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**AFTER THE UK 2024 RIOTS: RADICAL CARE ON AN  
'ISLAND OF STRANGERS'**

A Research Paper presented by:

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## **Abstract**

In August 2024, a wave of extremist right-wing violence swept across the UK, targeting Muslim, migrant, and minority ethnic communities. This frightening moment symbolised wider tensions in the contemporary British landscape: polarising debates on immigration, race and class, the long-term impacts of neoliberal austerity politics, and the continued dehumanisation of minority communities. As the Labour government introduce harsher migration controls and far-right protesters continue to occupy the streets, affected communities must continue to live with the lingering fear that such violence could erupt again at any moment.

Through the lens of radical care, this research centres the experiences of those affected by the riots, exploring how those neglected by the state continue to resist, survive and thrive. Radical care understands relational practices of caring as essential for political reimagining and social transformation. Radical care exposes how marginalised communities mobilise to fill the gaps where the state has failed or actively reproduces histories of violence and trauma. Rooted in local communities and non-hierarchical collective action, radical care challenges neoliberal individualism and austerity politics.

Starting with individual and collective experiences of the 2024 UK riots, this research goes beyond, to explore how practices and structures of radical care are necessary for surviving on this ‘island of strangers’ and can imagine new possibilities for wider transformation.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

This research offers a vital contribution to Development Studies by centring radical care as a critical social and political practice within contexts of ongoing structural violences and trauma. By situating the riots within a continuum of colonial, neoliberal, capitalist, patriarchal hierarchies, it exposes the concerns of social, political and economic development within the global North. This is vital academic exploration within the current global wave of far-right populism and anti-migrant rhetoric.

Furthermore, by drawing from conflict and peacebuilding studies, feminist political economy, human geography, postcolonial theory and social theory, this research presents a holistic understanding that fills a significant gap in academic literature. Aligning with feminist and decolonial approaches, this research emphasises social relations, moves away from damage-centred research on marginalised communities, and foregrounds the politics of care, survival, and resistance.

## **Keywords**

radical care; riots; United Kingdom; anti-migrant; structural violence; trauma

# Acknowledgements

To all the friends, family, teachers, comrades and strangers who inspire me every day – who are doing beautiful things, making the world a little less miserable and showing that they care.

\* \* \*

Many of the poems I have written have been about Brixton, Handsworth, Bradford and such places. These are places where I spend a lot of my time, and these are places that hit the headlines in the summer of 1981.

I have wrote poems about these places because the riots to me were the fulfilment of a prophecy by Marcus Garvey.

The prophecy is simple: when there are many hungry and many without food, many in bad housing, then an uprising is bound to come.

The way I see it, the youths have feelings and emotions [...] the police force cannot deal with these feelings and emotions.

So now I use my pen to bring out my anger.

— *Benjamin Zephaniah (1958-2023)*

\* \* \*

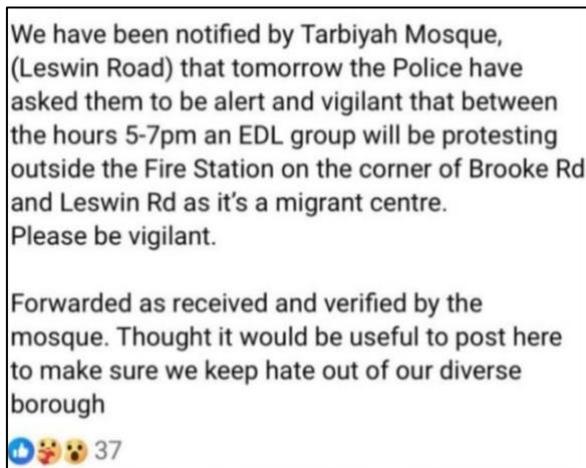
Lower your expectations accordingly. There will be no blueprint for the coming revolution here. If I possessed such a thing I would not be wasting my time in the lonely work of scholarship.

— *Gargi Bhattacharya*

# 1. Introduction

*WARNING: A FAR-RIGHT RIOT IS BEING PLANNED FOR WALTHAMSTOW THIS WEDNESDAY AT 8PM. FAR RIGHT THUGS ARE PLANNING TO ASSEMBLE AT THE IMMIGRATION BUREAU. PLEASE BE VIGILANT AND EXTRA SAFE AS IT LIKELY THE SITUATION WILL BE VERY TENSE.*

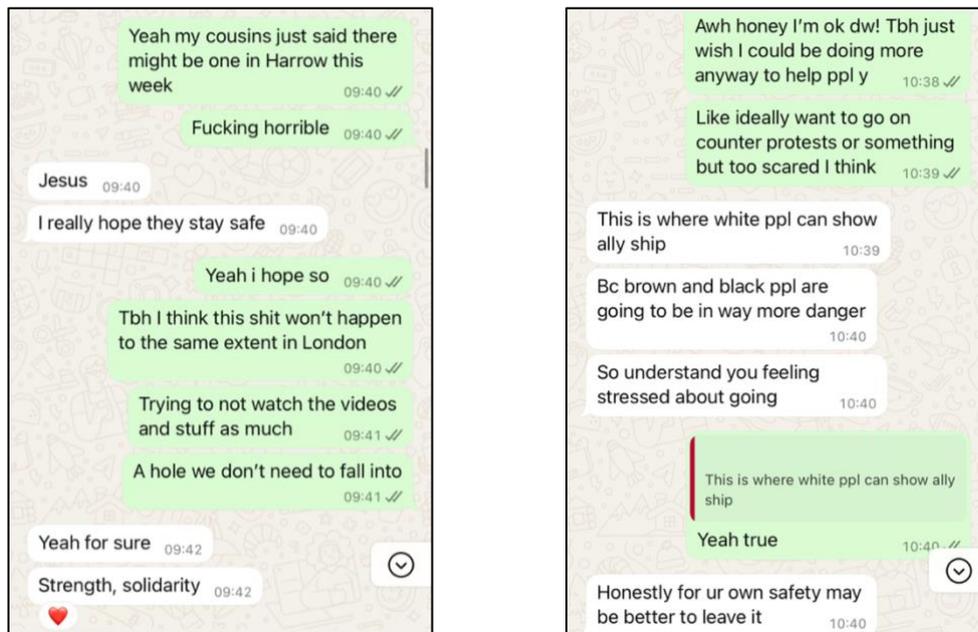
My friend, Cleo, is anxiously sending screenshot after screenshot of Facebook and Instagram posts (fig. 1&2), alerting me to several far-right protests rumoured to be taking place over the next few days. She indicates one is planned for that evening at a migrant centre around the corner from where I am currently working. These posts also seek to mobilise counter-resistant actions, to ‘*make sure we keep the hate out of our diverse borough*’. Another reads, ‘*we as a community need to be active to show these thugs that people of Walthamstow cannot and will not be divided,*’ urging people to attend a large demonstration in East London the following day.



Figures 1&2: Unknown authors, social media posts warning about upcoming riots, 2024.



After a week of scrolling through chilling footage of fascist mobs rioting around the country, fear is getting the better of me. I am unsure about attending the counter-protest, and Cleo rightly points out that this is an opportunity for white people to show allyship to Black and brown communities who are concerned for their safety. We agree to avoid online rabbit holes, and she sends me ‘*strength, solidarity*’ (fig. 3&4).



Figures 3&4: WhatsApp message screenshots, 2024.

I ultimately decide to attend the demonstration and gladly find it to be a peaceful, spirited, uplifting affair. A crowd of over a thousand gathered to stand up for their community, clutching signs reading ‘*Refugees welcome*’ and ‘*Stop the far right*’, joining in chants of ‘*Whose streets? Our streets!*’ and waving flags in solidarity with Palestine. Apparently, only a handful of the far-right mob turned up, and clearly realising they were outnumbered, quickly left.

\* \* \*

Between July and August 2024, the United Kingdom saw a wave of extremist right-wing violence sweep across the nation. Fuelled by anti-migrant, Islamophobic, and racist vitriol, the country saw one of the largest instances of social unrest in years. This frightening moment symbolised wider tensions in the contemporary British landscape: polarising debates on immigration, race and class, the long-term impacts of neoliberal austerity politics, and the continued dehumanisation of minority communities.

A year on from the riots, as I was conducting fieldwork for this research, the BBC broadcast a documentary entitled *Why I Joined a Riot* (2025), seeking to present a complex, nuanced portrayal of individuals who participated in the riots. It neither aimed to completely vilify nor excuse them, but to understand their motivations and how they were influenced by anti-migrant discourses. While I do believe that such questions should be interrogated, I could not help but feel a sense of discomfort and frustration. While some people are invited to have their stories told on the largest national platform – showing their complicated humanness, allowing the possibility of

sympathy and forgiveness – others are not. Instead of being granted this opportunity, they are constantly stereotyped, marginalised and dehumanised, only spoken of as ‘illegal workers’, ‘arriving in small boats’ and ‘taking our jobs’. Therefore, I want this research to be an opportunity to provide the alternative perspective to public debate, to show how the ‘other’ copes and cares for each other, to affirm their humanity when mainstream discourse is stripping it (Jones et al., 2011, p. 150).

During the process of data collection, I looked back at the messages between Cleo and me. Amidst the memory of this horrific, surreal episode of violence, there was this moment of vulnerability, of two friends protecting each other. Whilst we were both struck by disbelief, uncertainty and fear about what was happening around us, we found some comfort in knowing that we could look out for each other’s safety, offering each other a moment of protection and solidarity. Throughout this research, I realise that it was not a unique interaction but part of a collective response to the riots from people who are all too accustomed to being made to feel like they do not belong, like strangers in their own country, and instead find solace within their communities. This is from where my research begins: in the face of violence, what everyday practices of solidarity, love and care emerge?

The absence of these representations is not confined to media and political discourse, but even within academic literature regarding migration, riots and conflict, there is an overwhelming focus on violence and consequent suffering. Meanwhile, the everyday relational, affective practices of care and community are often undervalued, deemed less worthy of academic study, and remain overlooked. When in fact, this focus can help illuminate the reality of, and eventually move beyond, the violence and trauma. By primarily drawing on theories and praxis of radical care, which underscores how care is intrinsic to the survival and resilience of those subject to past and present violence, this paper illustrates the alternative reality of the riots (Hobart & Kneese, 2020).

This research is pertinent in light of the current British political landscape, as well as the global wave of right-wing populism. Given the Labour government’s perpetuation of anti-migrant narratives, the far-right Reform UK’s current surge at the top of the polls, and that discriminatory violence has seemingly vanished from mainstream political discourse, academic exploration is vital. Analysing this moment offers a unique opportunity to engage with a significant juncture in British political history. Furthermore, this holds relevance beyond academic discourse, offering valuable insights for social movements and practitioners. Principles of radical care provide not only survival strategies in the short-term but a vital framework towards an ethical alternative.

This paper takes the 2024 riots as a point of departure, as they were are more than just an isolated outburst but positioned within a broader continuum of structural violences (Ince, Borén and Lindell, 2021) and embedded forms of chronic trauma (Lederach, 2005; Pain, 2019). This research delves into the lived experiences of those affected by the riots to demonstrate that radical care is an everyday reality and necessity for marginalised communities, enabling them to resist, survive and thrive (Hobart and Kneese, 2020). Through qualitative interviews, personal experiences and interdisciplinary theoretical analysis, this research traces the contextual political and historical background to the 2024 riots (*chapter 2*); situates the topic within existing academic discourses (*chapter 3*); outlines the chosen methodological approach (*chapters 4 & 5*); then examines how practices and structures of radical care can imagine new possibilities for wider transformation (*chapter 6*).

## **1.1 Research questions**

This paper seeks to explore how did affected communities engage in practices of radical care in the context of the 2024 UK far-right riots, and how can these illuminate possibilities for broader political transformation?

*Sub-questions:*

- How are the 2024 riots entangled with histories of state-perpetrated violence, structural inequalities and chronic trauma?
- What forms of radical care emerged in this context, and through which structures did they operate?
- How does radical care enable liberation and resistance, and offer possibilities for social and political transformation?

## 2. The Riots

The 2024 riots were triggered by the fatal stabbing of three young girls attending a dance class in the northern English town of Southport, on 29 July (Halliday, 2025). Following the attack, mis/disinformation quickly spread, with false claims about the perpetrator's racial identity, religion and nationality circulating online, amplified by notorious far-right influencers such as Tommy Robinson and Andrew Tate (Amnesty International, 2025). A mere two hours after the attack, a post on social media platform X, claimed the suspect was a 'Muslim immigrant', and a few hours later, a post with the false name 'Ali al-Shakati' was amassing millions of views (Booth, 2025). The police eventually identified the attacker as Axel Rudakubana<sup>1</sup>, a 17-year-old British resident of Cardiff – but this did nothing to stop the inevitable. That evening, a Southport mosque was attacked (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Disorder soon escalated, with riots taking place in at least 27 towns and cities over two weeks (House of Commons Library, 2024). More mosques, immigration solicitors, refugee centres and asylum-hotels were targeted, but this clearly went beyond the 'Muslim immigrant' narrative, and anyone who fit the racialised profile of the 'enemy' became a potential target (Ince, 2024, p. 55). Disturbing footage circulated online: in Sunderland, Filipino nurses were pelted with stones on their way to work (Mahase, 2024); in Belfast, a young girl skipped along with her parents as she chanted 'pakis<sup>2</sup> out' (Hussein, 2024); in Middlesbrough, rioters took over the streets, halting cars only allowing white drivers to pass (Ali, 2024). The horror reached its peak on 4 August in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, where a masked mob attacked a hotel housing more than 200 asylum seekers. Rioters surrounded the building, smashed in windows and set the building on fire, as chants of 'get them out' were heard (BBC News, 2024).

However, this also sparked a wave of resistance, and thousands of anti-racist protestors mobilised across the country, not only holding counter-protests but even forming human shields around asylum-hotels and immigration centres (Sinmaz, Dodd and Halliday, 2024). Their presence proved decisive, as many planned far-right demonstrations failed to materialise, and by 10 August, the unrest had largely seemed to have stopped. By 30 August 2024, a total of 1,280 people had been arrested for their involvement in the riots, and 796 charged (BBC Verify, 2024).

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning that in attempt to quell racist and Islamophobic misinformation, authorities released the name and image of a Black teenager, compromising his anonymity and leaving him susceptible to potential threats and racist targeting.

<sup>2</sup> A racial slur directed at people from South Asian descent, originating in the UK during the 1960s.

At the time of the riots, newly elected Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer (2024), condemned the acts of ‘far-right thuggery’, declaring that those committing ‘wanton violence alongside racist rhetoric’ do not represent the country. However, his half-baked response garnered heavy criticism. While he strongly condemned the far-right, there was a glaring absence in his comments – the words ‘anti-migrant’ or ‘asylum seekers’ were not used, and the violence itself was not characterised as acts of ‘racism’ or ‘Islamophobia’ (Starmer, 2024). There was a parliamentary inquiry examining the role of social media and misinformation, and the creation of a National Violent Disorder Programme to strengthen policing strategies, but nothing from Westminster investigating the role of anti-migrant narratives (UK Government, 2024). To Starmer’s government, this violence was a freak accident committed only by the fringe population, those confined to dark corners of the internet and now shoved into overcrowded prisons.

## **2.1 Contextualising anti-migrant narratives**

The riots stem from violence and resentment that had been simmering under the surface for decades and can be placed in the wider narrative of anti-migrant views and the rise of the far-right, indicative of what is seen across the vast majority of Europe. Several key moments have defined the UK’s contemporary political landscape, starting with the Home Office’s ‘hostile environment’ immigration policy, introduced in 2012 by then Conservative Home Secretary, Theresa May. This set of draconian measures was introduced to make the path to claiming asylum, settlement and citizenship more difficult. Human rights experts have criticised the severe and lasting impact of the hostile environment on migrants and ethnic minority communities (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020; Williams, 2020). This contributed to the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union, colloquially known as ‘Brexit’. In the lead up to the general referendum in 2016, pro-Brexit campaigners, standing on a platform of xenophobia and lies, won the public vote by portraying immigration as a threat to the nation, demanding that Brits must ‘take back control’ (Cap, 2017). The next few years of Conservative rule continued to produce multiple devastating scandals, exposing the government’s deeply anti-migrant, racist ideologies; namely, the Windrush scandal in 2018 (Janes, et al., 2024), the Rwanda deportation plan in 2022 (Bullen and Bartram, 2024) and the Bibby Stockholm asylum barge in 2023 (Turner et al., 2023). United Nations’ experts even remarked on the ‘growth in volume and acceptability of xenophobic discourses on migration and foreign nationals’ seen in mainstream political parties since the hostile environment and Brexit (Achiume, 2019).

Anti-migrant, Islamophobic and racist discourse went hand in hand with austerity politics, as this period was also marked by severe cuts to public spending budgets and increasing taxes. The

past decade has seen the Conservatives slashing social security, affordable housing schemes and local services, while the use of food banks and child poverty rates have sharply risen (Collinson, 2022). The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic put more pressure on already crumbling public services, and the country emerged from lockdown only to enter a cost-of-living crisis (Hernandez, 2021).

This has gradually paved the way for the growing far-right. As deprived communities were confused, angry and left suffering due to austerity measures, right-wing populists offered a solution: the supposed swarms of migrants arriving on boats were to blame for the dearth of economic and labour opportunities. Despite racialised communities being statistically more affected by socio-economic inequalities, and migrants typically undertaking the lowest-paying jobs, these groups have been erased and instead only brought into public conversation when a scapegoat is needed (Khan, 2020, p. 8). Right-wingers, most notably Nigel Farage and his Reform UK party, have weaponised this tactic of division, pitting the most deprived sections of society against each other in a false binary for political gain.

### 2.1.1 The 2024 riots

The 2024 general election offered a glimmer of hope, as Keir Starmer's Labour government was elected after nearly 15 years of Conservative rule. Sadly, any hope was proved premature, as Labour only seemed to continue this mainstreaming of racist, anti-migrant discourse. In May 2025, as he announced plans to introduce stricter migration controls, Starmer (2025) warned the UK risked becoming an 'island of strangers.' His speech received widespread backlash as it undoubtedly echoed one of the most notorious anti-immigrant and racist speeches from British history; when Conservative Member of Parliament (MP), Enoch Powell, delivered an inflammatory decree against mass immigration, stating that people felt like 'strangers in their own country' (Powell, 1968).

The media has played a crucial role in circulating and normalising these narratives. Not only traditional media, but social media has been a key site of the rise of incendiary far-right ideologies. Hate speech and misinformation are amplified on social platforms at a massive scale, with the recent years seeing popular figures such as Tommy Robinson amass over a million followers.

The threads of these dynamics were apparent in the 2024 riots. The majority of those arrested came from neighbourhoods marked by deprivation, poor health and high unemployment – areas that also showed strong support for Reform UK's far-right populism (Duncan, et al., 2024). Furthermore, much of the violence was orchestrated via online platforms, leading to numerous charges for inciting racial hatred on social media (Ralph, Robinson and Aitken, 2025, p. 2).

## 2.2 Great British race riots

So-called ‘race riots’ are hardly a new phenomenon in the UK, with a recurring cycle evident since the early twentieth century. In times of economic and political crisis, the state fuels fears of the ‘other’, casting minority communities as threats to national identity. The imperial state is structurally invested in reproducing these dynamics, with differentiation through racialisation being instrumental to subjugating and dividing the working classes (Robinson, 1983, p. 26). The British Empire was fundamentally predicated on the exploitation, division and erasure of racialised populations – first abroad in the colonies and later within the metropole through waves of Commonwealth migration. Bhattacharya (2018, p. 36) highlights how these particularly vulnerable racialised populations are left without state protection and further scapegoated in order to distract from and legitimise the violence perpetuated by the ruling classes. Or as the Pan African Congress Manifesto puts it, modern British society ‘rest[s] on a pitiful human foundation of writhing white and yellow and brown and black bodies’ so that ‘the favoured few may luxuriate in the toil of the tortured many’ (Du Bois et al., 1900, cited in Gopal, 2019, p. 284). When this is the foundation on which the nation is built, the conditions for riots are already set.<sup>3</sup>

1919 saw the first mass attack on ‘foreigners taking our jobs’. Rioting broke out at major port cities, due to post-WWI job shortages, where many West African seamen had settled. Minority ethnic populations, many of whom had been living in the country for a while or fought in the War, were suddenly targeted (Sivanandan, 1982, p. 114). Moving to the mid-1950s, the first wave of immigration was tapering off, but former colonies were demanding independence from a declining Empire. All that remained was an ‘ideology of racial superiority’ that emboldened growing white nationalist groups and led to violent clashes such as the 1958 Notting Hill Riots (ibid., p. 116). These tensions and anxieties led to demands for immigration control, culminating in the first Immigration Act in 1962, which placed harsh restrictions on Commonwealth citizens entering the UK. This politically endorsed measure of racism signalled to the general public that racial hostility could become mainstream. The 1960s through to the early 1980s saw the rise of the far-right National Front, resistance movements and organising among Black and Asian communities, stricter immigration measures, and frequent violent riots. Powell’s 1968 speech became another politically sanctioned catalyst:

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<sup>3</sup> This paragraph draws from a previous submission, Ramachandran, U. (2024), ‘The lens of racial capitalism: examining the intersection of race & class in contemporary Britain’ [Unpublished paper]. International Institute of Social Studies.

The unspeakable had been spoken, free speech set free, the whites liberated; Asians and West Indians were abused and attacked, their property damaged, their women and children terrorised. Police harassment increased, the fascists went on a rampage and Paki-bashing emerged as the national sport.

Many significant riots were marked by tensions with police, seen as the enactors of state violence, as riots were often triggered by the unlawful murders of Black and Asian individuals at the hands of the police. Riots during the 1990s and early 2000s continued to be fuelled by state-led racism, economic recessions and growing ethnic tensions. The most recent example, still lingering in living memory, is the 2011 riots, which initiated in Tottenham, north London, after the police fatally shot and attempted to cover up, 29-year-old local, Mark Duggan (Bridges, 2012). Thus, riots have become a recurring feature of modern Britain, emerging as a symptom of the deep embeddedness of racialised, exploitative, colonial hierarchies that continue to structure society.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.3 Today

Throughout this research process, and even as I currently write this, the rise of far-right politics, discriminatory violence and the state's failure to intervene, continues. In July 2025, a series of protests were held outside an asylum hotel in Epping, Essex, demanding its closure and leaving two hotel staff members with serious injuries (Chaudhari and Dexter, 2025). In August 2025, a bizarre nationalist campaign emerged under the name 'Operation Raise the Colours' (Mackie and Somerville, 2025). This protest has seen people hanging up the Union Jack and English flags in public areas, as well as spray-painted on roundabouts, shop windows and other public property (Addley, 2025). On 14 September 2025, 150,000 people marched through central London in a 'Unite the Kingdom' rally. Organised by Tommy Robinson, the protest led to violent clashes with police and videos emerging online of protesters hurling racial abuse at passersby (Mukhtar, 2025). Elon Musk – who has increasingly intervened in British politics since the second Trump administration – joined via video call to deliver a message: 'There's something beautiful about being British and what I see happening here is a destruction of Britain, [...] rapidly increasing erosion of Britain with massive uncontrolled migration' (Melley and Chan, 2025). Recent months

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<sup>4</sup> Notable riots include: the 1975 Chapeltown riots in Leeds, where young people clashed with police. The 1979 Southall riots in an area of London with a predominantly South Asian population, which began as a peaceful demonstration against the National Front and ended in the police killing school teacher, Blair Peach. The 1981 riots across several cities (the most serious in Brixton, London; Toxteth, Liverpool; Handsworth, Birmingham and Moss Side, Manchester), where mainly young Black people protested the increase of discriminatory stop-and-search laws. The 2001 riots in Bradford, due to heightened tensions between a growing South Asian population and the National Front.

have seen a disturbing increase in racially aggravated violence and assault across the country (Ali, 2025). On 9 September 2025 in the West Midlands, a young Sikh woman was raped by two white men, who allegedly said to her, ‘you don’t belong in this country, get out’ (Brown, 2025). On 19 September 2025, a nine-year-old girl in Bristol was shot with an airgun as her attacker shouted racial abuse (Grierson, 2025). On 6 October 2025, a mosque in East Sussex was set ablaze while two worshippers were praying inside (Dodd, 2025).

Meanwhile, Reform UK are leading the polls, with Farage’s pledge to scrap indefinite leave to remain (the main route towards permanent settlement) and deport thousands of legal immigrants, proving quite popular. Under Starmer, Labour no longer offers the hope it once promised to deliver. The current climate is one of fear and isolation for many – for those who have fled persecution and conflict, for those who arrived searching for the myth of the British dream, for those who have been here for generations and know no other home. People now feel unwanted and unsafe in their own neighbourhoods, afraid of being attacked every time they step outside.

This is to acknowledge that the problem I explore is not yet resolved but remains ongoing and evolving. The 2024 riots are the temporal anchor for this research, but the findings extend beyond. I am using this opportunity to explore the questions and narratives that emerge at the intersections of overlapping identities, that are plaguing many at this moment. This research summons (not) belonging, colonial violence, intergenerational histories, resistance and survival. They are everlasting concerns that were as applicable ten years ago as they will be (unfortunately) in ten years’ time.

### **3. Theoretical Positioning: Radical Care in Times of Violence and Trauma**

Having outlined the contextual backdrop to the 2024 riots, it is evident that they were not simply an isolated event, but part of an ongoing history. This theoretical chapter first examines existing academic debates to present an integrated understanding of the nature of this structural violence, as well as its enduring psychological and social impacts (*chapter 3.1*). However, relevant literature is largely written concerning the uprisings of oppressed, racialised groups, and the 2024 riots were instead an expression of far-right ideology. Therefore, as my research centres on how affected communities survive, resist and heal in these conditions, my primary theoretical lens is radical care (*chapter 3.2*).

This topic traverses across disciplines, such as conflict and peacebuilding studies (Lederach, 2005), cultural and political sociology (Bhattacharyya, 2013; Tilly, 1985), feminist care theory (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993; Hobart and Kneese, 2020), human and political geography (Ince, 2025; Till, 2021), postcolonial theory (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 2005; Narayan, 1995), psychology (Fanon, 1967; Pain, 2019) and urban studies (Ince, Borén and Lindell, 2021; Pain, 2019). I draw from the aforementioned fields to present a holistic understanding that fills the significant gap in academic literature, by foregrounding care, survival and humanity of neglected communities living in the conditions of ongoing structural violence.

#### **3.1 Contextualising histories of violence and trauma**

##### **3.1.1 Riots**

As the 2024 riots are still relatively recent, there is limited academic discussion. Research so far has been approached primarily through social media analysis (Ralph, Robinson and Aitken, 2025), human geography (Griffin, Clayton and Adamson, 2025), and criminal justice (Godshaw and Singleton, 2025), to unpack the role of online misinformation in the riots, the unfolding of the racialised violence itself, and the role of the police. While it may be too soon to assess the long-term effects, these tensions will likely only resurface when the next major riot erupts – which feels imminent given this year’s wave of anti-migrant protests, the ‘Unite the Kingdom’ rally and surge in violent hate crimes.

Both within academic and public discourse, the long-term, after-effects of riots remain often underexplored, with emphasis instead placed on identifying triggers or managing the immediate aftermath. Political theory traditionally viewed violent riots as illegitimate and irrational

(Arendt, 1970, p. 75) positioning them as ‘a temporary rupture from “real” politics’ (Ince, Borén and Lindell, 2021, p. 85). However, recent social theory engaging with critical histories of social movements, has placed riots in wider patterns of resistance (Clover, 2016; Hobsbawm, 2017), viewing them as a crisis point to analyse causes, triggers and responses in the periphery. Taking the 2011 UK riots as an example, much of the literature explored socio-economic factors and racialised imaginations of the nation that caused people to riot (Bhattacharyya, 2013), as well as the impacts on crime and policing (Denef, Bayerl and Kaptein, 2013; Hall et al., 1978).

Recent contributions, primarily in the fields of political and social geography, identify a significant gap in discourse on riots, and position them as not simply an ‘outburst of the extraordinary’, but a ‘magnification of the ordinary’ (Till, 2013, p. 71). Such arguments claim that the current framing on triggers and responses obscures how riots are ‘structurally embedded in relations of power’, while the after-effects remain underexplored (Ince Borén and Lindell, 2021, p. 84; Ince 2025, p. 54). Drawing from debates in conflict studies and natural disaster research (where the lasting effects of disruptive events are more fully discussed), policy responses and psychosocial impacts, Ince, Borén and Lindell (2021) put forward a holistic framework that moves beyond the ‘present-centric’ literature on riots. Riots are instead positioned as ‘part of a continuum of political expression...with material, policy, and psychosocial consequences’ (ibid., p. 85).

### 3.1.2 State

The 2024 riots serve as an entry point into wider contexts of structural violence, as the acts of violence on the streets were a mere amplification of ongoing factors, absorbing the blame that should be directed elsewhere. This framing is necessary to stress how the state is not just complicit in, but an active perpetrator of the violence, using the riots as a mechanism through which it sustains and legitimises control.

The British nation is one built on imperial conquest, extractivism and violent racialised hierarchies. This persists today through systemic inequalities and institutional neglect of the most vulnerable. The state’s primary function is to maintain this hierarchy and a monopoly of violence (Tilly, 1985, p. 175), achieved through a politics of divide and rule. Ethnic minority and immigrant populations have long been framed as the underlying problem (Hall et al., 1978, p. 339). This narrative of ‘us’ and ‘them’ has dominated for years, seeped into the national psyche (Gilroy, 2005, p. 23), with racialised communities, immigrants and Muslims posited as this threatening external, ‘other’, needed for the state to preserve its role as the sole protector, akin to a ‘protection racket’ (Tilly, 1985, p. 171). The 2024 rioters effectively were an outsourcing of state violence, taking this repression into their own hands to instil fear in, and assert control over minority communities

(Ince, 2025, p, 55.). This self-appointed policing is exemplified in the footage from Middlesborough; while rioters racially profiled drivers, the police are seen standing by in silence (Ali, 2024).

State complicity is further evidenced in Starmer's hypocrisy: despite last year's condemnation of the rioters, he has remained relatively silent on the current surge in far-right nationalist protest and worrying rise in Islamophobic and racist hate crimes. Instead, the riots were a one-off, something committed by a handful of 'far-right thugs' who would 'face the full force of the law' (Starmer, 2024), as by 'siphoning off racism and racial violence to the terrain of law and order, the government conceals its complicity in the creation of state racism' (Sivanandan, in Burnett, 2017, p. 2). Further evident in the fact that none of these far-right extremists were charged with terrorism<sup>5</sup> (House of Commons Library, 2024).

Since the state has an active interest in perpetuating this violence, there is a reluctance to acknowledge the roots causes of racial hierarchies and structural power relations produced by histories of Eurocentric imperialism and capitalism – as these are also the very tools from which the state benefit. This creates a circularity of violence, where there is no room for taking responsibility for earlier violence, thus legitimising and empowering itself (Mbembe, 2001, p. 26; Gilroy, 2005, p. 99).

### 3.1.3 Britain and beyond

This positioning of street violence as a symptom of racialised hierarchies is evident in literature in other geographies. For example, UK riots are often analysed in comparison in France (Waddington et al. 2013). Another former imperial centre where violent uprisings of the oppressed in contemporary multicultural cities are a 'boomerang' or 'by-product' of past colonial violence, (Balibar, 2007; Haddad and Balz, 2006).

Literature on race riots in the United States is much more developed, positioning riots, particularly those that occurred during the civil rights movement, as crucial to analysing the contemporary social landscape (Gilje 1999). Riots are discussed as contemporary manifestations of histories of race relations and structural domination, essential to the anti-colonial struggle (Clover, 2016; Darden and Thomas, 2013).

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<sup>5</sup> This is in contrast to protest group Palestine Action being proscribed under terrorism legislation in July 2025, despite widespread [criticism](#) from international human rights law [experts](#). Since the ban, nearly 1,000 arrests have been made and [six people charged with terrorism](#) offences for demonstrating support for the group.

### 3.1.4 Chronic trauma

An understanding of not just the structural implications, but the individual and collective impacts of this violence is crucial to the discussion. How these forms of violence manifest in a particular kind of trauma – one that is continuous, collective and deeply embedded.

Insights from conflict and peace studies are particularly useful, as emerging research explores the long-term effects of political violence. Lederach (2005) advocates for a decolonial approach to peacebuilding, integrating indigenous and non-Western understandings of time, history, story, place and identity. In these cosmologies, the past, present and future unfold simultaneously, rather than in a linear manner. Thus, conflict and violence are not absolute events with a before and after but are ongoing processes. Peacebuilding, therefore, must also speak to this holistic understanding of time – as a continuous, intergenerational process, with ‘a past that lies before us’ (ibid., p. 140). Lederach (ibid., p. 146) further emphasises healing from violence must be rooted in the lived histories and relations of local communities and collectives, where trauma is recognised as a shared social process.

This is particularly relevant in the context of colonial violence, where postcolonial and critical race scholarship offer relevant frameworks for understanding its enduring, intergenerational effects. Such theories explore how trauma stemming from colonial histories continues to impact the psychologies, identities, collective memories and bodies of subsequent generations (Fanon 1967; Hall, 1990). This is exemplified in how for older generations, these riots were not an isolated occurrence but part of a continuum, evoking visceral memories of the riots from the 1970s and 1980s (Kimathi, 2024). Trauma is transferred through generations but simultaneously has the power to become part of resistance, fuelling the class struggle or Black struggle, for instance. (Ince, Borén and Lindell, 2021, p. 92)

Further relevant literature draws on psychology to describe the effects of state and internal violence. Till (2012) uses the metaphor of ‘wounds’ as, echoing Lederach, it implies a more complex temporality rather than a binary end/beginning, before/after. Instead, the scarring is a process that happens over a long period of time; healing over itself, only to be ripped open again. Pain (2019) identifies the chronic trauma of political violence shares similarities with domestic violence and child abuse; defined by ‘repeated exposure to violence, close control by the perpetrator and a limited prospect of escape’, the results of which can be feelings of dehumanisation, altered identity, anger, depression, self-hatred (ibid., p. 388). Pain (ibid., p. 390) asserts that ‘with chronic trauma, we are never post-violence, but both violence and trauma wind on as material, embedded, everyday realities.’

## 3.2 Theoretical framework: radical care

The academic literature I have drawn from situates the riots within broader structures of violence and trauma. However, there remains a significant gap in examining the practices of care that emerge in response. This forms the primary basis of my theoretical framework; to go beyond existing riot, violence and trauma analysis that largely focuses on the uprisings of oppressed or racialised groups, while the 2024 riots were distinct expression of white supremacist violence. My research, therefore, centres those harmed by such violence, foregrounding care as an active, necessary practice to cope, heal and survive in conditions of systemic harm. First, I will trace the origins of care theory then illustrate my primary theoretical lens of radical care.

### 3.2.1 What is it to care?

Care theory emerged from feminist political economy, encompassing but going beyond care work and social reproduction. Care theory similarly identifies that certain practices are ‘gendered, relegated to the personal domain, and thereby depoliticized’ (Krystalli & Schulz, 2022, p. 19), and that its integration into core social and political values is key for political and social transformation (Tronto, 1993, p. 157).

Gilligan (1982) advocated for an ethics of care as an alternative to the dominant liberal individualistic model of ethics. This feminist, moral framework places human connection at the centre: interpersonal relationships, responsibility towards others and the virtue of compassion. Several key contributions aimed to expand on this framework, freeing care from simply the personal and applying it to the political.

Seminal work from Tronto (1993, p. 104) linked ethical relations of care to the political by recognising care as a practice ‘aimed at maintaining, continuing, or repairing the world’. She claimed that ‘care’s absence from our core social and political values reflects many choices our society has made about what to honour’ (ibid., p. 179), and that only by ‘reaching out to something other than the self, will we be better democratic citizens’ (ibid., p. 167). Tronto and Fisher (1990, p. 40) identified the interdependent relations involved in care, creating a four-phase model: *caring about, caring for, care giving and care receiving*.

Care theory has slowly influenced fields that are dominated by rational and unemotional approaches, such as international relations (Robinson, 1997), human security (Robinson, 2011) and conflict and peacebuilding (Krystalli & Schulz, 2022). Such discourses are centred on violence, suffering and harm, but viewing through the lens of care illustrates how humans actually behave in these periods. How the most fundamental human experiences of forging social relationships

and acting through feelings of love, shape how we engage with the world especially in periods of turmoil.

Crucially, these framings emphasise care, caring roles and care workers are inherently political, as these relations are established in the context of unequal power structures. Robinson (2011a, p. 5) argues the ‘relations of care in a global context are constructed by relations of power determined primarily by gender, class, and race. These are, in turn, structured by the discourses and materiality of neoliberal globalisation and historical and contemporary relations of colonialism and neocolonialism’. While care is a universal human experience, the conditions in which it is given and received, by whom and for whom, is impacted by hegemonic structures and institutions (Robinson, 2011, p. 114; Tronto, 2010). Thus, only by understanding care as political theory, will we be able to uproot and transform the conditions of those doing the formal and the (much less visible) informal care work. (Tronto, 1993, p. 157).

### 3.2.2 Radicalising care

Radical care builds on existing literature to theorise care as an essential reimagining of politics. It is inextricably tied to histories of systemic inequalities and constitutes a resistance to dominant neoliberal individualism. It is a relational practice grounded in local communities, by those neglected by the state and vulnerable to structural harm.

Work from Hobart and Kneese (2020) and The Care Collective (2020) establishes this concept, in part a response to the recent explosion of ‘self-care’ in public discourse. Stripped from its original politically radical meanings rooted in Black feminism, where caring for oneself was ‘an act of political warfare’, it is now coopted by neoliberal, individualistic logics (Lorde, 1988, p. 130). Radical care seeks to reclaim and re-radicalise care as a collective and political practice.

Hobart and Kneese (2020, p. 2) reiterate the inherent political nature of care, as it is linked to external forces which dictate structural inequalities, impacting ‘those most easily overlooked by the politically and socially privileged’ (ibid., p. 8). They stress care as fundamental to social movements, presenting ‘radical care as a set of vital but underappreciated strategies for enduring precarious worlds’ (ibid., p. 2). As it offers an alternative to capitalism, (neo-)colonialism and patriarchy, radical care is rooted in continued histories of violence and in non-hierarchical collective action – radical care is seen in communities coming together to help those overlooked by the state and institutions (ibid., p. 9).

However, literature warns of the dangers of care – that its invisible and undervalued nature means it is ripe for exploitation and co-optation for neoliberal aims (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p.

7). Tronto (2010, p. 161) similarly identifies that institutional care is likely to face two challenges: paternalism and parochialism. Those with the power will dictate what care looks like and to whom it should go, misusing it as a commodity, something given from those in power to those without it. Furthermore, Narayan's (1995, pp. 133—134) postcolonial feminist perspective shows how care discourse, paralleled with colonial rights discourse, justified 'power and domination between groups of people', through constructing colonial subjects as inferior in need of paternalistic guidance. This persists in contemporary Britain, where colonial hierarchies remain; racialised and migrant populations are deemed worthy of care only on the state's terms, remaining structurally disadvantaged.

Radical care attempts to expose and overcome these power dynamics by emphasising solidarity and mutual aid, with needs dictated by communities themselves. It stresses that such practices are not confined to self-preservation and short-term relief, but are ultimately to redistribute forms of power and provide longer-term support for self-determination, survival and resilience (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 10). Radical care is not merely about revealing the nature of existing survival strategies, but offers a framework towards wider social transformation, an alternative to the dominant political order – 'a roadmap for an otherwise' (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 13).

### 3.2.3 Radical care and the riots

While Hobart and Kneese (2020) spotlight certain contextual examples of radical care, this is still an emerging field. Applying it to the context of the UK riots, which are entangled with enduring histories of violence that have been in motion for centuries, I demonstrate that radical care is an everyday reality and necessity for those living with the enduring consequences of structural, colonial, capitalist, patriarchal violence. For those whose unresolved chronic trauma defines how they relate to the world, passing down from generation after generation due to a wider refusal to address the root causes.

Radical care instead reveals the practices and realities of how those affected by the riots 'provide care, survive, and even dare to thrive in environments that challenge their very existence' (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 3). By filling the gaps of state neglect, caring for those left behind and meeting collective needs, radical care emerges as the antidote to the 'island of strangers'.

By shifting emphasis onto these practices, I hope to transform the dominant narrative, which too often leaves such stories to be engulfed by historical amnesia. The recurrence of riots signals a need to break this cycle. By rooting political analysis in a commitment to radical care, we might be able to reimagine what alternative narratives are possible (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 7). In

other words, ‘what is seen—and made possible—when we widen the frame and focus the lens on life and love, rather than limit the field of vision to death and suffering?’ (Lederach, 2019 in Krystalli & Schulz, 2022, p. 2).

## 4. Methodology

This research has been explored through qualitative fieldwork, conducted in July and August 2025. This methodology was chosen as care is a deeply personal and emotionally grounded, yet abstract and multifaceted concept. Thus, qualitative interviews were the ideal format for in-depth exploration, to probe into personal experiences, emotions and anecdotes (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2020, p. 11). Additionally, as I wanted to speak to those impacted by the discriminatory violence of the riots, individual interviews provided a safe space to discuss trauma and difficult experiences openly. However, care is also a relational, collective practice, so I also sought to include some group settings and relevant community events to form a more holistic picture (*ibid.*, p. 17).

Fieldwork resulted in thirteen semi-structured interviews, including one focus group discussion with three participants from the same organisation. I also attended a community event and exhibition where I spoke with several of the artists, performers, organisers and attendees, and then conducted a follow-up interview with the primary organiser.

### 4.1 Sampling

Several participants were from existing personal and professional relationships, including past colleagues, allowing for established familiarity and trust (King, Horrocks and Brooks., 2019, p. 100). I leveraged these networks to contact further respondents through snowball sampling (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2020, p. 92). Other respondents were identified through purposive sampling (*ibid.*), as I contacted anti-racist and migrant organisations whose work I was familiar with, or that I found had signed an open letter addressed to Starmer's government at the time of the riots (Race Equality Foundation et al., 2024).

### 4.2 Profiles

Respondents varied in age, ethnicity, religion and class. There was a range of first to third generation immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. A majority of the participants were working at local charities and grassroots organisations, mostly in support work, community organising and outreach roles. This was in part due to my existing connections, previous work experience and knowledge of the sector.

Many participants also lived in, or identified as belonging to, the communities they served, meaning they are ideally positioned to both give and receive care. Additionally, their responses often began from the perspective of their professional role, in a safeguarding capacity in relation to more vulnerable community members. However, these experiences were fundamentally

intertwined with personal identity, illustrating the complex demands of emotional labour and care work, performed simultaneously within communities and for themselves.

A few respondents were white British or European, identifying as allies, anti-racist and pro-migrant. These perspectives were crucial to include as the role of allyship and support from white, non-migrant communities was an important factor of the 2024 riots and counter-demonstrations. Additionally, I intentionally left the definition of ‘affected communities’ broad and aimed for a relatively diverse dataset as I want to underscore how these riots had impacts in all corners of British society.

### **4.3 Time and place**

Respondents were based in several different cities across England: Brighton, Leeds, London, Manchester, Rotherham and Sheffield. I tried to find respondents from areas particularly affected by the riots, with an emphasis on ensuring northern cities were well represented, as these saw a notable proportion of the violence and are more structurally impacted by inequalities and austerity measures. Each locality, city and region has its own specific dynamics shaped by class composition, racial demographics, migration trends and histories of resistance, which obviously shape how the riots and practices of care are experienced, but I have attempted to find broader thematic similarities across the country as a whole.

As mentioned earlier, the far-right violence is not constrained to the summer months of 2024, but continued throughout the period during which my interviews were taking place and continue to the time of writing. However, due to research constraints, my interview discussions centred on the 2024 riots themselves. Nevertheless, the current shifting political landscape continues to shape these dynamics and will be incorporated into the discussion.

### **4.4 Conversations and coding**

Interviews were semi-structured, using a questionnaire guide (*Appendix 1*) to provide a consistent foundation for discussions, but some questions were tailored for specific contexts and profiles. Most were held in person and three were online. Conversations with attendees and performers at the community event were informal and unstructured. All conversations were conducted in English, voice recorded and transcribed automatically (using Otter.ai).

My findings were analysed in ATLAS.ti, with a combination of deductive and inductive coding, integrating predetermined codes from theory and research questions with codes emerging from the participants’ experiences to identify key themes (Williams and Moser, 2019, p. 51). I then

applied a cyclical open, axial, and selective coding strategy to refine these, find patterns across interviews and develop deeper, nuanced theoretical insights through analysing participants' perspectives in relation to academic discourse (ibid., p. 47). Open coding generated initial descriptive themes (such as *care, community resilience, safety, fear, relationship building, class dynamics, racialisation* and *institutional barriers*). Axial coding subsequently allowed me to group these into ten wider categories (including *emotion and embodied experience, identity and difference, resistance and activism, care and healing*) and identify any contrasts, (such as *local versus national, and positive versus negative*).<sup>6</sup>

I initially approached interviews to understand specific responses to the riots – the emotional impact and the individual or community care practices that emerged. However, through the coding process, it became clear that I additionally needed to explore the challenges and wider implications beyond the riots, as many recurring themes connected to broader structural forces.

## 4.5 Ethical considerations

During interviews, the absence of voices from vulnerable groups, such as asylum-seekers and refugees, who were directly targeted by the riots, became an increasingly noticeable gap. However, taking into account ethical considerations and the risk of retraumatising, I chose to capture these perspectives through secondary sources, which have informed my thinking. Many of the organisations I spoke to produce podcasts, webinars, poetry, reports and case studies, which provided valuable additional perspectives.

This sensitivity was extended to all participants, who were provided with clear and detailed information about the research, were able to skip any questions they did not wish to answer, and were met with active, mindful listening throughout. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The real name of the exhibition, *This Home is My Own*<sup>7</sup>, and the photographs I took have been included with the organiser's permission. No organisation names have been mentioned unless they have produced a publicly available piece of media referenced. All participants have been pseudonymised.

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<sup>6</sup> This paragraph draws from a previous submission, Ramachandran, U. (2025), 'Qualitative interviewing: Research analysis summative assignment' [Unpublished paper]. International Institute of Social Studies.

<sup>7</sup> <https://clitbait.co.uk/this-home-is-my-own-art-resistance-and-reflection-one-year-on/>.

## 5. Positionalities

Care is both the subject, inherent in my positioning and motivation, and the driver of my methodological approach, the lens to which I naturally approached each interview. I also spoke to people who do *care* – it would be ironic if those who took the time to speak with me about this research did not. We spoke because it is something we mutually care passionately about, because it impacts our lives on both a personal and professional level. It is fundamentally intertwined with our being.

Throughout the interview process, I was acutely aware of the implications of my positionality – as a British Indian, second-generation immigrant raised in northern England, with left-wing socialist, feminist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist politics and experience working in grassroots charities. At the time of the riots, I was a volunteer caseworker at a grassroots migrant-rights organisation in London, providing support and advice at an asylum hotel. This added another dimension to my perspective of the riots – I was not only personally impacted but was in a position of care to asylum seekers, some of whom were deeply distressed by reports of anti-migrant attacks across the city. On the one hand, my personal entanglements meant increased sensitivity and an easily established trust, built on shared experience and cultural short-hands. Or it equally meant pre-assumed biases preventing me from seeing the bigger picture.

Especially when conversations turned to something particularly emotionally distressing, for example if someone recounted a story of racist abuse, I worried if I was getting too invested and whether I should take a step back to probe. This might have been the case, but I realised that I did not like the alternative. A lack of emotion, empathy and care is what creates the conditions for such violence in the first instance – with the powers that be not treating such individuals with basic humanity. It is fundamentally an emotive topic, one that speaks to the very essence of human nature: forming social bonds, creating and sustaining communities, feeding those relations through love and care. It would feel counterintuitive and frankly just wrong, to not have reciprocated feelings of care and compassion in these discussions.

This is to be conscious of my place in the research process and acknowledge how it never exists in a vacuum but stems from a context and history extending beyond me (Patel, 2015). I approach my personal entanglements in this context, not as a hindrance or an obstacle to objective research (of which there is no such thing), but as a strength that enables me to navigate the topic with nuance, build trust and foster meaningful conversation (Bolak, 1996, p. 109). I shared experiences from my time working with asylum seekers, attending anti-racist demonstrations, conversations with my mother about the importance of showing solidarity, and my fluctuating

relationship with my dual identity. These disclosures helped to legitimise my research, signalling my personal stake in this, making it clearer from which standpoint I speak.

## 6. Radical Care on an ‘Island of Strangers’

Through weaving together findings and analysis from interviews with theoretical discussion, this chapter illustrates how affected communities engaged in practices of radical care in the context of the 2024 riots, and how these can illuminate possibilities for broader transformation. I will first examine some of the common radically caring practices that emerged (*chapter 6.1*), then the common structures in which they take place and the varying tensions of these (*chapter 6.2*), then lastly examine how the conditions of radical care hold future possibilities (*chapter 6.3*).

### 6.1 Caring practices

Care is undoubtedly a varied, shifting and intangible practice. As Tronto (1993, p. 102) points out, a negative claim of care (‘I don’t care!’) or an absence of it is easier to describe, but pinpointing exactly what effective care looks like is much more difficult. However, with the need for care starkly revealed in times of precarity, through discussions about participants’ experiences, memories and responses to the riots, common caring practices – defined by Tronto (*ibid.*, p. 108) as the combination of thought and action – emerged.

#### 6.1.1 Protection, safety and survival

While Tronto (1993, p. 105) notes the similarities between care and protection, she emphasises the distinction that protection does not always necessarily stem from care:

Caring seems to involve taking the concerns and needs of the other as the basis for action. Protection presumes the bad intentions and harm that the other is likely to bring to bear against the self or group, and to require a response to that potential harm.

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, the first instinct for many was to reach out to friends and family to check on each other. Although this may have been a fear response to the threat of harm, during the riots, that threat was both immediate and tangible. Thus, care became inseparable from protection – concern for safety and offering protection from real danger were the primary expressions of care. Here, care is a ‘critical survival strategy’ (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 2).

When asked what their memories of the riots were, several respondents interestingly drew comparisons to the COVID-19 pandemic – another period marked by fearing what might happen if you step outside your door. Lingering feelings of restriction, uncertainty and suffocation resurfaced. Leah, a woman in her early thirties of Nigerian heritage, working as a cartoonist, recalled that during the riots, conversations with her family and friends centred on deciding where

it was or was not safe to go. She even referred to it as ‘our own kind of pandemic, feeling another type of self-isolation because of people.’ Zainab is a first-generation Pakistani Muslim and a support worker at a domestic violence charity for minority ethnic women in Rotherham. She remarked the irony in the role reversal between herself and her daughter, who forbade her from going to the town centre for her weekly grocery shop. ‘They said, no mummy, you can't do this, you can't go. Things stopped, I felt my life stopped, because I can't go freely anywhere. I can't go for a walk.’ Fear became the dominating force, leading to self-imposed isolation and restricted freedom, as public spaces turned into hostile, unpredictable zones marked by violence.

However, the comparison to the COVID-19 lockdown was interesting, as it was another instance that simultaneously demonstrated communities mobilising to offer mutual care and support for those structurally neglected. For Farha, a British Indian Muslim in her sixties who works at a community development charity in Rochdale, Greater Manchester, it was a notable turning point. She recounted how during the pandemic, language and cultural barriers prevented some from receiving vital support, prompting the community to mobilise, share resources and care for one another. These same informal networks were relied upon during the riots, as Farha described how people checked in and shared advice, having ‘to depend on ourselves to provide that security, that reassurance, that support.’

This was echoed by other respondents who worked at migrant, anti-racist charity organisations, which were also targeted. Contingency plans were quickly devised to keep staff and service users safe: appointments in offices were cancelled, staff buddy systems were implemented, and one organisation even removed staff pictures and names from their website. Sophie, a colleague whom I worked alongside at asylum hotels in north London, has been with the same migrant organisation for ten years. She recalled internal conversations about balancing safety with avoiding fearmongering among asylum seekers they worked with. ‘How do we acknowledge the violence that is happening and how distressing it might be for them, whilst at the same time providing reassurance?’ Despite the risks, staff still chose to visit the hotels that week – a gesture that residents deeply appreciated. Sophie said it was ultimately essential to show that, even amid fear and violence, ‘we are all here together [...] in solidarity.’

Many respondents described the glaring absence of state-led support and care. As Farha stated, ‘we weren't prepared, and we were seeking guidance and leadership from somewhere’. However, in response, grassroots networks quickly organised, offering each other protection, comfort and mutual care to help one another survive.

### 6.1.2 Radical compassion and overcoming fractures

Amy, an immigration advisor for young refugees in Brighton, described the idea of care as ‘inherently selfless.’ To her, ‘care looks like giving what I can in that moment to ensure that other people get what they deserve or feel how they deserve to feel.’ This articulates the core principle of the ethic of care: an understanding of the self as inherently and constantly relational, experienced through relationships with others and grounded in interdependence (Gilligan in Tronto, 1993, p. 79). Hobart and Kneese (2020, p. 2) emphasise care as ‘feeling with, rather than a feeling for, others,’ meaning care is inseparable from compassion and empathy.

In practice, this is much easier within a ‘known’ community, so complexities arise when the caring is extended to a community of which one is not necessarily a part. Tronto (1993, p. 59) poses that ‘a way to think of morality that extends some form of sympathy further than our own group remains perhaps the fundamental moral question for contemporary life’, stating that only by including the concept of care in this morality can this be addressed. Moreover, she warns that care itself commonly falls into parochialism, with caregivers often developing preferences for care receivers with whom they are closer or through the caring relationship in which they are already engaged (*ibid.*, p. 170).

While the inability to empathise with, and therefore extend care towards, the unknown ‘other’ is a point of great ontological discussion, in this context it also reflects the deliberate objectives of the divide and rule tactics; the class and culture wars led by those in power. This demonstrates that radical care within marginalised communities is not untainted by contexts of structural violence fundamentally based on othering and exclusion, but in fact a product of them, and thus have the potential to reproduce hierarchies.

This was one of the key challenges that emerged during my interviews: how to overcome the persistence of deep societal fractures, which were only exacerbated by the riots. Many respondents alluded to this perceived division of ‘us’ and ‘them’: where ‘us’ is the known, trusted community with shared identities or political beliefs, while the ‘other’ is the far-right, racist thugs participating in on the riots. This ‘other’, the Hegelian unknowable entity that threatens the existence of the self, had the potential to be anyone. Several respondents said that at the moment of this unpredictable violence, suddenly, any white neighbour could be capable. Thus, many tended to turn inwards, to one’s own, known, identifiable community.

This complicates radical collective care, which Hobart and Kneese (2020) theorise as marginalised, neglected communities mobilising for social change. Many who participated in the

riots or share similar beliefs, who have been constructed as the ‘white working class’, are also victims of austerity measures and economic deprivation. However, divisions along racial lines take priority over class-based solidarity, as ‘race is the modality in which class is lived’ (Hall et al., 1978, p. 394). Therefore, this entrenched polarisation and state-perpetuated division have impeded the solidarity building necessary for socio-political transformation. Care is instead redirected inward, preventing the ‘coalitional work’ on which truly radical care is built – rather than looking out only for those in your same social positions, coalitions inspire people to work together across class, race, ethnicity, religious, and state boundaries toward a common cause’ (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 9).

Here, communication and engaging in dialogue emerge as important tools in bridging divides, allowing for needs or perspectives different from the self. Many respondents pointed to open conversation, knowledge-sharing and consciousness-raising as a way to counter preconceived prejudices. There was a common understanding that such views do not simply emerge but stem from exposure to violently divisive narratives. Furthermore, repairing fractured communities requires attempting to engage with the roots of these beliefs, rather than dismissing them outright.<sup>8</sup> Yet the willingness to extend understanding and care towards those who are different is not something the far-right has the capacity for. This, I believe, is the fundamental difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – between a politics inherently rooted in empathy, collectivity and care, and a politics built on dehumanisation, exclusion and preserving hierarchies. This requires what Ade, a thirty-year-old British-Nigerian community organiser at an anti-racist organisation in Leeds, described as ‘radical compassion’. He approaches his work with the idea that ‘you’re not better than anyone else. [...] think of the most evil, horrible, worst human being ever and know that you could be just as bad.’

Zainab’s colleagues, Aleena and Saira, are support workers and first-generation Pakistani Muslims. Saira and Zainab have spent over twenty-five years helping the organisation grow from a grassroots initiative into a crucial support service for women in the community facing gender-based violence. Located in Rotherham, where rioters tried to burn down an asylum hotel, they expressed deep distress upon realising the extent of racist and Islamophobic views right on their doorstep. Yet they recognised that the violence did not happen ‘in a vacuum’, with Saira questioning what signs were ignored and by whom. Reflecting on state response, she said that

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<sup>8</sup> My dataset was limited in fully exploring this idea, since it was based on the perspectives of those affected rather than direct interviews with the perpetrators of violence. Nevertheless, investigating whether or not there should be engagement with the far-right, to what extent and in what manner, would be a valuable area for further research, particularly given the current political climate.

mass arrests and prison sentences were ‘like putting a plaster on it’. The law did nothing to address the underlying causes and uncover ‘why did it happen in the first place? What led it to happen?’

Aleena questioned what happens to those once incarcerated, suggesting ‘they would be the ones to kind of sit down and have a conversation with’ and ‘wondering if anything has been done behind bars [...] trying to do some workshops or something with them to see why they did it.’ Even those deeply traumatised by the violence that still lingers in their town, approached the perpetrators with nuance, urging restorative justice, knowing that only by attempting to engage with such views will we be able to counter them.

### 6.1.3 Affirmation of cultural identity

For most of the respondents – especially second or third generation immigrants – the riots deeply impacted senses of identity, belonging and ideas of Britishness. This audacious display of nationalist violence and white superiority forced a destabilising encounter. Self-conceptualisations of identity were disrupted, exposed as misaligning with how one is perceived by others. As Farha, who has lived in the UK since she was three years old, explained:

In just a space of one summer, 60 odd years of establishing yourself went out the window [...] we were all, Pakis for want of a better word, we were all, refugees. [...] That was extremely unsettling. Unnerving. It made us feel very vulnerable and question our identity, or what we thought we perceived ourselves as our identity, because, certainly what we thought of ourselves was not perceived or was not reflected by the others.

The realisation of these entrenched notions of inferiority leads to alienation and the adoption of new identities, but all ultimately in relation to dominant, white identity (Fanon, 1967, p. 14, 93). These can result in self-hatred and an internalising of derogatory stereotypes of inferiority (ibid., p. 11). Aisha – the co-founder of a feminist collective, in her mid-twenties, London born and raised to Pakistani parents – admitted to internalised racism and Islamophobia accumulated over time. ‘If I hear about an attack that's happened on the news, and they don't know who the attacker is, my first instinct is I bet they're Muslim.’ It can also lead to assimilation, distancing yourself from ‘othered’ cultures to prove proximity to white Britishness, but these only align your identity with the ‘coloniser’s’ accepted view (ibid. p. 23). For instance, Lina – a scientist from Iraq whom I met while working at the asylum hotel, after she had just claimed asylum with her daughter – recalled overhearing a woman make racist, anti-migrant remarks on a bus. She shrugged it off, saying, ‘she doesn't know me, maybe we are doing some useful things here [...] maybe I'll be productive in the

future,' reflecting pressure to perform as the 'good immigrant' figure. Ultimately, all attempts are in response to constructions of white British identity and '[no] matter how hard you try [...] we will always be perceived as people from the other country', according to Saira.

Liberation and reclamation of agency ultimately come through rejecting and creating new identities that exceed these historically entrenched binaries of superiority/inferiority (ibid., p. 226; Hall, 1990, p. 228). In the face of violent displays of nationalism that seek to erase or homogenise anyone who does not fit into the myth of national identity, such as the riots, new forms of cultural identities emerge (Hall, 1992, p. 308;). In globalised cities like those in the UK, we see the re-identification of cultures of origin, the construction of counter-ethnicities, and the revival of cultural traditionalism (ibid.). A multiplicity of identities emerges, 'the product of several interlocking histories and culture', belonging simultaneously to several homes yet to none (ibid., p. 310). This fluidity allows power to be negotiated across spaces, resisting objectification under the white gaze. Cultural identity, being the 'difference' that is the target of violence, can simultaneously be the site of struggle and form self and community care.

Aisha likened the internal effect of racism to being 'caged [by] mental patterns', attributing creative practice and communal celebrations of cultural identity as means to dismantle them. As the organiser of the *This Home is My Own* community event and exhibition, Aisha explains the relief in being in spaces and practices outside of the white gaze. The exhibition encapsulated the vast and varied ways in which culture and identity can be openly explored, affirmed and documented through art, communal activity, music, performance and shared practice. The event description read (*fig. 5*):

This exhibition is our way of taking stock of what happened in the year that followed, when the cameras are no longer asking us to explain, justify, condemn or advise. It is a space to explore belonging, outside the condescending, reductive gaze of whiteness. A space to reflect on what home really means.



Figure 5: Installed text at exhibition entrance with event description.



Figure 6: Raabia Ghaznavi, *Amma & Nana*, 2025.

By sharing pain, memories, imaginings, and by recognising mutual experience, it became a space to process collective lingering trauma inflicted by the riots (Herman, 1997, in Pain, 2019, p. 396). This becomes a practice of mutual care, with art and performance enabling communities to enact their own experiences and document their presence, through material and embodied forms of memory, challenging the spaces and dominant culture that seek to erase them (Györke and Timár, 2021, p. 95; Till 2012, p. 5).

The works on display expressed both alienation and belonging, exploring the multiple facets of diasporic cultural identity. One piece reconstructed a Chinese takeaway<sup>9</sup> shopfront from aluminium food containers (*fig. 7*), while another collated family photographs to create an archive of the gendered labour involved in building immigrant communities (*fig. 8*). These layered materials, techniques and mediums were a tangible expression of overlapping, hybrid identities – affirming and celebrating the ‘rich, complex mosaic of experiences’ of British cultural identity, as an installed text stated.

Through foregrounding the aesthetic qualities of care (Thompson, 2020), the exhibition allowed the exploration of fluid identities that encompass difference and challenge fixed binaries (Hall, 1990, p. 229). The exhibition embodied the relational, sensory and affective dimensions of care (Thompson, 2020, p. 215), exemplifying how radical care mobilises ‘visceral, material, and

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<sup>9</sup> Emblematic of migratory flows and colonial histories, the family-run Chinese takeaway has long been a central fixture of British culinary culture and national identity.

emotional [...] acts of preservation' that implicitly challenge structural dehumanisation by creating positive affects of identification (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 2).



Figure 7: Ahn Tran, *Sun Sun Shop Front*, 2025.



Figure 8: Melody Akanji, *Gathering*, 2025.

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The practices of radical care that emerged from my interviews were numerous and diverse, shaped by each individual's needs and relations. However, I have exemplified several common threads connecting them: wanting to protect and shield loved ones from harm, extending compassion and sensitivity, engaging in open dialogue and knowledge-sharing, celebrating cultural identities, and finding moments of joy amidst the pain. Despite differences in demographics, contexts and location, these shared practices demonstrate radical care as a unifying experience.

## 6.2 Caring structures

The caring practices explored are embedded in relational structures: family, community and institutions. While these are embedded in one another and inextricably linked, this section breaks down the how they operate and highlights some of the specific challenges and power dynamics present in each.

## 6.2.1 Family

Explicit experiences of care relationships are often rooted in familial relationships, though these are not without tensions and difference (Tronto, 2010, p. 161). This was especially evident during the riots, as they sparked intergenerational dialogues and exposed contrasting responses to racialised violence and being othered. The intergenerational inheritance of structural racism and violence was revealed – the psychological and physiological impacts of trauma reaching across generations, re-evoked in present moments of oppression (Sullivan, 2013, p. 191).

When recounting immediate responses to the riots, many respondents described conversations had with parents, children, siblings and partners. The family was a place to collectively discuss what happened, make sense of it and comfort one another. Leah said that within her family, ‘we always have these hard conversations, we talk about politics, we talk about race, about social issues [...] always reminding each other that you're doing well, you're doing great’. Intergenerational experiences and memories were intertwined, as the riots prompted parents and grandparents to recount past encounters of racism and violence, while children reconstructed their own views in relation to these inherited experiences (Hall, 1990, p. 226). These exchanges exposed, not only the recurring cycle of violence and trauma, but how coping strategies and healing practices differed across generations.

Older family members were reminded of the pervasive racism and hostility faced in the 1970 and 1980s, ‘almost taking them back to the first time they arrived in this country’, said Farha. However, this comparison also meant that some older generations downplayed contemporary violence. Leah said that since her mother faced horrible, extreme forms of racism when she first arrived in the UK, she tends to avoid discussions of race and no longer feels it is as significant an issue. ‘She just feels like it could be worse, like it's not a big deal.’ Saira arrived in the UK as a young child and was raised with the notion that Pakistan is her true home. ‘It was embedded in me through my mum, that we belong there’, she tells me. Therefore, for those identifying with another home elsewhere, the far-right cries of ‘*go home!*’ do not have the same impact as it does for second and third generations who have never known another home.

When I asked Leah about the similarities or differences in her and her mother’s experiences of racism, she recounted a formative incident: while in the car together, another driver shouted a derogatory racial slur at her mother. Leah was shocked that her mother’s response was to immediately apologise, assuming she was at fault. She then reflected on their differing positionalities and privileges; her mother’s thick accent and lived memories of vicious racist attacks, versus Leah’s socialisation in the UK. This perhaps results in a heightened sense of

precarity for her mother, feeling like an overt reaction can have dire consequences, while Leah feels emboldened in her claim to her country. Leah recognised her mother's response as what she called 'a trauma response of powerlessness.'

These contrasting responses – Leah wants to confront, engage in dialogue and express collective anger, while her mother wants to minimise its impact and persevere in silence – illustrate the multiple forms (self-)care can take. However, while differing approaches are valid and necessary, the repeated occurrence clearly demonstrates that unresolved, ongoing trauma continues for each generation. Lederach (2005, pp. 141–143) urges a holistic understanding of violence and trauma that acknowledges how recent riots, personal experiences of racism, parents' and grandparents' lived memories, and ancestral narratives coexist. While different generations perhaps interpret violence differently, these concurrent spheres of memory often remain fragmented, hindering collective, cross-generational healing.

For some, however, intergenerational histories are regarded as a profound source for radical care – the past offering comfort, knowledge and liberation in the present. When I asked Ade how he remains hopeful in the face of today's adverse political climate, he replied that his strength comes from:

'the Black radical tradition, [...] the works of elders, ancestors, [...] relying on legacy and history and tradition, and knowing that I'm building on something and I'm building something that'll be passed on as well.'

He firmly situates himself within history, using it to orient himself in the present. Histories that shape not only individuals and families but are also located in wider collective memories, which is why community is integral for providing the care needed to heal from this trauma.

## 6.2.2 Community

Community undoubtedly emerged as the key site and actor for radical care in the wake of the riots and beyond. Many respondents identified community support as vital for combatting isolation and fear; as Farha said, 'when the going gets tough, the community pulled together'. Effective radical care that emerged in response to the riots was already ongoing, rooted in existing relational ties and in-depth understandings of local specificities (Lederach, 2005, p. 145).

Radical care 'relies on working with communities and asking them what they need rather than making paternalistic assumptions' (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 10; Tronto, 2010, p. 161). Farha, explained the need for her organisation's collaborations with other anti-racist organisations, both regional-wide and town-specific: 'each area and each locality, it's quite distinct. So, the

demography that make up the communities in each area differ, and therefore the needs differ, the way our response will differ.’ Additionally, Michael – a researcher and policy expert at a London-based grassroots organisation dedicated to strengthening and empowering local Black and minoritised communities – tells me that he builds trust for effective community work by ‘understanding what their needs are and [approaching] it as a critical friend rather than a top-down 'better than you'.’

This in-depth understanding of a community’s needs is compounded by the fact that many respondents identified as being a part of the target communities – either in terms of race, religion, gender or local neighbourhood. Identity, work and social activism are enmeshed; the boundaries between professional and personal are blurred. Caring for your community subsequently becomes a way to care for oneself. As Ade described, his work as a community organiser is not siloed from the relationships cultivated throughout his life: ‘I do organise with the grassroots quite a lot, but I am from there.’

This community-rooted care unfolds with an underlying assumption that it will not come from elsewhere. The neoliberal, imperial state is predicated upon neglecting the vulnerable, so this gap must be filled – radical care, collective practices and mutual aid are essential to countering these logics (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 10). A lot of respondents are already engaged in community work (whether that is through formalised grassroots organisations or independent activism) that are ‘challenging inequalities, representing the voice [and] needs of the communities, challenging the status quo’, as Farha described. This work is built upon anti-hierarchical logics of self-organising and communal care, resisting further harm caused by ‘defunct’ and ‘extractive’ neoliberal systems, according to Michael. Not just in the short-term, but to build alternatives from the ground up. Michael is currently working on community-driven housing and wealth-building projects in north London, helping communities to grow and thrive by ‘pushing out the extractive model of capitalism and making that wealth is circulated within communities.’

Countering these logics also means resisting hierarchy, allowing for multiplicities of identity, rather than seeking to homogenise. Community can contain and be shaped by factors such as race, religion, gender, class, migration status, age, kinship, political affiliation, and so on, unable to be reduced to a single dimension. The community created by the marginalised strives not to perpetuate the violent power structures that have enabled their oppression.

However, community is not simply a harmonious, utopian entity – it is not immune to wider power structures operating on logics of hierarchy and othering, which are inevitably reproduced. While Anderson’s (1983) ‘imagined communities’ are bound together by the *shared*

(narrative, memories, heritage, desire to live together), the riots exposed how communities are equally based on *exclusion*. Through discussions with respondents, it became clear that, while community is a discursively constructed concept that resists static definitions, in the context of violence, it ultimately falls along lines of division.

For instance, reflecting on the impact of the riots on her town, Farha first described Rochdale as ‘a very friendly and community-oriented place’, with trouble only caused by ‘outsiders’. Yet in the moment of the riots, she admitted she was no longer sure who she could trust and retreated into ‘allies, people that you know are similar to yourselves.’ This was also evident in the fact that even some racial and religious minority groups failed to underscore the inherently ‘anti-Muslim element’ of the riots, subsequently reproducing the violence and erasure of Muslim communities, potentially prohibiting care practices from addressing these specific needs (*#WeNeedAnswers* [Webinar], 2024).<sup>10</sup> This reveals community care’s susceptibility to parochialism, withdrawal into those who are ‘similar’, and logic of otherness; emphasising the danger of radical care to ‘bleed into right-wing and white supremacist politics as much as it upholds leftist utopian visions’ (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 8).

This is not always the intention, but a by-product of communities confined by neoliberal state structures. In response to the Harehills riots<sup>11</sup> in Leeds – sparked by disputes over children from a Roma family being taken by social services – Ade’s organisation has been working with the area’s Roma community. A group facing severe socio-economic deprivation and social exclusion, Ade admitted that the team’s understanding of the community was limited. As a result, they overlooked internal divisions between the Romanian and Czech Roma groups, unintentionally causing further harm and straining relationships with the community. Despite the organisation’s staff largely being racialised minorities themselves, the lack of direct representation and reliance

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<sup>10</sup> Evidenced in recent discourse regarding the rise of antisemitic attacks in the UK, in context of Israel’s genocide in Gaza. The gross, antisemitic conflation of the state of Israel and all Jewish populations, has led to increased [hysteria](#) around the safety of Jewish people. However, there has not been the same level of public outrage at the [record-level rise](#) in Islamophobic attacks and safety of Muslim populations. For example, in October 2025, on the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur, a [stabbing attack occurred at a synagogue](#) in Manchester. This horrific incident received widespread media coverage and was even weaponised by the Home Secretary to discourage a [pro-Palestinian protest](#) from taking place. Meanwhile, the [stabbing of an imam](#) at a mosque in west London in September did not make national headlines.

<sup>11</sup> The 2024 Harehills riots took place a few days before the Southport stabbings. Harehills is home to significant Pakistani and Roma communities, and tensions quickly escalated between the ethnic groups. With police outnumbered, [local councillor Mothin Ali](#) heroically stepped in, attempting to deescalate the violence and further destruction of the neighbourhood. He is now Co-Deputy Leader of the Green Party, which has seen an unprecedented increase in membership under the new leadership and, as of November 2025, are polling in second place behind Reform UK.

on pre-existing assumptions revealed how even well-intended efforts to care for another oppressed group can reproduce exclusion and hierarchy.<sup>12</sup>

This exposes the limitations of community and care, which are fundamentally linked and determined by neoliberal systems. Actors within these frameworks face limited resources, rigid hierarchies and pressures to deliver measurable outcomes. For example, the aforementioned issue could, in theory, be addressed by simply hiring staff from the Roma community. However, broader societal inequalities mean that Roma people face significant barriers to education and employment, so this problem extends beyond the organisation's immediate remit. Ade himself acknowledged the limited capacity to simultaneously 'resist the far-right' and 'stand in solidarity with the Roma' in Harehills, so the organisation is unable to have the desired impact. Care involves an emotional, relational component, but is equally dependent on resources, logistics and socio-economic constraints. Therefore, in times of scarcity, care is naturally prioritised for the 'similar'.

### 6.2.3 (State) institutions

The limitations of community care stress that, while essential, it cannot be the sole site of care, and that effective state-provided, institutional care is also required. The emergence of radical care exposes institutional failings and gaps, yet simultaneously recognises the urgent need to connect with them. State care, through public policies, as well as less formal care practices, all work through institutions (Tronto, 2010, p. 158). It must also be noted that even certain community-based care practices are delivered through (informal) institutions. Several of the organisations I spoke with are institutionalised, hold relative structural power or act as mediators between state and community – but are therefore subject to limitations, as explained in the previous section. Thus, transforming and building institutions that provide care effectively is a necessity. How can community care be effectively integrated into or collaborate with state institutional mechanisms for a more successful impact? How can we seek to transform institutional care?

Tronto (2010, p. 168) claims that 'institutional care is better understood in the context of conflict', so responses to the riots provide an appropriate background for examining state and institutional care. Respondents conveyed institutional absence to support vulnerable communities at the time of the riots, with Farha claiming the state failed to 'step up in terms of their public duty and civic responsibility.' The primary sentiment towards the state among respondents was mistrust. An underlying assumption persisted that the state does not have your best interests at heart, that

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<sup>12</sup> My data sample did not provide enough scope to thoroughly analyse the frictions of inter-community, ethnic and religious tensions, and the subsequent impacts on delivering effective community care, so this highlights an interesting area for future research.

they don't care. Ade associated feelings of 'insecurity' with 'interacting with state bodies', claiming that 'they have no legitimacy'. Amy plainly said, 'I think that we have never seen care from the government, so we don't necessarily know what it would look like'. The lack of trust taints anyone associated with the state. As a former civil servant, Michael faced significant challenges in his community work, with residents interpreting his bureaucratic background, despite being a fellow Black Londoner, as 'you're in the government, so therefore you're not one of us'.

Institutional responses to the riots were characterised by presumptions of what people needed, rather than asking, and a deflection of responsibility. Government inquiries were quickly launched into strengthening policing strategies (House of Commons Library, 2024) and the role of social media mis/disinformation (UK Parliament, 2024), and an independent commission on community cohesion was announced in June 2025 (Puddle, Rutter and Rolfe, 2025). I have already noted how such responses ignored the racist, Islamophobic and anti-migrant nature of the violence and its colonial roots, while common cohesion and integration discourse implies that migrants and minorities are to blame for social fragmentation. The commission aims to 'enhance community connectedness, cohesion and resilience', weaponising individualistic logics, and the language of care and compassion to shift accountability onto communities themselves, making no mention of the state's role in sustaining divisions (ibid.). This allows the state to absolve itself of responsibility, while its institutions continue to extract unpaid labour from citizens, exemplified in the overrepresentation of migrant workers in health and care work, hospitality, admin and support services (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 8).

The state's evasion of responsibility relies on a narrative of care that idealises 'benevolence or moral purity' of those actually delivering it (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 8). This presumes that those in the charity and care sectors work out of pure love for the job and will continue regardless, 'dedicated 24 hours a day, 365 days a year,' Farha professed. This allows the state and its institutional actors to retreat from obligation, while the very sector providing essential services is overlooked in terms of resource distribution, testing the limits of this presumed morality and goodwill. A vicious cycle of care is established, with community actors and grassroots initiatives stepping in to fill institutional gaps. However, this creates forms of dependency; such community actors feel indispensable, especially as they provide the essential services that nourish mental health, resilience and wellbeing, stuck in an endless loop of wanting to provide without deflecting responsibility to the state (Nabijou, 2023).

Nevertheless, institutional care is not wholly perceived negatively, with some respondents sharing fond experiences. During the riots, Sophie was pleased that her local council was a key

liaison between community outreach organisations (particularly those supporting migrants), the police and the Home Office. Although she admitted, ‘I just don’t trust the Home Office’, the council became a reassuring, active presence to whom they could voice concerns and access information. Additionally, Lina’s perception of institutional care countered my assumptions of harmful state immigration policy. She recounted her experiences of navigating the asylum system: the immigration officers conducting her asylum interviews who showed her dignity, kindness and compassion, the staff at asylum hotel that helped with her luggage and offered advice about the local area. Even in institutional settings, which are often governed by an uncaring state at a macro level, relative power and impact is still held by those delivering the care through daily interpersonal interactions. However, Vincent, an asylum-seeker sharing his experiences of the ‘hostile environment’ on a podcast,<sup>13</sup> points out the irony that while kind individuals work within these harsh systems, ‘the nice people do not have much influence on the system’ (Nabijou, 2024).

Drawing inspiration from community organisations and local institutions, the centralised state must transform by centring genuinely caring relations, engaging with community needs, and making decisions through participatory methods. The positive experiences of institutional care described were effective because they built trust, engaged in meaningful dialogue, and showed empathy and humanity. This offers a viable alternative to resorting to dominant narratives of stricter policing measures or increased community integration.

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This section has illustrated how radical care is not only confined to localised communities, isolated from wider forces, but is a fundamentally socially and politically embedded practice that spills into various spheres of life and relational settings. Each context presents unique moments of care, alongside significant challenges and limitations. Therefore, this next section considers what conditions of possibilities these examples of radical care unveil – what conditions they provide for a more caring future.

### **6.3 Caring possibilities**

Radical care is not a fixed doctrine nor an abstract philosophy, but it provides a roadmap for an otherwise’ (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 13). Rooted in the grassroots, mutual collaboration,

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<sup>13</sup> *No Small Victories: Tales of Community Resistance* is a [podcast](#) hosted by a volunteer-led migrant and refugee support group in north London. They speak with guests with lived experience of ‘surviving and resisting the UK’s Hostile Environment immigration policy and explore what a kinder and more hopeful society could look like.’

participatory action and marginalised people determining their own needs, radical care offers a vision of hope for an alternative way of living – so that it eventually should no longer be considered ‘radical’.

The examples of radical care I have mapped out – embedded in the everyday lives of marginalised people, essential for resistance and healing in times of violence – offer strong possibilities for a future ‘otherwise’. However, I have demonstrated how radical care does not occur in isolation from power structures and external forces, but emerges through and in response to them, limiting its full potential. Therefore, this section exposes these challenges and contradictions present in sustaining such care, and asks what might happen if they are overcome?

### 6.3.1 Healing histories of violence and trauma

As outlined earlier, these riots are the latest in a long cycle. Each clash in the street or car set alight, reopening an unhealed wound. I asked respondents why they think riots and violent displays of difference recur. Ade succinctly replied: ‘I think all roads lead back to European history.’

Historic memories of colonial violence lingered like a spectral presence throughout conversations. For Farha, the images of the rioters attempting to burn down the Rotherham hotel and kill asylum seekers inside, ‘brought memories of lynching and slavery and all the negative things that you read about historically, and you can never imagine that you're experiencing it in the here and now.’ Viscerally embodying notions of chronic trauma described earlier, my respondents are certainly not post-violence; the violence and trauma of the past are very much present, embedded in everyday realities (Lederach, 2005, p. 140; Pain, 2019, p. 390).

However, this understanding is resisted in the dominant conversation. Aisha frustratingly explains that our ‘historical memory is actually characterised by denial’ and that ‘we don’t even want to talk about colonialism, forget what happened last year.’ British culture is dominated by historical amnesia and wilful ignorance. The British government has not formally apologised for colonialism and its role in and the transatlantic slave trade, children do not learn about the negative consequences of the British Empire in schools, the Commonwealth Games is a widely celebrated event, the list goes on. State policy and media narratives work to sever connections with colonial histories, claiming they are distant and irrelevant, with nothing to left to reckon with. Neglecting to acknowledge how this colonality persists in modernity through renewed power dynamics of exploitation and dependency in British trade, aid, development and foreign policy (Quijano, 2000; Langan, 2023).

This linear, episodic, dominant narrative of violence – one that resists drawing the line between British imperialism and the 2024 riots – persists. Trauma thus lingers in the bodies, memories and places of affected individuals and communities, implicating their identities and challenging their healing (Lederach, 2005, p. 145). Rotherham in the aftermath of the riots illustrates this. The surrounding area of the attacked asylum hotel remains unsafe, a zone marked by structural and physical violence, yet vulnerable individuals continue to be relocated there. Aleena, Saira and Zainab depicted the volatile, precarious atmosphere of town. They recounted how several women they support, already grappling with the trauma of domestic abuse, have been housed in that area, only to face continued racial and sexist harassment, ignored by the local council and police. Continued layers of past and present violence intersect and overlap: recent experiences of domestic violence and the anti-migrant riots, entangled with migrant histories, embedded racialised hierarchies and socio-economic inequalities. They recalled one immigrant family with young children repeatedly moved around after multiple racist attacks. Even in their new home, the young mother startles at every noise. ‘Do they move on?’ Saira asks, ‘They don't really. It's those memories that haunt them.’

Radical care, on the other hand, recognises communities and individuals as rooted in ‘histories and present situations of violence and vulnerability’ (Michaeli, 2017, p. 53). Such histories of colonialism and ‘centuries of exploitation inform the inequalities entangled with care today’ (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 9). The government’s responses and inquiries following the riots present a fragmented account of what happened, implying that now the perpetrators are in prison and harsher policing strategies have been implemented, justice has supposedly been served, and their complicity can remain concealed (Sivanandan, in Burnett, 2017, p. 2). A wider public accountability mechanism is required, which recognises the state’s role in inciting or mishandling the riots and ensuing hate crimes, while centring the stories and identities of those affected.

Lederach (2005, p. 146) emphasises this is the ‘deeper challenge of peacebuilding’ and admits that no appropriate, holistic frameworks are currently in place. However, he spotlights useful initiative implemented to respond to the trauma felt by caregivers in the wake of 11 September 2001– it moved beyond direct trauma healing provisions, to support caregivers within social contexts, connecting their trauma to wider global justice frameworks (ibid., p. 145). Trauma healing was conceptualised as a collective process, shaped by historic and contemporary violence that defines individual and communal identities (ibid.). Lederach poses what effect such engagements could have on the ‘wider public and even national ethos’ (ibid.)?

Connecting with wider frames of historical analysis are integral for addressing intergenerational violence and trauma, allowing a renegotiation of history and identity. A lens of radical care is sensitively, historically situated to help us orient present moments and past contexts. Otherwise, the cycle of race riots continues, aggravating harm to those already licking their wounds. It has become a tragic inevitability, the vulnerable living knowing they live in a society that does not care for them or their histories. As Aisha acerbically remarked, ‘just like there will be seasons, there will also be racial violence.’

### 6.3.2 The invisible labour of resistance

The care needs that arise during violence are entangled with inequalities shaped by ‘the discourses and materiality of neoliberal globalisation and historical and contemporary relations of colonialism and neocolonialism’ (Robinson, 2011, p. 5). Consequently, care becomes an undervalued and unevenly distributed form of labour, constructed along gender, race and class hierarchies – further impacting both the care givers and care receivers (ibid.). This devaluation and exploitation of care work are essential for the functioning of the capitalist, extractivist economy (Fraser, 2017, p. 21).

Although vital to repairing and tending to society, care and social reproduction are rendered invisible, as feminist political economists have long argued (Mies, 1986; Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic, however, exposed this paradox—revealing who truly sustains society. As Laugier (2021, p. 61) notes, ‘care is never so visible as in those situations where a form of life is shaken.’ De Kock et al. (2023, p. 507) meanwhile claim that this sudden value placed specifically on formal care work and workers, reduced ‘what it meant to care for one another in society [...] to a focus on the bare necessities, which meant physical care’. While other caring practices are further obscured, ‘when care is performed by others than who we traditionally identify as care professionals’ (ibid.).

Conversely, I would argue that though these less visible forms of care were not valued in the manner as formal care work during the pandemic, their absence revealed their essential effects (Bellacasa, 2017 p. 1). Forms of relational care – such as affective labour, aesthetics and communal practice – extend beyond physical health and well-being and are fundamental in tending to society. Some of these are experienced through informal roles and personal relations in the family or wider community, while others are experienced through formalised paid work by community carers (such as social workers, creative practitioners and faith leaders), but who are not typically categorised as care workers. These are the practices and people performing them, that helped

affected individuals and communities endure and survive the riots. These compromise the invisible labour of resistance.

However, even those in these paid positions are not strictly working within the confines of their job title, and in fact going beyond to care for their communities and, especially in the instance of the riots, themselves. This vital work would not be done without uncompensated physical and emotional labour; embodied by several of my respondents. Sophie admitted the immense emotional toll of supporting asylum seekers and refugees within a broken system, especially during the riots. Yet, she saw her job and her activism as intertwined – ‘it’s a part of our lives’, a way to enact her politics. Aleena commended her colleagues’ passion and work ethic of, saying their consistent willingness to ‘go above and beyond’ for service users is what keeps her motivated and hopeful. Observing the commitment, love and care my respondents had for their respective communities was profoundly moving – qualities that should be celebrated and valued, but sadly, are too often exploited.

Laugier (2021, p. 61) claims this ‘invisibility’ in regard to care ‘does not refer to a difficulty in perceiving but rather a refusal to see.’ At the time of the riots, Starmer (2024) publicly thanked the police for their support in tackling the violence, but there was no acknowledgement for the community carers who equally play a role in keeping communities safe and rebuilding spirits after the dust settles. Going back to the pandemic, formal care work was suddenly valued and applauded – quite literally when people stood outside their homes in lockdown for a weekly round of applause to show appreciation for healthcare workers – when it suited the state. Yet this was not actually economically compensated and was made invisible again, as British nurses have been striking repeatedly since the pandemic over pay disputes.

This exploitation and co-optation of care labour is not accidental but a necessary function of neoliberal, neocolonial state (Fraser, 2017, p. 21; Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 7). Again, not just in healthcare work but within the charity sector and social movements, individuals are working within fundamentally broken systems, made increasingly difficult during times of scarcity. Amy thinks this is not unintentional on the government’s part: ‘make them so busy that you can’t actually have a nice culture of care, because we’re just fighting fires all the time’. This can lead to burnout and resentment, and leaves less time and energy for capacity building, knowledge sharing and strengthening resistance. Amy continued that this tactic ‘restricts knowledge, because if you don’t have the time to learn [...] how are you going to ever fight? Ever understand the systems and then fight the systems?’

Rather than ‘prospering and growing’, as Farha noted, they remain constrained by a vicious cycle, unable to move beyond immediate needs to actually dismantle and transform the very hierarchies and narratives that perpetuate their condition. I found myself in this cycle of firefighting while at the asylum accommodation. I extended small acts of care, but ultimately knew these were limited, beholden to a broken system. I spent much time referring individuals to already at-capacity local clubs, services or even immigration solicitors, watching someone’s frustration grow when I explained they were not permitted to work while awaiting their status, and reassuring week after week that their claim would be approved soon.

Herein lies the disruptive potential of care, revealing what invisible, neglected practices deserve greater recognition and value (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 12). However, it raises a critical question: how can care be honoured, the dedication and passion of caregivers be celebrated, without continuing to exploit them or allowing the state to evade responsibilities to provide required support.

### 6.3.3 Countering the ‘island of strangers’

When I asked respondents how they felt about Starmer’s ‘island of strangers’ remarks, many surprisingly agreed with him, saying it did capture the isolation and alienation people experience in their communities, but not for the same anti-migrant reasons Starmer claims. Ade responded:

‘it is an island of strangers, but not because of migrants, because there's no youth clubs. [...] People do feel like strangers [...] because Britain's been broken for at least a century, and we've been fixing it.’

Michael echoed Ade’s concerns, noting that cuts to youth spaces have disproportionately ‘impacted people from certain backgrounds.’ During his time as a civil servant, he raised this issue repeatedly, but the lack of response ultimately led to his resignation.

Radical care is rooted in communities and collective practice; however, in today’s climate, characterised by hyper-individualisation and loneliness, it has become increasingly difficult to find, build and nurture such communities. The ‘island of strangers’ encapsulates the sentiments of mistrust and hostility generated by scapegoating migrants and pitting classes against each other, and the desire not to build community based on difference. It equally refers to the material barriers to building community that work to reinforce such sentiments.

Economic inequalities, entrenched through decades of austerity politics, were a backdrop to many of the conversations. When I asked Michael about his experiences of the 2024 riots, it immediately brought up unresolved memories of the 2011 riots. While the groups and purposes

for rioting differed – one, the white far-right espousing hateful ideology, the other predominantly young people in London decrying police brutality and racism – Michael expressed a degree of sympathy towards the 2024 rioters, understanding that ‘the thread between them is austerity’. He argued that the government’s ‘fixation’ with a neoliberal economic model blinds them to the realities of the most vulnerable. Aisha similarly noted that there seems to be an inability to truly grasp that the ‘root of rage and discontent’ felt by specific communities is economic dispossession.

The devastating impact of cuts to social welfare and local government spending is well documented, hitting minority groups in terms of class, race, gender, age and disability, the hardest. When the British population has reached a record number of people using foodbanks and children living in poverty, it is arguably no surprise that many feel like a stranger in their own communities, trapped on this island.

Furthermore, within the context of specifically anti-migrant violence, the hostile immigrant system actively prevents migrants and asylum-seekers from sustaining community and influencing change, due to housing dispersal, limited state welfare support, and not to mention the detrimental impacts to mental health. Speaking about communities she has formed since being in the UK, Lina said, ‘when you move places several time[s], it disconnect[s] you from people that you know, and you have to build a new relationship with people, so it makes it harder.’ This is compounded by the psychological distress of being separated from her other child, who is still in Iraq. The guilt prevents her from trying to enjoy things here while ‘someone who's very part of my heart is suffering somewhere in the world.’

The politics needed to build the resistance, to advocate for alternative economic policies, cannot emerge without community, and the relationships, trust and culture that comes from it. And community cannot be built without physical spaces and resources. Ideology alone is not sufficient, emphasising the need for historical materialism and an overhauling of current systems; for the ‘social changes and political revolutions are to be sought not in men’s brains [...] but in changes in the modes of production and exchange’ (Engels, 1939, p. 290).

Principles and praxis of radical care counter this isolation, by promoting care within one’s immediate community and focusing on ‘fixing your own backyard’. Small, local actions – whether advancing housing justice in Leeds, driving a community wealth project in north London, or advocating for migrant youths in Brighton – form the ethical and physical foundations for broader systemic change. These mutual aid practices cultivate the ‘skills that are denied in white patriarchal capitalism, such as collaboration, feedback, and participatory decision making’, offering a blueprint for what this new order could look like (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 13). As Ade reflected, while

it may seem limited to focus on localised struggles while witnessing what is happening on a global scale,

a movement is built by people in the end, and we're based in Leeds, so we have to listen to what the people in Leeds need from us. And answer their needs, restore their resilience, advocate for their right[s] [...] you can't really build a movement to resist that without first building the homes that the movement will live in.

\* \* \*

The asylum hotel embodies perhaps the most uncaring, inhumane of government policies: tens of thousands of vulnerable people (many of whom are escaping violent persecution or coping with severe trauma), are stuffed in overcrowded, under-resourced, heavily securitised hotels, forbidden to work and provided only £9.95 a week (Nabijou, 2024; Clark, 2022; WRW, 2024). Even within the margins of society, the people dictated by capitalist-colonial systems as not worthy of dignified life, resigned to almost-death care remains (Mbembe, 2003).

Despite, or perhaps due to the very nature of, such a hostile living environment, human beings still find ways to forge connections with others.<sup>14</sup> While the asylum system has become 'much harder to use' over the past decade, Sophie shared moments of humanity and hope that emerge:

No one wants to stay there. No one should be staying there. But also, obviously, friendships are there, and people get to know each other and stay in touch and support each other. There's someone who's given birth recently at one of the hotels you used to go to, and all the other residents are checking on her and are supporting her and looking after the baby.

These forms of radical care, which resist and renegotiate wider external forces aiming to extinguish them, indicate the way forward. The relational practices of the oppressed and marginalised, which radical care highlights, enable us to demonstrate our humanity, heal from violence and trauma, and gradually build the resistance, brick by brick, towards a future alternative.

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<sup>14</sup> I recommend this article, ['Love in a Hostile Environment'](#) in UK quarterly magazine, *The Fence*, about asylum seekers dating and searching for love. A beautiful illustration of the stories that should be out there, that even during extreme precarity and uncertainty, the human desires for love, connection and care do not stop.

## 7. Conclusion

One reality of the 2024 riots is the eruption of far-right violence, fuelled by the belief that some are less deserving, that this signals a loss of control that must be reclaimed through assaults on those perceived as threatening ‘strangers.’ Another reality also emerges: one of people showing unity, solidarity and resilience against hatred. Despite being neglected and assuming that external help will not be given, they find ways for mutual support, whether by sharing laughter with loved ones, checking in on a neighbour, seeking guidance from a community leader, or attending a local cultural celebration. Even amidst the most distressing, dehumanising circumstances, the most vulnerable continue to resist and survive.

The relational practices of radical care and sustaining community identified in this research did not simply arise in response to the riots but have unfolded alongside long-standing histories of violence. Radical care has been an everyday reality and necessity for those enduring the ongoing, unresolved trauma of structural, colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal violence, as the society they inhabit continues to neglect these root causes. Care therefore emerges as a means to shape and renegotiate ‘senses of the self, community and belonging’ through ‘supporting one another, [...] reciprocity, and forging new relations’ (Krystalli and Schulz, 2022, p. 13).

Nevertheless, having simultaneously discussed the challenges and tensions of care, it is evident that its potential is restricted, as it emerges through and in response to power structures and hierarchies. Therefore, radical care reveals the disruptive and transformative power of care, fundamentally a means to redistribute power to the most marginalised, to reveal what invisible practices should be valued (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 10; Bellacasa, 2017, p. 12). Ultimately, care must no longer be a radical act but the principle of our social and political order.

A fundamental lack of an ethic of care within our prevailing politics is evident. This lack, therefore, perpetuates structural discrimination, dehumanisation and division. The materiality of violence manifested through institutional policies as much as far-right riots. With the state being a significant enabler of the anti-migrant rhetoric underpinning the riots, it could never fully provide the appropriate care required. The riots, therefore, exposed an urgent need to reverse from this current political trajectory, emphasising that a viable alternative is required.

Radical care imagines and enacts alternative. While certain visible practices of radical care in the face of violence perhaps emerged out of necessity and immediate protection, it encompasses possibilities that go beyond. Grassroots community work and social action are emblematic of a radically caring politics; rooted in genuinely understanding community needs, engaging in shared

dialogue, collaborative decision-making, being driven by empathy and humanity. My research has demonstrated that this is already happening on the small scale, inherent in how marginalised communities care for each other and their environments despite neglect. These are the anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal skills required to challenge the state that has enabled and perpetuated their oppression. (Hobart and Kneese, 2020, p. 13). However, my research finds radical care work profoundly constrained by material economic barriers, as well as deeply entrenched polarisation and social fragmentation. Can radical care initiatives alone resist and overcome these?

Therefore, the challenge lies in translating these practices into electoral politics to achieve systems change. This presents a crucial area for further research: exploring how this can be extrapolated, translated, and scaled up for political transformation. Specific radical care case studies or mutual aid initiatives must be examined in more detail, perhaps through active methodologies such as participatory action research, engaging a variety of stakeholders and changemakers. This is not only relevant for community leaders and grassroots social movements, but crucially requires the participation of policymakers and elected political officials.

Hobart and Kneese (2020, p. 2, p. 13) present radical care as both a set of strategies for ‘enduring precarious worlds’ and a roadmap for the otherwise. It is an intrinsic way of being and relating, but it remains a *radical* way of being. Violence and cruelty have become so normalised, even by those who claim to protect and support us, that the notion of care itself seems radical. For radical care to truly enact its ideological purpose, it no longer needs to be radical. It fundamentally calls to centre in our political order the very human practices of caring and loving, healing from trauma, and protecting from further harm. However, herein lies its paradox: can this transformation be possible within the confines of a neoliberal, neocolonial, capitalist, patriarchal global order? Within a system fundamentally predicated on endless exploitation, dehumanisation, commodification and hierarchy – not caring for anyone or anything but profit – does radical care have the capability to dismantle these systems?

While it is all too tempting to succumb to despair and impossibility in the face of such violent realities, the insights gained through this research – hearing and learning from individuals who persevere in caring for their communities – reaffirmed a hope in the transformative potential of care. Each small, local act of radical care disrupts power, embodies the desired ethic and helps move incrementally towards this transformation – towards the possibility of a more caring world.

# Appendix 1: Interview guided questionnaire

## Introduction

- Can you tell me more a bit about yourself – where did you grow up, where you live now and what you do?

## Organisation (if relevant)

- How does your role fit into the wider organisation and/or movement?
- Why did you want to do this role? / How did you get into this work?

## Experience during the riots

- Can you tell me what you remember about the riots last summer?
  - Can you describe your experience a bit more? What you remember feeling?
  - Did you witness any in person? Did you attend any counter demonstrations?
- This city saw a lot of far right and counter protests – can you explain how you think it impacted the city?
- Do you recall feeling any immediate or short-term changes or responses? (in your org)
- Do you feel like there's been any longer-term changes, any recent discussions or mentions you are aware of? (in your org)

## Care

- How do you define or understand 'care'? Personally and/or professionally?
- What care practices have helped you feel resilient, strong, etc?
  - E.g. self-care, taking responsibility to care for others, physical caregiving
- (In your work) who or what do you care for that gives you strength, inspiration or hope?
- At the time of the riots, what practices did you engage in to care for yourself or others?
- What did you wish you could have done for yourself or others?
- Have you connected with others to offer care, create change or support?
- Since your work involves caring for others, how do you take care of yourself?
- Do you help others provide care for themselves?

## Institutional response

- How do you decide what services to offer your communities? Do they ask what they need? / How do you know what your communities need?
- Does your organisation/movement engage with any level of government? (E.g. local council, city, national?)
- What would care from the government look like? Did you receive any of it?

### **Future**

- In the past few weeks we have seen a violent attack outside an asylum-seeker hotel in Epping and an outbreak of racist, xenophobic mobs in Northern Ireland. A recent survey by GMB trade union reported that 85% of Uber drivers feared similar attacks would happen this summer, saying it would have long-term impacts on their livelihoods and families. What do you think can and should be done to respond to these fears? To care for these people living and working in fear of more violence?

### **Additional**

- How do care and community fit together?
- What kind of community services did you have growing up? / Did you have any services like these growing up?
  - What was your experience of them – what did they give to you?
- What would you identify as the biggest thing missing or needing from your community?

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