refugee Action, 2017). Blue-Ivy arrived in the UK as a minor and has spent the majority of the last 16 years destitute. For her, having no safe, fixed space has been the biggest challenge to her mental health:

> I mean you can be black and African to where it is a challenge and add LGBTQ is another challenge…and a woman. The thing is the most challenging thing about it is losing your accommodation (54-58).

Living at the intersection of race, forced migrancy, sexuality and gender, Blue-Ivy is already managing multiple levels of stress arising from multiple levels of discrimination. Comparing her experience of trauma in Uganda to her experience since being in the UK, she added, *"the trauma you live in the UK is every single day when you add destitution to it"* (168-169). Here, Blue-Ivy is pointing to the every day dialectic between the body, safety and (the lack of) space available to her. With no secure place to rest her body, Blue-Ivy has no structure from which to tether her sense of safety to. She has to relive the traumas she has experienced every day, as she cannot rest or find the locus from which to start healing. The precariousness of space was emergent as one

of the most salient challenges for the mental health and healing of the participants interviewed.

3.2 Superordinate theme 2: (Dis)orientation

Ahmed (2006), in her queer reimagination of phenomenological theory, describes orientation as the way in which we find our bearings in a world which changes shape, depending on which way we turn and which routes we choose. Our bodies are expected to move along certain socially organised lines, and if we choose not to, we find ourselves disorientated. Drawing back to Davis' queerly raced hermeneutic phenomenology, this means that sexualised, gendered and raced bodies, 'deviant' bodies, find themselves perpetually disorientated in the world, but simultaneously orientated towards one another as the *"familiar"* (Heidegger, 1973, p.144). Orientation, then, is *"a question not only about how we 'find our way', but how we come to "feel at home""* (Ahmed, 2006, p.7).

This chapter will explore the theme of (dis)orientation in QTPOCRAS subjectivity, drawing on the orientating function of community building, and the ironic safety achieved through exposing oneself as a 'deviant' body in queer/trans activism.

3.2a Estrangement and empathic re-orientation

A major theme that emerged out of the four interviews was one of feeling a total lack of agency in the geographical and material locations the participants had been 'put' in since being in the UK. Whether the Home Office had physically 'placed' them in unchosen and unfamiliar environments, or whether circumstance placed them into desperate situations, all participants expressed disorientation and a rejection of the 'homes' and locations that they found themselves in. Whilst the precariousness of these spaces was already discussed in the previous chapter, the sense of estrangement that participants reported in these assigned 'homes' is worthy of its own further analysis.

Migration in itself can be seen as a process of becoming estranged from the home space that the body once inhabited (Ahmed, 1999). Being dislocated from one's previous geographical anchor, one is subsequently disorientated when arriving in an unfamiliar place. According to Ahmed, all bodies have to arrive in the space they occupy – though attention is only drawn towards arriving migrant bodies, as non-migrant bodies are 'invisible' to the collective consciousness (2006). Similarly, Ahmed (2017), Alcoff (1999, 2015), and Fanon (1963) are amongst many who have noted that through coloniality, the white body is unmarked, and does not call attention to itself, as its environment has organised itself to be white and unmarked in accordance. It is therefore only 'deviant' bodies that disrupt the white, gender-and heteronormative order of the social landscape who are noticed as being disorientated.

For Caramelizcious, being *"placed"* (142) in a transphobic, anti-black environment denied her any sense of agency, or claim to the house that was supposed to be hers. In a home that rejected and violated her for being a black trans person, she was estranged even from other 'out of place' migrant bodies she shared a space with:

> Since that I've been here I've been housed with Middle Eastern guys, even though I identify as trans they still placed me in a house with men, and with the… the experience I had there was very horrible, they tried to call me names, the guy was even racist he was telling me that I am black. I should get out his house (7-11).

For Ahmed (2006), orientation is about making the strange 'familiar' through the embodied expansion into space. If the destination is hostile and makes room for certain normative bodies and not for other deviant ones, the body cannot expand into its new home, leaving its owner feeling *"'out of place' where they have been given 'a place'"* (p.12). Metaphors of the peripheral are frequently invoked by psychologists contemplating the corporal effects of discrimination. Prosser (2003), describing *"skin memories"* (p.54), invokes the idea of skin as the canvas for the body's autobiography: *"it is the phenomenological function of skin to record"* (p.54). In 'Black Skin, White

Masks', Fanon (1986) presents the '*schéma épidermique racial*' – the epidermal racial schema, the chronicle of the white gaze and its violent wield on the black body. Nayak (2015), makes reference to the skin as permeable to the psyche by external violence: *"racist, homophobic, patriarchal, subordinating power structures that appear as external get under the skin, into the psyche"*. Similarly, Ahmed's imagining of skin documents the homes left behind, and the homes one migrates into. Spaces impress on bodies – the material texture and quality of new spaces *"reshape the body surface"* (p.9), a skin that is both individual and social. Migration involves *"reinhabiting the skin"* (p.9) – or stretching the skin as we inhabit new spaces. Discomfort and disorientation is experienced when the skin's memory fails to make sense of the place it has arrived in (Ahmed, 1999).

Blue-Ivy describes how 'out of place' her body is in the location it inhabits, as both literally and figuratively homeless: *"They say, oh you don't belong anywhere. You don't belong to Uganda neither do you belong to England, so you're the lost nation. It will be like oh those are the lost people"* (400-403). Blue-Ivy is referring to the fact that she has been in the UK for 16 years, having arrived as a minor, herself only 16 at the time. Her overarching message in the above extract is one of yearning for a place to belong, recognising she is 'othered' in both her origin and the destination she currently inhabits, unwelcome in both. She describes feeling disorientated and rejected attending church with the Ugandan community in Leeds, as they only welcome her *"to pray the gay away"* (98), but do not extend their invitation to their homes for fear that she will contaminate the environment: *"as if its catching"* (69). Similarly, her lesbian, black, and African subjectivity is denied and invalidated in the UK, as has been elaborated on in the previous chapter.

Blue-Ivy's description of herself as being a member of 'the lost nation' warrants further analysis with regard to citizenship and belonging on the collective and individual level, especially in the context of seeking asylum in Brexit-Britain. However, in order to return to the research question, and the ways in which activism and community organising impact on QTPOCRAS' sense of wellbeing, what peaked my attention in the interview was her pointing to the plurality of

'the lost people' that she is a part of. She makes reference to the fact that she is not alone in this category of 'otherness', of disoriented bodies. In her reflection on belonging and estrangement, Ahmed (1999) describes that 'lost people' gravitate towards one another, creating common bonds around *"not being at home"* (p.336) and the shared heritage of *"lacking a home rather than sharing a home"* (p.337), creating a community of strangers, oriented towards one another. For the participants of this study, being a member of a QTPOCRAS community group was described as *"a turning point"* (Aditi, 84); and a place to come to be *"pointed in the right direction"* (Blue-Ivy, 254), orientating towards the familiar and acting as emotional landmarks: *"basically you find out they are the only people you know"* (Blue-Ivy, 497-498). Christina felt alone and isolated before being able to orientate herself through locating others:

> Well I think it has a positive effect because before I started going to groups I was like on my own. I was in a new city, I didn't know anybody, I had no friends around then I started making friends (141-144).

What emerged most homogenously across all four participants was their revelation that being part of this community group gave them a heightened – or even new – sense of empathy and compassion towards others. Initially, this was articulated through stating that the Leeds Group provided a space where participants could feel understood by one another, possessing commonality which made them realise they were not alone in their experiences:

> And yes being in a community is like belonging, you'll have like people to have your back, people who probably went through the same thing that you went through you'll hear like different stories so I like being in a group, I think like in a group it's good for me (Caramelizcious, 173-177).

The solidarity felt by Caramelizcious here is echoed by Aditi, who adds that being able to have the performative function of orientating others who are *"lost"* was actually beneficial to her self-esteem and sense of wellbeing:

> J: community activism…What does it mean to you to be a member of that group?
> A: It means a lot because in a way it helps you meet like people you know socialise and people you have similar issues or problems, right?

> And in a way that you got the chance to express yourself and help others too who are in need that they don't know or seem lost. So, it's kind of… it was kind of helpful for me. I was able to get help and help others too (89-98).

The reciprocal comfort offered between re-orientated bodies allows for the estrangement to be reworked *"as a site of bodily transformation"* (Ahmed, 1999, p.344), allowing subjectivity to be rooted through gestures of friendship and familiarity. Aditi confirms this with a later comment: *"It was more like a family afterwards, so, it's just not like okay just leave, it's like kind of more family thing"* (106-108).

Literature on the importance of 'chosen family' formation amongst lesbian and gay people is longstanding and well established (Clarke, Ellis, Peel, & Riggs, 2010). Chosen families function as substitute support structures for queer people, often ostracised by 'family of origin' (Israel, 2005). What this research, with its primary locus in the 1980s, largely fails to account for are the experiences of bisexual or trans people, the intersectional experiences of QTPOC, or the trans-national loss of 'family of origin' support and added isolation of RAS subjectivity. The creation of familial bonds inside the QTPOCRAS community group was therefore described as intense, the intersubjective space becoming so tight between some members that the communal becomes personal, and the 'loss' of a member to detention or deportation feels as traumatic as a family separation. Blue-Ivy describes the pain she experienced when the Home Office 'came for' a fellow group member:

> B.I: That was too much, it was home.
> J: Mmm
> B.I: It was going to my own home.
> J: Yeah…
> B.I: Too close. So, that you can't keep the vulnerability out, whether you like it or not because if they take her, it as if they've taking you. When you allow them to take one person and you say well maybe that's okay but then what happens to the other one? Then they keep coming back for more (725-739).

Here, Blue-Ivy is making sense of the cost of the intimate relationships that she has acquired. Through reaching out through space, orientating herself to other

'lost' bodies, family and community is created, and she is re-orientated. The empathy and subsequent sense of self-worth that is developed through reciprocal comfort-giving also has potentially painful consequences. Through finding safety and home in one another, the sense of personal loss is even more salient when the other is 'taken away', once again threatening home.

3.2b Activism as ironic safety

The second subordinate theme to emerge under a the overarching theme of becoming orientated was that of activism being a calculated risk for the participants, who could not choose to become less visible as queer/trans people once engaged in public organising. The irony of claiming asylum in Britain because of discrimination faced in countries of origin based on colonial laws has already been noted in chapter 1. What is a further irony, is that the Home Office expects asylum seekers claiming on the grounds of SO/GI to confirm their queer/transness by becoming visible ambassadors for the rights of sexual and gender minorities in their homelands. By performing in this way, however, QTPOCRAS put themselves in much greater danger should their claims be refused and face deportation to nations which now identify them as activists. In this way, one must choose to put oneself at enormous risk with the hopes that it will lead to a greater safety, and is therefore an ironic position to be 'placed' into, having to orientate towards the unknown.

> You know, it's kind of a requirement because even it's weird that some people don't need that. You have to be strong enough to deal with it. Because there are people who are like okay I cannot do that, I cannot come out yet the home office requires people to the asylum process to say which groups do you belong to. So, that is the thing that they do not consider people depending on their character - people have to be other different people (Blue-Ivy, 436-443).

In the above extract, Blue-Ivy is pointing to the forcible outing of QTPOCRAS through Home Office criteria of what constitutes a valid and credible queer and/or trans person who is seeking safety in the UK. Many members of the Leeds Group are not 'out' outside of the confines of the safe space they inhabit with one another, and choose not to engage in events or protests where their

visibility would be noted. This may be because they rely on accommodation or sustenance from other communities who would reject them if they disrupted their gender-and heteronormative assumptions. By referring to the pressure on people *"to be other different people"*, she means that the Home Office requires all asylum seekers, regardless of their personality, to be vocal leaders against the struggles they experienced in their homelands. She further describes the pressure she is under to locate herself at the forefront of a movement, as it is a Home Office *"requirement"*:

> In one way it places you in danger more although it seems like that's what they require and basically, its as if they require that for them to even consider you to be an asylum seeker which is kind of scary (14-18).

This exposure not only put Blue-Ivy at risk in Uganda, where her visibility as a lesbian activist in the UK was noted on social media, but also 'outed' her amongst her Ugandan community in Leeds, disorientating her from those that she initially tried to form a sense of 'home' around. Coming to the front of the movement in the UK places her in more danger than she was living as a lesbian in Uganda, where she is seen as a traitor:

> B.I: What I mean is that for example every person they think they have a right to feast on your life.
> J: To feast on your life.
> B.I: Yeah. For example, you see the photos of being on pride or anything and you're going to get them on Facebook of the groups they know. And then they'll write everything, today they can say oh, this is who are the people sponsoring pride, these are the terrorists. Why are they terrorists? They are teaching our children homosexuality. So, you are all those, you have to deal with the fact that you'll never be viewed positively no matter what good you do to you are just something that has to be hidden away. And when now you come to the top you are nothing but evil, to the front you're nothing but evil in all ways (405-422).

Through the powerful metaphor of other's entitlement to *'"feast on her life"*, Blue-Ivy illustrates that choosing to be visible as an activist opened her up for public consumption. She is unable to control the boundaries of her privacy, as she has chosen to fight the pressures to stay hidden and silent. By becoming a recognisable queer organiser, she is *"nothing but evil"* to the Ugandan community, her identity lost to the gagging label of *"terrorist"*.

Caramelizcious also draws on the notion of speaking as dangerous, but silence is, for her, deadly:

> It can kill you, it's very toxic it can kill you, because sometimes... you can even get sleepless nights it can lead you to stress depression because it's always on your mind, you try to put it in your subconscious but sometimes it just comes back up, it's very bad (Caramelizcious, 241-245).

Lorde (1984), in her speech *'Transforming Silence into Language and Action'*, calls on the audience to speak their truth in the face of fear, because when it comes to annihilation, *"your silence will not protect you"* (p.41). For Lorde - as a feminist, Black, lesbian poet - it is silence, not death, that is the ultimate choking device. Caramelizcious calls on fellow QTPOCRAS to disrupt the toxicity of silence, as it will fester in the subconscious and *"kill you"*. Caramelizcious is speaking in concurrence with Lorde, that she has nothing left to lose but her voice itself. Voice is often linked to notions of agency and empowerment in feminist scholarship (Parpart, 2013), but is often considered as such within a neo-liberal frame of reference, not taking intersectional subjectivities into account. For a white British woman to attend an organised, publicised women's march to protest sexual harassment in London may have quite different consequences than a QTPOCRAS person using their voice to report sexual assault in a home that is not their own. However, whilst an increase in visibility and a subsequent decrease in safety was noted, participants shared that this was a risk they had no option to take, due to the psychological consequences of remaining hidden and accepting permanent disorientation.

3.3 Superordinate theme 3: Purpose

Purpose emerged as a pattern of meaning-making across the interview process. Overall, participants reported an increased sense of purpose since engaging in QTPOCRAS organising, expressing this as an appreciation of self-discovery, and an acquired sense of life's meaning. However, the final

subordinate theme to emerge was one of 'Burnout', the principle expressed toll of engaging in meaningful work.

3.3a Self discovery & reconciliation of identity

Aditi, Blue-Ivy and Caramelizcious all expressed a deepened sense of faith or spirituality gained from accessing QTPOCRAS networks, as practically, these networks were able to refer the participants to queer/trans affirming places of worship.

> Like the Imam said, we just leave it to God; you know we just live to love. That's all that matters, no one has any right to judge someone. That's how I've managed to live since then and I constantly pray, like I pray to God you know…And seeing other Muslim friends of mine going through, I said okay I'm not alone. Like they said the same thing so what's to worry about? There is nothing to worry about (Aditi, 398-408).

Through attending an affirming mosque, Aditi was able to reconcile her religion and her sexual orientation, and no longer felt the need to compartmentalise herself. She evaluates this experience as deepening her faith and helping her to create a positive 'whole' identity as a bisexual, African woman. In this way, QTPOCRAS solidarity and internal support structures provide a critical departure from colonial thinking around homonationalism and the West's racial 'other' (Puar, 2007) in its concept of queer and transphobia in faith communities, with white, secular culture as the only beacon of acceptance. This imbues the colonial subject and its religion with notions of backwardness, under-development and ethical primordialism, contrasted with the moral superiority occupied by the 'diverse' and 'tolerant' West.

Similarly, Blue-Ivy describes orientating towards an affirming church in Leeds as being *"more than good"* for her sense of spirituality (774). Similarly to Aditi, Blue-Ivy realised through the Leeds Group telling her about a queer-affirming church that her lesbian, African subjectivity was valid and whole, and she did not need to 'cover' any part of herself in her faith practice:

So, there's nothing I've got to reconcile – my faith and my sexuality. So basically, I don't need to pray anything away (Blue-Ivy, 776-780).

What both Aditi and Blue-Ivy both draw on with the above excerpts is arriving at a place of acceptance – a material space – and this enabling internal acceptance to take place. Both women feel safe to reconcile parts of themselves they previously felt under pressure to cover. Yoshino (2007) describes the felt need to cover aspects of one's socially undesirable identity as a hidden assault, and the *"civil rights issue of our time"* (p.23). Covering, rather than 'passing' or 'hiding' is essentially the response to microaggressive calls for assimilation, being queer without 'flaunting', being Asian without being 'too ethnic', being Muslim but 'Western'. These cultural pressures go largely unsaid, but reward or punishment is felt by the marginalised body through inclusion or exclusion of public space. The debate on multiculturalism and diversity positions migrants as an impediment to social cohesion through their failure to integrate, their ways of life as threatening superior Western ideals (Anthias, 2012). For Aditi and Blue-Ivy, their religious, sexualised, raced and asylum seeker subjectivities are intersectional in a way that one compartment of their identities was always covered before attending the Leeds Group, meeting other queer/trans people of faith, and learning that there is a seat for their whole selves at the table.

Aditi remarks that this catalyst for self-acceptance had positive effects on her psychological wellbeing:

It really boosted my kind of confidence and yeah it makes me believe in who I am and that I can do or be whoever I wanted to be, yeah and live my life fully (330-334).

This discovered sense of an irreducible, whole self echoes the statements analysed under the theme of 'Space'. Fanon (1963) refers to the growth of his black consciousness as the realisation that his subjectivity is whole and enough, rejecting the colonial gaze of the black subject as underdeveloped: *"I am not the potentiality of something. I am wholly what I am...my Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It is. It is its own follower"* (p.135). In a quantitative study investigating the effects of activism on

psychological wellbeing, Klar and Kasser (2009) found that high-risk activism did not correlate positively with wellbeing of participants, but did correlate strongly with higher self-actualisation, defined in the study as *"the discovery of the real self, and its expression and development"* (p.760).

Blue-Ivy and Christina discussed the self-educational aspect of being a member of a QTPOCRAS organising group. Leaving their countries of origin, where stepping outside of the hetero- and cissexist social milieu was restricted, they explained that conversations around self-identity and the spectrum of SO/GI were inaccessible. Being a member of a queer/trans group with other POC, however, enabled them to discover aspects of themselves and their wider communities that they had previously not had access to:

> The Leeds Group empowers you. You're able to - it empowers you, you gain knowledge because even if you're in the spectrum you do not know about everything and everyone (Blue-Ivy, 205-209).

> That's how I discovered that I am non-binary because they explained…I use male and female pronouns at any given time so they were like, oh you're non-binary then. Yeah that was major because we don't really have any support groups back home or anywhere where they explain things to you and educate you on things like that (Christina, 128-139).

Learning about themselves in the context of others and having access to information about the LGBTQ+ continuum was helpful for these group members, both in terms of empowering their own self-identities but also meeting and learning about other people who defied gender and sexual normativities. This acquisition of a language to speak of one's own and other's queer/trans subjectivities is what Fox & Ralston (2016) term *"social learning"*, whereby members receive positive *"vicarious reinforcement"* of their own identities (p.638). In this way, engaging in activism furthered participants' self-discovery and reconciliation of identity.

The third and final pattern of meaning-making to emerge under the overarching theme of self-development is that of a new vision for the future, with an appreciation of personal strength acquired through QTPOCRAS activism:

> It gives hope. It gives you that something to hang on to. It's an anchor for most of us would have given up more than a few times. So, I have found out that through that I'm able to sustain myself more (Blue-Ivy, 589-593).

Through engaging with the support offered by other group members, Blue-Ivy has an *"anchor"* from which to build and develop her own sense of strength and confidence. The community acts as a secure object of attachment, from which she can explore her subjectivity and increased self-efficacy. This self-development was expressed by Caramelizcious in a slightly different way, who viewed the safe space of the group as the opportunity to capacity-build and skill-share:

> We have like meetings where we sit and talk and we get to know each other, sometimes they do like the pros and cons of protesting, yes pros and cons of protesting like especially I really want to protest on housing for the LGBT community, which I have such - I've grown such strength just to face this (182-187).

Through engaging with QTPOCRAS activist groups, Caramelizcious has been able to gain the strength to fight against the injustices of transphobia and gender-based violence she herself experienced in asylum accommodation. The collective strength of her fellow activists has bolstered her own strength in the vision of her activist future. In this way, she has gained a sense of purpose from her traumatic experiences. The next subtheme, 'Fighting for the voiceless', will elaborate on this sentiment.

3.3b Fighting for the voiceless

The most prominent sentiment to emerge under the theme of Purpose was the acquired vision for activist futures, and the imperative and duty felt to fight for the queer/trans community members that participants had left in their countries of origin. Whilst Caramelizcious outlined her intentions to fight for the rights of QTPOCRAS to access safe housing in the UK, Aditi, Blue-Ivy and Christina located their intentions 'back home'. Puar (2007) notes the imperialistic and neo-colonial nature of the Western attempt to liberalise its former colonies'

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treatment of sexual and gender minorities – an uncomfortable irony since forms of queer and transness were commonplace in much of the world until colonial forces pathologised and subjugated them (Murray & Roscoe, 1998). QTPOCRAS living in the West with an interest in international LGBTQ+ rights attainment therefore find themselves at an awkward nexus – critical of their previous government's treatment of queer and trans people, but unwilling to further the narrative of the West's 'backwards' and 'primitive' racial other.

Christina delivers a powerful motive to make things better for her community members in Trinidad & Tobago:

> I feel a lot safer. And I want all my friends I left behind experience the same thing. So, I try my best to volunteer with different groups and do as much as I could. It may not be much but I can still make a difference…my main focus is to change things back home so it could be safe and if I ever decided you know when I want to return, I know that I'm safe (77-94).

Christina feels safer to express herself freely as a gay non-binary person since arriving in the UK, and is aware that the friends she 'left behind' do not experience this same liberty. She spoke of 'back home' with a sense of survivor's guilt, owing her fight to those she left behind as if indebted to them. Lorde (1984) famously wrote *"I am not free while any woman is unfree"* (p.132); calling on other feminists to take up the fight for other subjugated bodies, even if their marginalised subjectivities are different to her own. Christina's reference to possibly returning home rests on the work she feels she must engage in whilst she is in the UK, in a relatively safer position to wield her voice. Her sense of duty to make a difference gives her a feeling of purpose, a sentiment echoed by Blue-Ivy:

> It gives hope that you stand up for other people, it's great to stand up for other people especially those who cannot especially from countries like Uganda. People who are detained over minor issues basically there is no human rights so it's great to fight for them.
> J: When you say fighting for people you mean fighting for people back home?
> B.I: Yeah, who are voiceless more than anything else. It's everybody who should fight for them because the minute they stand up for themselves they are thrown in jail. At least somebody has to show them

that we exist. For example, our parliament introduce like a anti-homosexuality bill, so literally if you do not fight now, you are laying the ground to take back the movement, the LGBT movement, the LGBT movement for example in Uganda like 20 years back. So, you can either stand here and fight while in safety and fight for those people who cannot fight or you just all disappear again (18-40).

Blue-Ivy is noting the duty placed upon her to fight for those *"who are voiceless"* as she is in a position of relative safety to do so. She references the collective responsibility we should all feel to use our voice in order to protect the activist movements in Uganda, where organisers face imprisonment and the LGBT movement faces disappearance. It is striking that Blue-Ivy and Christina both describe feeling safe enough in the UK as QTPOCRAS to fight for their community members in their respective countries of origin, when the theme of safety in the UK does not appear anywhere else in their narratives. When discussing QTPOCRAS activism at all other points of the interview, the participants were referring to the collective organising around the treatment of asylum seekers in the UK, the perils of inadequate and unsafe accommodation, and the Home Office's queer-and transphobic treatment of their sexualised and gendered subjectivities. These were felt to be precarious activities. When speaking about the collective action involved in homeland activism (Banki, 2013), however, participants spoke with more confidence about their relative privileged positionalities. Blue-Ivy feels the weight of responsibility to engage in homeland activism at the threat of setting the queer/trans movement in Uganda back, and allowing for the silencing the lived experiences of those she feels to represent transnationally.

Blue-Ivy also refers to her decision to engage in visible QTPOCRAS activism as an act of defiance against the racist, queerphobic and anti-migrant forces that seek to erase her:

When I have this, when I go for that activism it's me saying this is it, you abused me but I'm still here, no matter what. It's like I'm smiling in the face of all adversity, all the challenges. So, that's what I like about it most (626-629).

Blue-Ivy is bold in her disobedience, and her resistance to annihilation. Fanon (1963), in his chronicling the psychological degradation inflicted by colonial imperialism, notes the resistant native to possess a state of mind expressed as *"fearlessness and an ancestral pride",* refusing to compromise, reminiscent of a *"proud, poverty-stricken adolescent"* (p.81), determined to have the last word. Blue-Ivy is empowered to smile in the face of her abuser, of the systemic violence that she faces through her embodiment of social undesirability. The humour with which she makes this statement alludes to having nothing left to lose but her voice. Her voice, then, becomes her most powerful weapon. This personal defiance feeds into the collective for other, more timid group members to draw from. Aditi notes that her strength to fight is drawn from others:

> Has it made a difference with my own strength? It does because maybe alone I couldn't stand up but with other people I can actually be moved, I'm not a lone wolf to speak up. So, once or twice I've been just speaking up and pushing but inspired by others (Aditi, 638-643).

Through locating her voice in harmony with others, Aditi is able to discovery her power. She attributes her strength to speak up to being inspired by her fellow activists, who allow her a sense of refuge in numbers. Her body is structured and moved to fight through the scaffolding of collective voice. Ahmed (2017) notes the inherent dynamism in a collective. It is a space within which the body moves, creates action *"like ripples in water...each movement making another possible"* (p.3), this active movement of the body *"the collective joy of dissent"* (p.249). In this way, Aditi not only found her own voice, but feels powerful enough to *"push"* for the voices of others who cannot be heard. Blue-Ivy spoke similarly about the action potential she realised through finding QTPOCRAS activism:

> Basically, you have something to live for, scream, shout for, fight for and umm [pause] gives you a semblance of self-worth of all that has made you - dehumanise you, everything - but at least you're fighting for people like yourself wherever they are, you're able reach out. If you can you're able to make that difference in the world (830-836).

Blue-Ivy's comment about finding self-worth after dehumanisation speak to the sense of meaning she has located in her suffering. Frankl (1985), in his memoir as a psychiatrist, Auschwitz survivor, and founder of the doctrine of 'logotherapy', attributes the will for survival to the search for meaning. Developed from Nietzsche's maxim *'he who has a will to live for can bear almost any how',* Frankl's logotherpay asserts *"man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life"* (p.117). Resisting the depersonalisation of racism (Lorde, 1984), the pathologisation of sexuality, the colonisation of the African subject and the exploitation of the female body, Blue-Ivy is 'screaming', 'shouting' and 'fighting' for something that locates purpose in her survival. This purpose affords her a sense of self-worth in a post-colonial, racist, heteronormative context that makes every effort to erase her.

3.3c Burnout

The final subordinate theme to emerge in this analysis is one of burnout as the emotional cost of finding purpose in activism. Grassroots organising can lead to members of organising circles feeling psychologically fatigued by the relentless experience of 'fire fighting' (Gorski & Chen, 2015). With little or no resources other than time, body and voice, individuals engaged in QTPOCRAS activism, whilst coping with the constant pressures of their own intersectionally marginalised subjectivities, can find the unrelenting urgency of their work to be detrimental to their psychological wellbeing. Blue-Ivy was the only participant who spoke at length about the draining effects of being at the forefront of the Leeds Group. As one of the more gregarious participants, I interpreted this as being associated with other's perception of her as a constant 'fighter', someone who was strong enough to hold other members through their own exhaustion. Whilst she expressed this position gave her a sense of purpose, she asked rhetorically *"so it's great to fight for them but who fights for you as a person?"* (122-123).

She further alludes to her matriarchal positioning in the group as leading to the transfer of responsibility onto her, and a sense that other's self-efficacy is reduced in her presence:

> People have problems but you realise at times it's also not good for your own mental health. Some people assume that because you have this facade of being brave you deal with things differently. But then you find people have very different mental health issues. As some of us will cover them up well others don't. But then you realise that others, you may be trying to help someone while they are also piling everything on you. Like someone goes, can you help me with this? Can you do this? I'm like you really can look that up on the internet but then somebody just puts that responsibility on you, just dumps it on you…So, to me as well as it lifts up it also drains. Sometimes it's good to be helpful but then you realise some people are discarding their own responsibility. Okay, because you want to help someone because you know they are having problems, they're not coping, but everybody's not coping, everybody has issues that at times you cannot share with everybody else (341-360).

Blue-Ivy's description of the emotional labour that she has to perform whilst being *"dumped"* on by others who identify her as leader is a source of psychological exhaustion. Studies by Zapf (2002) show a positive correlation between emotional labour performed and burnout in situations of low reciprocity. Furthermore, Gorski & Chen (2015) identified deterioration of psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing, and disillusionment and hopelessness as consequences of activist burnout.

As a woman of colour, Blue-Ivy's experiences of emotional labour must be placed within the context of gendered, racialised expectations (Mirchandani, 2003). Research interrogating a 'Superwoman Schema' (Woods-Giscombé, 2010), 'Sisteralla Complex' (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) and 'Sojourner Truth Syndrome' (Mullings, 2006) explore the attempts to capture the multidimensionality of African American womanhood, with specific reference to the intersectionally raced and gendered expectations placed upon black women to perform care and emotional labour in family and community settings. The overarching similarity between these paradigms is the expectation of black women to embody innate pillars of strength whilst 'holding' the care-giving of

others, simultaneously navigating the pressures of their own intersectional oppression. Studies exploring the psychosomatic consequences of these lived experiences attribute lower life expectancy, and chronic stress related health disparities such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease to meeting the demands of these multi-caregiver roles (Belgrave & Adams, 2016; Donovan & West, 2014; Sullivan, 2013; Woods-Giscombé, 2010; Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010)

Blue-Ivy identifies that her positioning in the group as a strong leader performs the dual role of lifting her up as well as weighing her down. Whilst noting the burden of responsibility she feels to carry her fellow activists, she simultaneously acknowledges the ways in which accepting this identity has opened her emotionally, and has contributed to her own healing process:

> Because of my personality I am - I come across as a leader but that maybe you know [pause]. That's a burden, that's a burden, that's weighing me down. But yeah, maybe through opening up kind of, yeah eventually I'm there I open up and it helped with the healing process (658-662).

In the above excerpt, Blue-Ivy alludes to the messy, complex and unsanitised lived experience of engaging in the group dynamic, especially with others who experience their own mental health difficulties through their embodiment of marginalisation. QTPOCRAS activist spaces are emotional ones, where participant's experience pride and frustration, healing and exhaustion, and become sites of purpose and burnout.

4: Conclusion

4.1 Limitations and future directions

There are a number of limitations in this study that ought to be considered for the sake of transparency and to improve future research. Notably, due to time constraints and simple misunderstanding between myself and the gatekeeper of the 'Manchester Group', the recruitment for participants ended up taking place in a different branch of the same organisation, but quite 'close to home' – in a group that I had co-founded and therefore had strong previous involvement with. Even though measures were taken to reduce the likelihood of my relationship with group members influencing their decision to take part in this research, ethical lines would have been clearer cut if recruitment has taken place on more objective territory. Furthermore, whilst attempts were made to conduct the interviews in the group's usual meeting space to increase participant's comfort, this was also not possible due to time constraints, and a meeting room was hired in central Leeds instead.

Whilst phenomenology is an excellent lens through which to analyse complex themes, the sample size recommended in its utility does limit the generalisability of findings. Due to Davis' queerly raced hermeneutic phenomenology being an innovative methodology, her work was the only point of reference I had for utilising this novel approach. As this school of analysis gains traction and is further proliferated, it will be less challenging for future scholars to apply to their work. On reflection, using Tedeschi & Calhoun's (2004) scale items to inform the interview schedule made some of the interviews less phenomenological in nature, as participants were prompted to talk about certain specific aspects of their psychological wellbeing rather than only sharing what was meaningful for them under the broader subject of wellbeing. Future scholars with larger capacity could approach this research question with a mixed methods design for a holistic and rigorous understanding of this topic.

As noted in the analysis, this study could have benefited from having the scope to pursue two research questions: the first exploring the effect of claiming asylum on the psychological wellbeing of QTPOCRAS to establish baseline data, and the second to explore how engaging in activism plays a mediating role in psychological wellbeing. In answering either question in the future, participants should include QTPOCRAS in immigration detention, whose voices are very rarely captured in British RAS research. It would also be interesting to replicate the design of this research with multiple small samples and focus groups across QTPOCRAS networks in the UK to generate a picture of the different experiences of activism in rural and urban environments.

4.2 Concluding comments

This dissertation has sought to answer the question 'what are the effects of activism on the psychological wellbeing of QTPOCRAS?'. Through Davis' queerly raced hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, it emerged that activism can play a pivotal, life-affirming role in QTPOCRAS' lived experiences. Participant's expressed being empowered by collective action, and feeling emotionally and physically safe in QTPOCRAS designated spaces, as contrasted with the precarious and hostile spaces they inhabited outside of their activist circle. Using Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation, I have argued that the multiple intersecting identities that the participants embody as raced, queer and/or trans forced migrants places them in disorientated social nexus. As such, the intersubjective, empathetic connections forged through QTPOCRAS activism re-orientates their being-in-the-world. At the same time, the costs of the felt benefits of taking up space and reorienting are not insignificant, and place them in greater physical danger.

For the participants involved in this study, however, the sense of purpose gained through self-discovery and fighting for their 'voiceless' community members sat alongside the burnout they experienced through engaging in this work. Though limited through the remits of this dissertation, I have attempted to present a 'whole' picture of the experiences of QTPOCRAS engaging in activism; their vulnerabilities, resiliencies, psychological growth and all of the

grey shades in between. Audre Lorde aptly captured this sentiment in her writing: *"I am not just a casualty, I am also a warrior"* (p.41).

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