The problem of hate crimes and related prejudices against asylum seekers and refugees in England and Wales

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DECLARATION

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“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”

Albert Einstein, a refugee.
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Abstract

Refugees fleeing their homelands in search of a safe haven in Europe are increasingly finding themselves subjected to racist and xenophobic reactions. Through a structured literature review, this dissertation critically examines the problem of hate, hostility and prejudice targeted at asylum seekers and refugees in England and Wales. It looks at the extent of the problem, the nature of incidents, as well as who is committing them and, why. Findings show that official statistics and data from victimisation surveys do not allow for an analysis of either the level or nature of hate incidents and crimes committed against this minority population. Qualitative research and organisational reports, however, suggest that asylum seekers and refugees are experiencing an everyday racism and xenophobia that takes the form of verbal abuse, harassment and violence. This dissertation argues that the responsibility for racist offending rarely lies with members of hate groups but instead with a range of ordinary people and can extend to the perpetrator’s community. The question as to what causes the manifestation of race-hate and related prejudices can in part be answered through cultural theories and to a lesser extent, through theories associated with socio-economic deprivation and the emotions of hate. However, the findings emphasize that there is a lack of qualitative and empirical research focussing specifically on the victimisation of asylum seekers and refugees in England and Wales, as well as the perspectives of perpetrators targeting them and without further research any conclusions in this dissertation remain theoretical and in need of corroboration.
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Introduction

Context of the research focus

Acts of violence and discrimination motivated by racial and ethnic hatred have a long history and not only in England and Wales (Bowling, 1998) but across the globe (Fredrickson, 2001; Iganski & Levin, 2015, p. 8; Turpin-Petrosino, 2015, pp. 32-40). At its worst, racial hate has claimed many lives and had a profound spatial impact on members of victimised groups resulting in their fleeing en masse, as in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia (Iganski & Sweiry, 2016, p. 100). More recently, populations have fled countries like Iraq and Syria where ethnic identity also played a part in violence and killings (Iganski & Sweiry, 2016, p. 100). While racial prejudices and related intolerances have often been the cause of flight for many refugees, it has also been what they have found on their journey to, and arrival in, a country of refuge, as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2009, p. 3) has previously stressed:

“Racial discrimination and related intolerance are common causes of flight and can threaten the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees at subsequent stages of their displacement cycle. They can be manifested through restricted access to asylum or negatively affect the quality of asylum. Asylum-seekers and refugees may be denied equal access to public services and become targets of racially motivated acts. What often begins as subtle expressions of dislike and intolerance can develop into institutionalized discrimination, incitement to hatred, verbal and physical abuse and, ultimately, hate crimes”.

Across mainland Europe, there has been an escalation of intolerance, discrimination, and violence directed at asylum seekers and refugees (European Network Against Racism, (ENAR), 2015-2016, p. 3). This has persevered against a backdrop of events like the Eurozone debt crisis, the EU Referendum in the United Kingdom, the European refugee crisis, terrorist attacks in a number of European cities and the growing popularity of far right parties (ENAR, 2015-2016; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2016; Anti Defamation League & Human Rights First, 2016). FRA (2016, p. 2) claims that racist and xenophobic acts targeting people already fleeing persecution is “pervasive and grave whether committed
by state authorities, the press, vigilante groups or the general population”.

**Why the research is worth doing**

According to FRA (2016, p. 3), only a few European member states (Germany, Greece, Finland and the Netherlands) monitor and collect information on incidents and hate crimes targeting specifically asylum seekers and refugees. Moreover, despite commendable efforts from civil society organisations in some European countries, FRA (2016, p. 8) argues that information on hate crimes against this population remains extremely limited.

Drawing on information received from civil organisations in England and Wales, the Office for the Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR, n.d.) reported just 12 incidents of ‘racism and xenophobia’ in their most recent data and only two of these related to refugees: one involving a sticker insulting refugees plastered outside a hospital and the other the vandalism of a refugee’s house. Using official data of police-recorded hate crimes from England and Wales, the ODIHR (n.d) provided the much larger number of 62,831 police-recorded hate crimes of ‘racism and xenophobia’. However, while this figure undoubtedly reflects the extent to which people are experiencing racism and xenophobia, as this dissertation will demonstrate, the information reveals little about the scale of the problem in relation to the victimisation of distinct groups like asylum seekers and refugees.

Furthermore, the distinct experiences, situations and vulnerabilities of refugees and asylum seekers has received little attention in hate crime scholarship (Athwal, Bourne & Wood, 2010, p. 17; Bhatia, 2017; Chakraborti, 2014, p. 14; 2015, p. 1744; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012, p. 503; 2015, p. 22; Hall, 2013, p. 67; Williams & Tregidga, 2013, p. 26). While there has been some limited study focusing more specifically on this population, it often emanates from outside England and Wales, is dated and concentrates on far right extremism (Iganski, 2008, p. 15 cites Björgo, 1995; Björgo & Witte, 1993; Bunar, 2007; van Donselaar & Wagennar, 2007).

**Research methodology**

This dissertation is based upon a structured review of academic studies from a number
of library-based research databases, journal databases, and Internet search engines. Searches for government, public and civil society organisational as well as media reports were conducted using search engines such as Google. This review has focussed mainly on literature from the last thirty years, representing the period preceding the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 and the years that followed: a significant time for hate crime policy makers and scholarship in England and Wales.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to critically explore the problem of hate crimes and related prejudices against asylum seekers and refugees in England and Wales. This aim will be achieved by addressing the following objectives:

1. critically contextualize the problem within society;
2. critically examine the extent of the problem;
3. critically investigate the types of prejudice and hate;
4. critically consider who the perpetrators are; and,
5. critically explore the causes of the problem.

Chapter summaries

The first chapter places this study within a social context and briefly considers how hate crimes became recognised as a problem worthy of concern in England and Wales. It then examines issues surrounding the construction of the term hate crime and the bearing this has on understanding the scope and nature of the issue. In a similar manner, it considers who have traditionally been understood as victims of racially motivated hate.

The second section considers the use of terminology when referring to different immigrant populations and the implications this can have on understandings and attitudes. In addition, it considers how racist hate crime is measured through police-recorded data and crime victimisation surveys as well as the issue of underreporting. It then critically examines what qualitative research and organisational reports reveal about the extent and nature of hate, prejudices and hostilities directed specifically against asylum seekers and refugees.
The third chapter considers who the perpetrators are and why they offend. In particular, it critically researches whether theories associated with extremism, socio-economic deprivation, emotions and culture provide plausible explanations as to the causes of hate incidents and crime directed towards asylum seekers and refugees.

The last section highlights the key issues identified in the literature as well as the lessons learnt and some of the practical implications they have on hate crime policy and research.
Chapter 1
The socio-political context of the problem

Like crime in general, hate crime is a social construction (Hall, 2012; Hall, 2013, pp. 19-39; Jacobs & Potter, 1998, p. 39) and as such, it is relevant to place this study within a social background and briefly consider how the victimisation of ethnic minority populations became recognised as a problem worthy of concern in England and Wales. It is also important to examine how racial victimisation has traditionally been framed in terms of whom it affects. This chapter then illustrates that to critically examine the problem, it is necessary to look beyond simplistic notions of hate and to the concept of prejudice.

The emergence of racial hate crime

Hate crime can be interpreted in different ways depending on the moment in time, who you are and where you are; with certain people and countries giving recognition to different groups and categories of offending and others simply not recognising anything at all (Chakraborti, 2014, p. 15; 2015, p. 1741; Hall, 2013, p. 40). For example, crimes against members of the Roma and gypsy communities as well as other minority populations such as Jews and representatives of the LGBT community are not classified as hate crimes in Hungary today, with racist or ideological motives in the committing of such offences not considered (European Tolerance Centre, European Centre for Democracy, Institute for Ethnic Policy and Inter-Ethnic Relations Studies, 2017, p. 42). One only has to look around the world to appreciate how societal and political concern with the victimisation of people based upon their identity has stemmed from a range of events and processes (Hall, 2102; Hall, 2013, pp. 19-39). For Bowling (1998, pp. 150-170), early concern in British academic and professional settings of what is now recognised as hate crime can be traced back to a number of specific events and developments, namely the urban riots of 1981 in Brixton, south London as well as the re-emergence of victimology as a significant field of study.

However, the watershed moment for racist hate crime in England and Wales was undoubtedly the 1993 murder of Stephen Lawrence, an 18 year-old black man killed in an unprovoked racist attack by a gang of white youths while waiting for a bus in Eltham, South-East London (Chakraborti & Garland, 2015, p. 20; Hall, 2013, p. 33). Following the relentless
campaigning of Stephen’s parents and others, a public inquiry was launched into his murder and the police’s handling of the case. Consequently, the Macpherson inquiry report (1999) was published and had not only a profound impact upon the way in which racism was perceived and policed, but gave hate crime as a term and concept a prominent place in societal, academic and political settings (Hall, 2013, p. 35).

The victims of race-hate

Researchers (Garland, 2011, p. 27; Mason-Bish, 2010, p. 62; Williams & Tregida, 2013, p. 126) remind us that traditionally race-hate has been the strand of hate crime that most people are familiar with, the most widely prioritised and researched. Yet, despite such focus, there are people that fall victim to race-hate that have received limited attention in the hate crime debates (Chakraborti & Garland, 2015, p. 22). One such group pushed to the fringes of discussion are asylum seekers and refugees (Athwal, Bourne & Wood, 2010, p. 17; Bhatia, 2017; Chakraborti & Garland, 2015, p. 89; Hall, 2013, p. 67). Moreover, this lack of attention is despite their official recognition as victims under the monitored race or ethnicity strand of hate crime of the operational police guidance (College of Policing, 2014, p. 30), that states:

“Any group defined by race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origin, including countries within the UK, and Gypsy or Irish Travellers. It automatically includes a person who is targeted because they are an asylum seeker or refugee as this is intrinsically linked to their ethnicity and origins.”

It has been argued that in attempts to measure the extent of the hate problem, different groups of victims have found themselves bracketed together as homogenous populations under the race or ethnicity strand of hate crime (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012, p. 504; 2015, p. 21). Scholars have maintained that through the combining of very dissimilar groups, distinct experiences, vulnerabilities and situations are diluted, misinterpreted or in certain cases ignored altogether (Chakraborti, 2015, p. 1740; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012, p. 504; Mason-Bish, 2010, p. 64; 2014, p. 27). While research has emerged more recently that examines the experiences of distinct communities falling within the broader race and ethnicity strand of hate crime victims such as gypsies, Roma and travellers (see James, 2013; 2014a; 2014b; James &

While neither the hierarchy nor worthiness of different groups within the race and ethnicity strand of hate crime is under debate (or for that matter other victims of hate crime), it is relevant to emphasize how certain communities have lacked the resources and progressive campaigning, the power of language and the political, social or economic influence of other more visible victims (Chakraborti, 2015, p.1745; Mason-Bish, 2010, p. 60; 2011, p. 301). Unquestionably, asylum seekers and refugees have been one such population (Chakraborti, 2014, p. 17; 2015, p. 1744). Further, with those seeking asylum and refuge being subjected to negative stereotypes in societal and political settings, frequently portrayed as ‘undesirables’, ‘criminogenic’ or less credible and worthy than more ‘legitimate’ victim groups (Chakraborti, 2015, p. 1744; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012, p. 503), any progressive politicisation and recognition of their victimisation has undeniably been minimized.

Recognising hate and prejudice

Another concern that has been identified within the literature is the rationale for choosing the word hate to describe these types of offences and the claim that incidents are not really about an offender hating their victim but much more about prejudice, bias and hostility (Hall, 2013, p. 9; Jacobs & Potter, 1998, p. 21). Preference has likewise been given to the terms hostility and prejudice in official definitions of hate crime; for example, the police’s operational guidance indicates that a racist incident or crime is one that ‘is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person’s race or perceived race’ (College of Policing, 2014, p. 4).

When considering the notion of prejudice, the relevance of Gordon Allport’s (1954) seminal work cannot be underestimated, and though dated, has often been the starting point for many (Tyson & Hall, 2016, p. 100). Allport (1954) explains how prejudices are rooted in people’s processes of stereotyping and in-groups (that is to say, a social group that an individual belongs to and strongly identifies with) act out these prejudices against members of out-groups (a social group with which a person does not identify). Through his five-point scale,
Allport (1954, p. 14) demonstrates how prejudices can be manifested towards out-groups by means of anti-locution and the expression of negative remarks, through avoidance and discrimination, by means of physical attack and, by way of extermination. Hall (2013, p. 84) highlighted how Allport was at pains to maintain that his scale was not representative of how people progressively move from one level of negative action to another and that most do not manifest prejudices beyond anti-locution. While this may have been, and probably still is the case for many, it is important to highlight (and as will be demonstrated later) that anti-locution or discrimination can be perceived as sowing the seeds for other types of negative actions and ultimately, in the eyes of some perpetrators, even legitimising it.

Since Allport’s work, further theories have been put forward to explain the development of prejudices, for instance, how they can be correlated with people’s social identity and grouping as well as intergroup conflicts (Hall, 2013, p. 88 cites Tajel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Sherif & Sherif, 1953; Sherif, 1966). In particular, ‘realistic conflict theory’ (Sherif & Sherif, 1953; Sherif, 1966, cited by Hall, 2013, p. 88), provides an explanation of how prejudice and discrimination develops between in and out-groups as a result of a real (or perceived) deprivation or competition for valued services and commodities; an example could be where jobs, housing or access to social services are scarce and conflict arises when an in-group blames an out-group, like immigrants.

It is important to consider the work of Jacobs and Potter’s (1993; 1998) when further examining prejudice and its association with the causation of hate incidents and crimes. Jacobs and Potter’s (1998, p. 38) argue that many incidents and crimes are seldom a result of high levels of prejudice but instead triggered for other reasons, such as economic deprivation or impulsive behavior and are ad hoc situational disputes ignited by short tempers and emotions. Through their arguments, Jacobs and Potter (1993; 1998) ultimately questioned whether hate crime as a concept and the enactment of hate crime laws should exist. A review of the debates that followed their provocative stance is beyond this study, but counterattacks were frequently supported with robust evidence (for a summary see Hall, 2013 pp. 169-182). It cannot though be denied that they highlight important issues when considering the role of prejudice in hate offending and the reality that it may only be in part a motivating factor in racial victimisation. It is relevant to consider such arguments, as they highlight how the causation of offending, in this case against refugees and asylum seekers, may not simply be about high levels of prejudice.
against certain people, but are perhaps somewhat more nuanced.

Concluding comments

This chapter has demonstrated that it is necessary to examine societal and political settings to understand how the concept of hate crime was established and recognised as a problem as well as how those experiencing it gained recognition as victims. In particular, it has argued that the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees as victims of hate and related prejudices have traditionally been overlooked, hidden and perhaps at times, even considered unworthy of concern. Finally, this chapter has shown that to understand the hate problem, it is important to consider the workings of prejudices and how they cause (or not), at varying levels, people to commit offences. The next chapter will move on to examine the extent and nature of race-hate and related prejudices directed at refugees and asylum seekers.
Chapter 2
The extent and nature of the problem

This chapter begins by reviewing the terminology used when referring to different immigrant populations and how this can impact upon the understanding of their experiences, vulnerabilities and situations. Then, drawing from official data and qualitative research, it critically examines what is known about the extent and nature of racism and xenophobia against asylum seekers and refugees in England and Wales. In particular, it considers not only race-hate offences but also a range of other intertwined prejudicial actions that they are subjected to.

The problem with terminology

It is central to define and understand who migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are, as it is becoming increasingly common to see the terms used interchangeably. The 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3) defines a refugee as:

“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

An asylum seeker is a person who claims to be a refugee but has not yet been evaluated, or accepted as such by the host government, whereas a migrant (sometimes referred to as an ‘economic migrant’) is a term used when referring to an individual who crosses a border voluntarily and for the purposes of inter alia better prosperity, education, to find work, to reunite with family, or to alleviate hardship or extreme poverty and, unlike refugees, if migrants decide to return home they will continue to receive the protection of their government (UNHCR, 2016). Therefore, essentially a migrant is not fleeing for his life but instead fleeing for a better life.
Whether it be the public, the press, policy makers, other commentators or academics, many have commonly used the terms refugee, asylum seeker and migrant mistakenly, interchangeably or blurred them into one (Cohen, 2002, p. xxii; Philo, Brandt & Donald, 2013, p. 144; Stonewall, 2004, p. 12). UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection (Türk, 2016, p. 138) has highlighted how this has been a long-standing challenge in dealings with not only the press but also academic and policy discourse. Moreover, Türk (2016, p. 138) argues that misrepresentations can take attention away from the different experiences, needs and the protection owed to refugees as well as affect public attitudes (Blinder & Allen, 2016, p. 33) and fuel intolerances against them (ENAR, 2015-2016, p. 3; Greenslade, 2005, p. 29).

One example amid many of how individuals in need of humanitarian and international protection have been incorrectly framed as ‘economic’ or ‘illegal’ ‘migrants’ is that of the then Home Secretary, Theresa May who described large groups of Africans coming from Nigeria, Eritrea and Somalia as ‘economic migrants’ who had paid criminal gangs to transport them across Africa (May asked to define…, 2015). Yet, Eritreans coming to Europe are one of the biggest populations claiming asylum and have been prioritised for resettlement in a number of European countries due to it being unsafe for them to return as Eritrea is under international sanctions and condemned for human rights abuses (Peter, 2015; Refugee Council, 2012). Hence, contrary to Mrs. May’s statement, it is highly unlikely that these Eritreans (or for that matter Nigerians and Somalis who come from war-torn countries plagued with human rights abuses) are ‘economic migrants’ but in accordance with the 1951 Convention are more exactly refugees.

It must be stressed again that it is not the intention of this research to contend that racism and related-prejudices against certain groups is more worthy of recognition than others, but instead to draw attention to the likelihood that the needs, rights, experiences, vulnerabilities and situations of communities such as gypsies, travellers, migrants, foreign students, or asylum seekers and refugees may be very different. To provide an illustrative example, a number of studies have suggested how victims of racially motivated hate crimes who have previously experienced significant adversity and trauma (which could be the case for many refugees), or subjected to repeat victimisation, could consequently be more resilient than other victims of crime (Kostić, 2010, p.72; United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODCCP), 1999, p. 8). While beyond the remit of this dissertation, examining the resilience
theory and comparing refugees’ experiences with other victims of comparable crimes would be an interesting area of research, especially as hate crime legislation and enhanced punishment is grounded in the notion that these crimes hurt their victims more (Hall, 2013, p. 166; Iganski, 2008, p. 72-93; Kees, Iganski, Kusche, Swider, Chahal, 2016, pp. 19-22).

The official problem

In England and Wales, official attempts to measure the extent of racist hate crime can be found in police-recorded crime data. The most recent Statistical Bulletin from the Home Office (2017, p. 4) illustrates how the amount of police-recorded race-hate crimes has been continually increasing over the last years. Five years ago, Burnett (2013, p. 2) already stressed how the sheer numbers reflected the extent to which racism shaped the backdrop of many people’s lives. Seemingly, this is still very much the case with an increase of 27 per cent to 62,685 police-recorded racist hate crimes in 2016/2017 from 42,862 in 2014/2015 (Home Office, 2017, p. 4). Additionally, there have been notable spikes in the reporting of hate offences around the EU referendum as well as the terror attacks on Westminster bridge and at the Manchester Arena (Home Office, 2017, p. 15) with Awan and Zempi (2017, cited by Chakraborti & Garland, 2017, p. 148) suggesting that events of local, national and international importance can trigger as well as influence the frequency and severity of hate incidents.

As highlighted earlier, police operational guidance states that hate incidents and crimes targeted at someone because of their asylum or refugee status constitute a recordable race-hate crime as this is intrinsically linked to their ethnicity and origins. Certain local policing initiatives, like those of South Yorkshire Police, have led to the development of recording systems to identify offences against refugees and asylum seekers (College of Policing, 2014, p. 34). However, there has been a failure to track and quantify hate crimes and incidents against the asylum and refugee population nationwide as can be seen from the Statistical Bulletin (Home Office, 2017). Hence, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the 62,685 racist hate crimes were motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a victim’s actual (or perceived) asylum or refugee status.

Crime surveys can provide for another means of measuring racial victimisation and in the most recent Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) (Home Office, 2015, p. 14), an average of 106,000 racially motivated hate crimes were reported for the year 2014-2015.
However, the CSEW data has similarly not been disaggregated beyond basic ethnic grouping (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Hence, it is difficult to determine the extent to which specific communities like asylum seekers and refugees have been victimised. The shortcomings and lack of disaggregated official hate crime data due to the manner in which people have been bracketed together under the broad strand of race and ethnicity has been raised as a concern in the past (Iganski, 2011, p. 5; O’Nions, 2010, p. 235). More recently, the Anti-Defamation League and Human Rights First (2016, p. 5) and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 2016, p. 5) have recommended that England and Wales develop monitoring systems to provide disaggregated data on hate crimes and the characteristics of victims. Notwithstanding the limitations of official data, it is evident when comparing the number of police-recorded hate crimes with those of the CSEW, that there are significant disparities, suggesting that racist incidents and crimes in England and Wales are going unreported to the police.

Under-reporting

Giannasi (2014, p. 114) stresses that reliable statistics will always be hard to come by and full reporting of hate crime can never be expected, as like crime more generally many individuals suffer victimisation without reporting it to the police. Nonetheless, the differences highlighted above are stark and it is likely that for certain isolated communities, like asylum seekers and refugees, they are even starker (Giannasi, 2014, p. 114; Home Office, 2016, p. 31; Iganski, 2011, p. 24). A number of explanations have been put forward to explain why asylum seekers and refugees are not reporting hate incidents and crimes (Bhatia, 2017; Chahal, 2016, p. 41; Chakraborti, Garland & Hardy, 2014a, p. 72; 2014b, p.12, FRA, 2016, p. 9; ODIHR, 2015, p. 3; Perry, 2010, p. 353).

First, there will invariably be high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers who lack information, do not understand, or are unfamiliar with the term hate crime (FRA, 2016, p. 9). Similarly, for many victims, harassment, bullying and violence form an entrenched, routine part of their daily lives and something that they resign themselves to and do not recognise or report as hate crime (Chakraborti et al, 2014a, p. 40; 2015, p. 1748). In the Leicester Hate Crime Project (Chakraborti et al, 2014a, p. 46) this was confirmed by asylum seekers from Zimbabwe, Somalia, Pakistan, Iraq, Sudan and Syria who did not recognise their experiences...
as hate crimes and despite the gravity and frequency of their victimisation, had simply normalised these incidents.

Second, many individuals fleeing human rights’ violations, civil war and repression may fear and be suspicious of government authorities. They perceive the police as an enforcer of a political regime, instead of an independent and trustworthy criminal justice agency mandated to investigate offences and uphold due process (Bhatia, 2017; Chahal, 2016, p. 41; FRA, 2016, p. 9; Perry, 2010, p. 353; ODIHR, 2015, p. 3). Moreover, the general hostile climate towards and negative stereotyping of refugees and asylum seekers in political and media discourse in England and Wales (Bhatia, 2015; Burnett, 2017, p. 95) has, undoubtedly, done little to dispel apprehension and further discouraged them from reporting hate crimes. Finally, asylum seekers in particular may be reluctant to report their experiences as they are afraid of any subsequent negative impact on their asylum claims, of being dispersed to prison-like detention centres, or worse still being deported back to their country of origin (Bhatia, 2017); past research has found how many failed asylum seekers preferred to take their own lives than face deportation (Athwal & Bourne, 2007, p. 108).

As scholarship has pointed out, the real-life value of hate crime policy and response becomes contingent on people reporting their victimisation (Chakraborti & Garland, 2017, p. 150; Perry, 2010, p. 361). However, as Chakraborti (2017, p. 9) maintains the needs and concerns of isolated victims continues to be ignored despite recurrent narratives within state policies and guidelines that reiterate the importance of breaking down barriers to reporting for these hard to reach communities (College of Policing, 2014; HM Government, 2014; 2012; ODIHR, 2009 cited by Chakraborti & Garland, 2017, p. 151).

The nature of race-hate

Even with improved reporting and robust statistics, Perry (2010, p. 360) argues that official data provides limited subjective information concerning hate offending, including the motivations of offenders, as well as the emotions and words expressed during incidents. Consequently, there is a need to understand offending through qualitative and other research from charities, non-governmental organisations, as well as media and journalistic accounts, all of which often provide a richer and more meaningful collection of information on racist
violence (Bowling & Philipps, 2003, p. 159; Chakraborti, 2014, p. 83; Iganski, 2011, p. 5). The Institute of Race Relations is one such resource that monitors racial attacks and violence through local and national press. In one of their studies (Athwal, Bourne & Wood, 2010), 660 cases of racial violence from 2009 were analysed and the incidents were found to have taken many forms, from graffiti on a wall and spoken abuse to arson and even violent, murderous stabbings. Considering that verbal abuse most likely was the factor used to define an attack as being racially aggravated, unsurprisingly in over two thirds of the cases, racial and xenophobic verbal abuse had been used. While the study did not focus on specific ethnic minority populations and Athwal et al (2010, p. 17) recognised the patchiness and flaws in their methodology, they nonetheless concluded that refugees and asylum seekers were a group that had ‘a real and terrifying daily risk of becoming a victim to racial violence’.

The Leicester Hate Crime Project (Chakraborti et al, 2014a, p. 22; 2014b, p. 8), one of Britain’s largest ever hate crime studies, also found how the majority of respondents (91 per cent) had fallen victim to racist verbal abuse and over two thirds (73 per cent) had experienced racist harassment in the form of bullying and other threatening behaviour, and nearly half (42 per cent) had been victims of property crime. Previous research (Bowling, 1998, p. 198; Chahal & Julienne, 1999, p. 9; Iganski, 2008, p. 42; Rowe, 2004, p. 116; Sibbitt, 1997) likewise revealed the existence of this low-level, ordinary and commonplace type of racial abuse and harassment.

Evidence of such racial harassment and abuse was also found in studies examining specifically the experiences of asylum seekers’ and refugees’ (Bhatia, 2015; 2017; Dumper, 2002) with participants recounting incidents whereby they were spat at, shouted at, had rubbish thrown into their gardens, received physical beatings (both themselves and their children), had stones thrown at them, were threatened with knives, had burning objects or faeces forced through their letterboxes, and had had dogs set on them as they walked outside their properties.

Previously, McClintock (2005, cited by Iganski, 2008, p. 23) argued that this type of racist violence is perhaps the most pervasive and threatening as well as possibly ‘the most banal and unorganized: the low-level violence of the broken window, the excrement through the letter box, late night banging on doors, and the pushes, kicks and blows delivered to the passer-by on the sidewalk’. The realities and ordinariness of much hate crime offending and these
everyday acts of racial prejudice has been, according to Chakraborti (2014, p. 18) a neglected area of research and all the more so when considering it effectively represents the predominant type of victimisation.

**Discrimination and criminalisation**

In addition to racial violence and harassment, there are other discriminatory experiences that refugees and asylum seekers are subjected to. It is important to consider some of them in the context of this research to understand how the problem is multifaceted and how such actions can intertwine with, and fuel hate. For instance, literature (Athwal & Bourne, 2007; Fekete & Webber, 2010; Webber, 2009) has called attention to how criminal justice systems can treat those seeking asylum unfairly and subject them to disproportionate penal policies and separate judicial systems characterised by harsher sentencing, segregation and expulsion. For Fekete & Webber (2010), this ‘enemy penology’ has, for example, incorporated controversial laws which make it an offence to enter the country without identification despite Article 31 of the 1951 Convention on Refugees that stipulates that it is not a crime to cross international borders without the correct papers if it is for the purpose of seeking asylum. It has been argued that contentious laws like these criminalise some of the already most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (Athwal & Bourne, 2007; Fekete & Webber, 2010).

Discriminatory and socially exclusionary practices have also meant that asylum seekers are prohibited from working for long periods, with the courts taking illegal working extremely seriously (Athwal & Bourne, 2007, p. 107; Webber, 2009). Many asylum seekers are already impoverished upon arrival and with their claims often taking more than six months to be processed, they commonly find themselves living in hardship and unable to pay for the basics and for refused asylum seekers the situation can be worse (Athwal & Bourne, 2007, p. 107; Refugee Council, 2012, p. 31; Webber, 2009). Furthermore, even if asylum seekers are recognised as refugees, they commonly continue to live in poverty and social exclusion with some becoming homeless and falling further into destitution (Batha, 2016; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), 2016, p. 35 cites Kartallozi, 2014, Doyle, 2014) with many forced into unethical and illegal work, at times even into conditions of slavery (Crawley, Hemming & Price, 2011, p. 6; McIntryre, 2017; Refugee Council, 2012, p. 31).
It has been claimed that England and Wales is possibly one of the worst places in Western Europe for asylum seekers to be, with the Government providing less financial support, poorer housing and social solutions than other countries, as well as having the strictest restrictions on working, but also accepting the lowest numbers of asylum claims (Athwal et al, 2010; Crush & Ramachandran, 2009, p. 8; Lyons, 2017). It is relevant to emphasize how stricter asylum policies are resulting in larger numbers of claims being rejected despite their authenticity (Refugee Action, 2017; Refugee Council, 2012), with the ENAR (2015-2016, p. 23) accusing the Government of a particularly exclusionary and hostile anti-asylum practice of ‘reject first, ask questions later’.

The above are just a handful of examples that demonstrate how deterrent legislation, anti-asylum policies and socially exclusionary practices are making this country an extremely discriminatory and prejudiced society for asylum seekers and refugees. Furthermore, such policies and practices have, according to Fekete and Webber (2010), resulted in the outlawing of individuals seeking asylum and refuge and as the next chapter will demonstrate, has been followed by another process, that of their vilification.

**Concluding comments**

This chapter has sought to understand the extent and nature of racial hate and related prejudices against refugees and asylum seekers but has shown that it is difficult to determine through official data and crime victimisation surveys as information has not been captured and disaggregated appropriately. Moreover, attempts to measure the problem have been further aggravated as asylum seekers and refugees are often not reporting hate incidents and crimes. That being said, studies have provided pointers to the nature of their victimisation and have suggested that they are experiencing not only an everyday racial harassment, abuse and violence, but also other discriminatory and exclusionary actions. Much of the research examining the nature of racist offending has also provided clues as to the characteristics of offenders as well as clues as to what motivates their offending and, the next chapter will address these issues in more detail.
Chapter 3

The perpetrators and causes of perpetration

Scholarship has provided insight as to the possible characteristics of hate offenders (see *inter alia* Levin & McDevitt, 1993; McDevitt, Levin, & Bennett, 2002; Sibbitt, 1997), and explanations as to the reasons for their offending, for instance, its thrill-seeking nature (Levin & McDevitt, 1993); its associations with the use of alcohol and drugs (Messner, Mchugh & Felson, 2004); its emotional nature (Iganski & Levin, 2015, pp. 52-57; Ray & Smith, 2002; Ray, Smith & Wastell, 2003; 2004); and, its defensive, retaliatory or organised and extreme character (McDevitt, Levin & Bennett, 2002). In addition, research has applied cultural and economic and social theories, as well as drawn on historic and geographic insights to explain why people commit hate offences (see Hall, 2013, pp. 98-123 for a synopsis of some of the literature). This chapter critically examines some of this knowledge to consider its relevance in explaining the causes of racist offending towards refugees and asylum seekers and whether it suggests that perpetrators share common features.

The profile of perpetrators

In support of the assertion that hate crimes are frequently committed by majority groups, studies have suggested that racist offenders, for the most part, are young and male (Bowling, 1998, p. 218; Chakraborti et al, 2014a, p. 56; Gadd, Dixon, Jefferson, 2005, p. 2; Iganski, Smith, Dixon, & Bargen, 2011, p. 14; Ray & Smith, 2002, p. 94; Roberts, Innes, Williams, Tregida, Gadd, 2013, p. 3). For instance, the Leicester Hate Crime Project found that the majority of offenders (37 per cent) appeared to be aged 19 or less and nearly a third (32 per cent) between 20 and 30 (Chakraborti et al, 2014b, p. 10). Previous research paying particular attention to hate crimes committed against immigrants in Sweden likewise reflected how most perpetrators were young and male (Bunar, 2007, p. 172). However, a widely cited study by Sibbitt (1997) examining the perpetrators of racial harassment and violence in two boroughs in London, cautioned against categorising offenders as exclusively almost young males and constructed a far more complex profile of perpetrators that spanned all ages, from very young children to old aged pensioners and included both sexes who often acted in groups of friends or family.
Sibbitt (1997) suggested that a common feature of offenders was also their adverse socio-economic situation, a finding since reflected in other studies (Gadd et al, 2005, p. 1; Iganski et al, 2011, p. 17; Ray & Smith, 2002, p. 95). German-based research examining whether unemployment could be correlated with right wing crime also found how it had played a crucial role (Falk, Kuhn & Zweimüller, 2011; Falk & Zweimüller, 2005). US-based research (Levin & McDevitt, 1993; McDevitt, Levin & Bennett, 2002) demonstrated how hate crime offenders could be characterised by their dysfunctional backgrounds, troublesome childhoods, difficulties in school and poor education, findings reflected in British studies (Gadd et al, 2005; Ray & Smith, 2002, p. 95; Ray et al, 2003). Finally, research has suggested that racist offenders commonly have issues with drugs and alcohol (Gadd et al, 2005, p. 1; Messner et al, 2004) as well as patterns of previous criminal behaviour (Gadd et al, 2005, p. 9; Ray & Smith, 2002, p. 95; Sibbitt, 1997, p. 101).

The above-mentioned research has undoubtedly provided important insight into the profiles of racist offenders; yet, constructing a consistent and reliable profile of the typical racist offender as well as extracting information on those who target asylum seekers and refugees has proved problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, while there were some, albeit sporadic, references to asylum seekers and refugees in a number of the studies coming from England and Wales (Chakraborti et al, 2014a; Gadd et al, 2005; Sibbitt, 1997; Williams & Tregidga, 2013), they provided no variables and analysis as to which populations were being victimised by whom. Secondly, any studies with a narrower focus originated from outside England and Wales and moreover, did not examine racial violence and harassment against refugees and asylum seekers exclusively, but situated this population alongside other ‘immigrants’, ‘non-indigenous ethnic minorities’ (Björngo & Witte, 1993; Bunar, 2007) as well as Jews and ‘foreigners’ (Falk & Zweimüller, 2005).

Thirdly, as Khan (2002, p. 41) has argued, even if many commentators agree with Sibbitt’s (1997) findings and see perpetrators as a variety of different people coming from different backgrounds, it nonetheless remains difficult disentangling and matching different types of violence and harassment to particular offender profiles. For instance, Khan (2002, p. 41) suggested that while females and the very young might be more inclined to deliver racist verbal abuse and harassment, young men remain largely responsible for physical violence, it is unclear as to the profile of offenders who commit arson and attacks on the properties of ethnic
minority populations. Khan’s arguments are all the more significant when considering, as we did in Chapter 2, the lack of reliable data and information on the extent and nature of offences committed against refugees and asylum seekers.

Finally, many of the studies on racist offenders and offending have commonly been victim-based and research on offenders’ perspectives is scarce (Bowling & Philipps, 2003, p. 160; Williams & Tregidga, 2013, p. 138). Undeniably, concentrating on victims’ experiences and perspectives obscures understandings of not only who racist offenders are, but their motivations for targeting certain people (Bowling & Philipps, 2003, p. 160; Roxell, 2011, p. 196). This can be illustrated by using examples from the Leicester Hate Crime Project (Chakraborti et al, 2014a, p. 22) that found how the majority of offenders ‘appeared’ to be of a certain age, or how many victims considered that they had not been targeted because of their asylum or refugee status but instead because of another identity characteristic such as their race, gender, age, dress, appearance or religion. These findings are extremely relevant in the context of this study, as they highlight how without a better understanding of offenders’ perspectives, it is difficult to obtain knowledge of certain characteristics (such as their age), who they are targeting, and for what reasons. That being said, the value of research examining the profiles of offenders should not be underestimated and provides many clues as to what motivates people to commit race-hate offences; it is to some of this theorising that this dissertation will now turn.

The extreme nature of hate

An explanation often put forward is that racist offending can be understood by means of its extreme and organized nature. Scholarly and political opinion, civil society and the media has often explained racism and xenophobia through the narrow lens of far right extremism and associated nationalistic ideologies (Chakraborti, 2014, p. 18; 2015, p. 1747; Iganski, 2008, p. 21; Iganski & Levin, 2015, p. 15). In addition, literature originating from mainland Europe considering attacks targeting refugees and asylum seekers has likewise framed any analysis within comparable parameters of organised violence by nationalist, far right groups and neo-Nazi skinheads (Iganski, 2008, p. 15 cites Björgo, 1995; Björgo & Witte, 1993; van Donselar and Wagemann, 2007). While research of late has drawn attention to an apparent growth of far right, extreme nationalistic groups and ideologies in Europe (Fekete, 2012) including in
England and Wales (Garland & Treadwell, 2012; Treadwell & Garland, 2011), past literature has maintained that these types of offenders are to blame for only a small amount of crimes. Gordon (1994, p. 50), theorising about racist harassment and violence in England and Wales, argued that:

“As for those responsible, it will not do to blame the organizations of the far right, although it may be tempting to do so... But the responsibility for racist violence cannot be laid solely or even mainly with them. The extent of racist violence is far greater than their small numbers. Those responsible for racist violence are ordinary people, predominantly men, but also women and also young people and children, even of primary-school age.”

Gordon’s (1994) findings that racist members are rarely members of hate groups has been supported by subsequent research in England and Wales (Gadd et al, 2005, p. 9; Iganski, 2008; Sibbitt, 1997) and while of less relevance, also in the United States (Levin & McDevitt, 1993; McDevitt, Levin & Bennett, 2002) and a study in Scandinavia (Bunar, 2007) that paid particular attention to immigrants and refugees.

The thrill and emotions of hate

The theory that people are motivated by the thrill-seeking nature and excitement of offending has been posited as a means of understanding race-hate crime (Levin & McDevitt, 1993; McDevitt et al, 2002). For instance, Levin and McDevitt (1993, p. 65) found how thrill-seeking perpetrators were predominately young males and typically acted in groups with one or two ringleaders looking for a stamp of approval from peers who regarded their hate as ‘cool’ and in this manner offending becomes psychologically and socially rewarding for the offender. Franklin's (2002) study also drew attention to how peer dynamics and conformity were a predominant motivation for hate offending particularly against gay and lesbians, consistent with Levin and McDevitt's (1993) thrill-seeking category. This supports earlier explanations of how offending is often not motivated solely by high levels of prejudice but is triggered by other factors (Jacobs & Potter, 1998), in this case the influence and pressure to follow others in a group. While Levin & McDevitt’s (1993) and Franklin’s (2000) research is US-based, the group dynamic of hate offending has been reflected in studies from England and Wales.
(Bowling, 1998, p. 218; Chakraborti et al, 2014a, p. 10) with research from Wales (Roberts et al, 2013, p. 7; Williams & Tregida, 2013, p. 139) suggesting that group-based offending is likely to be more prevalent in racist harassment and violence.

There appears to be no literature examining the significance of the group and thrill-seeking nature of racist offending directed specifically at refugees and asylum seekers. Nonetheless, this feature of offending can be found in a number of cases identified in the literature and reported in the media (Athwal et al, 2010; Chakraborti et al, 2014b; Sibbitt, 1997). For instance, Zimbabwean and Iraqi asylum seekers from the Leicester Hate Crime Project (Chakraborti et al, 2014b) recounted how they had been harassed and attacked by groups of young people; refugee families in Sibbitt’s study (1997) were harassed by groups of children and a female member of a Somali refugee family was chased by a crowd from a neighbouring secondary school, then attacked with bottles, as well as being persistently intimidated and abused by them. The group dynamic was strikingly apparent in another case whereby a 17 year old Kurdish Iranian asylum seeker was subjected to a gang attack in Croydon that reportedly involved at least 20 individuals, and ended with him beaten unconscious and left for dead (Grierson, Dehghan & Ross, 2017). Levin and McDevitt (1993, p. 66) argued that many hate offenders would not embark on a hate motivated rampage on their own, with the group dynamic providing confidence, motivation and security in numbers. Despite these observations, without seeking the perspectives of the perpetrators (and their peers) as to why they chose this manner of thrill seeking and group offending, the relevance of Levin and McDevitt’s (1993) theory remains abstract.

Research has drawn attention to the role that other emotions such as pride, shame, envy and loss play in racially motivated hate crimes (Dixon & Gadd, 2011; Gadd et al, 2005; Iganski & Levin, 2015; Ray & Smith, 2002; Ray et al, 2003; 2004). Developing the idea that race-hate offending is of a low-level nature committed in the unfolding context of ordinary people’s everyday life (Bowling, 1998, p. 198; Iganski, 2008, p. 69; Rowe 2004, p. 116), Iganski and Levin (2015, p. 56) maintain that offending can occur when commonplace interpersonal disputes or conflicts arise and become highly-emotionally charged, and it is only during such moments that animus surfaces, rather than offending arising from high levels of prejudices (Jacobs & Potter, 1993; 1998).
Ray and his colleagues (Ray & Smith, 2002; Ray et al, 2003; 2004) in their research suggested that many racist perpetrators experienced an accumulation of unacknowledged shame which is transferred into rage and anger that offenders projected onto particularly South Asian communities who perpetrators perceived (often mistakenly) as more socially and economically successful. Moreover, Ray and Smith (2002, p. 96) delineated how envy and resentment had driven frustrations and hostilities directed at these South Asian immigrants because offenders saw them as having a distinct culture and community; a feeling of belonging and community that the perpetrators themselves felt they had lost. Subsequent research (Dixon & Gadd, 2011; Gadd et al, 2005) likewise reflected how racist offenders expressed a deep sense of loss and hurt pride due to their community’s fall from grace in their once economically thriving town. Consequently, offenders developed hostilities towards those they perceived as non-deserving immigrants and a threat to already scarce resources. The racist offenders in these studies commonly confused different immigrant and other populations, voicing a ‘them’ and ‘us’ viewpoint rather than a true understanding of victims’ differences and identities (Dixon & Gadd, 2011, p. 50).

The socio-economic nature of hate

The social and economic situation of perpetrators has been a consideration when examining not only the possible common characteristics of perpetrators, but also what causes racist offending. Such theorising, as Sibbitt (1997) suggests, can be traced back to Allport (1954) who delineated associations between prejudiced people and their reactions to social and economic upheavals and how they blame and scapegoat out-groups for all these ills and woes. As highlighted earlier ‘realistic conflict theory’ (Sherif & Sherif, 1953; Sherif, 1966, cited by Hall, 2013, p. 88) has also offered explanations as to how conflict between different groups can be a result of perceived or real socio-economic deprivation. Much literature reviewed for this study tended to support such ideas and drew attention to how racism and xenophobia often occurred against a backdrop of social and economic adversity such as unemployment, material and emotional deprivation, competition for resources and benefits (Dustman, Fabri, Preston, 2011, p. 703; Gadd et al, 2005; Falk & Zweinner, 2005; Ray & Smith, 2002; Ray et al, 2003; 2004; Sibbitt, 1997).
Gadd et al’s (2005) study exploring the social context of racist offending in North Staffordshire, a region associated with industrial and social decline, brought together not only the views and experiences of perpetrators, but also those of other members of the community. Interestingly, it was not only racist perpetrators but others within the community that put much of the blame for all that was wrong in their lives on refugees, asylum seekers and other new comers (as highlighted previously, respondents in Gadd et al’s study failed to differentiate between different people and groups). The offenders, as well as these ordinary members of the community, perceived the presence of minority populations as a sign of the area’s decline and a tough reminder to them of their failure to secure decent lives for themselves and their families. This idea that prejudicial attitudes and scapegoating extends beyond the racist offender was likewise reflected in Sibbitt’s (1997, p. vii) study that found it was not only perpetrators that held racist attitudes but similar viewpoints were shared within the offenders’ wider community; the ‘perpetrator community’. Sibbitt (1997, p. vii) explained that perpetrators saw this as legitimising their actions and subsequently, “the wider community not only spawns such perpetrators, but fails to condemn them and actively reinforces their behaviour”.

British hate crime scholars (Hall, 2013, p. 105; Iganski, 2008, p. 70) have cautioned against reading too much into socio-economic theories to explain race-hate offending. They argue that although the scapegoating of immigrants for social and economic ills can create a climate from which hatred and bigotry develops, with struggles over resources being another component of racist offending, there is seemingly not a strong correlation between socio-economic deprivation and racist offending (Hall, 2013, p. 105; Iganski, 2008, p. 70). Hall (2013, p. 105) citing US-based research (Green et al, 1998; Lyons, 2007; Stacey et al, 2011) highlighted how racist offending against immigrants was found to be more prevalent in affluent areas and could not be convincingly associated with unemployment rates. Instead, Hall (2013, p. 105) believed that evidence from these studies could be aligned with cultural explanations of racist offending against immigrants.

The culture of hate

Supporting research findings highlighted earlier, namely that racist offending is rarely committed by members of hate groups and does not occur in a vacuum, Levin and Rabrenovic (2009, p. 42) draw attention to how “hate hardly depends for its existence on individual
pathology or abnormal psychology” but instead is something far more collective and “part of the culture, the way of life, of the society in which it exists”. Research has posited how hate violence is situated in cultures of prejudice, stereotypes and narratives about differences (Iganski & Levin, 2015, pp. 58-63; Levin & Rabrenovic, 2009). For Levin and Rabrenovic (2009) this ‘cultural hate’ is nested in learned, accumulated and persuasive experiences and intensifies as it intertwines with widely shared myths and negative stereotyping. Harmful stereotyping, according to Brown (1995, p. 82 cited by Hall, 2013, p. 85) can be found within the cultural settings in which people are raised and live, conveyed and reproduced in the normal socio-cultural ways, like through socialisation in the family and at school, through continued exposure to images in books, magazines, newspapers and television (these days social media can almost certainly be included in this list).

Levin and Rabrenovic’s (2009) idea that cultural hate spreads across generations chimes with much of Sibbitt’s (1997) research which saw how the elderly frequently influenced the attitudes of other and younger family members, as well as the people next door, or how young children and teenagers had been immersed and accustomed to hardened racist attitudes, particularly where community racism was already in existence. For Levin and Rabrenovic (2009, p. 43) “those who sympathize with bigotry draw their hate from the culture, developing it from an early age.” Similarly, the idea that cultural hate is dispersed across generations has been reflected in other studies (Gadd et al, 2005, p. 6; Roberts et al, 2013, p. 5). For instance, in Gadd et al’s study, the attitudes of younger racist offenders towards ‘new comers’ and their flawed knowledge of different populations, immigration, asylum, and nationality, were commonly shared with their elders. Younger offenders echoed the view of the older generation in that the Government should tell the truth about the magnitude of the immigration ‘problem’; that claims of persecution should be more thoroughly investigated; that many more ‘migrants’ should be ‘sent back’ to where they came from; and, access to benefits, housing and healthcare should be limited to ensure that the 'soft touch' image that attracts people to Britain in the first place is dispelled (Gadd et al, 2005, p. 6).

More recently, it has been reported that there is evidence of an increase in hate incidents and crimes recorded in schools with students being called names associated with ‘refugees’ (Bulman, 2017). Another study (Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), 2016, p. 6) found how over half of the children questioned believed that asylum seekers were stealing
our’ jobs. These reports suggest that culturally negative attitudes relating to refugee and immigration issues have somehow spread to, and are manifested by, the younger generation.

Another particularly interesting idea in Levin and Rabrenovic’s (2009) work is how cultural hate, in the eyes of the perpetrator, serves as a justification for their violence, in much the same manner as Sibbitt’s perpetrator community serves the same legitimisation for racist offending. Further, for Levin and Rabrenovic (2009, p. 51), the spreading of a dehumanising sentiment is an important element of both hate offending and its legitimization, as without this it would be far less likely that ordinary members of society would carry out or lend their support to such offences. A justification is that once the offender has attacked a culturally and socially dehumanised enemy and out-group (in this case asylum seekers and refugees), they can hence be victimised with ‘moral impunity’ (Levin & Rabrenovic, 2009, p. 46). The offender further legitimises their actions by believing they have achieved justice for friends, family and community through attacking those who have threatened the cultural, national and traditional heritage. Burnett (2013; 2016) has advanced the idea that this type of everyday racism is being passed off as pragmatic and legitimised, a racism that is culturally and economically necessary in the eyes of the offender; a new form of behaviour that is spreading and going unchecked in societal and political settings.

The importance of rhetoric

Cultural outlets such as the media are a prime example of how cultural hate has been conveyed and allowed to foster and propagate. Press and political discourse have not only used asylum seekers as the scapegoats for societal and economic ills but have dehumanised, vilified and criminalised them through the use of metaphors such as bogus, villains, cheats, thieves, liars, criminals and even, terrorists (Bhatia, 2015, p. 98; Burnett, 2013, p. 11; Cohen, 2002, p. xxiii; Finney, 2003, p. 14; Hardy & Chakraborti, 2017, p. 22; Webber, 2009). As such, asylum seekers have become central to how social problems in England and Wales have been depicted, been portrayed as a threat to the way of life (Bhatia, 2017; Finney, 2003, p. 14), and constructed as the modern day ‘folk devils’ (Cohen, 2002, p. xxiii; Fraser & Piacentini, 2013, p. 56)

For Bhatia (2015), this vilification has followed the cycle of criminalisation that refugees and asylum seekers have been subjected to, a process triggered by discriminatory and
socially exclusive anti-immigration policies and practices outlined in Chapter 2. According to Crawley et al (2011) such policies and practices have pushed individuals into acts of desperation, degradation, resistance and crime. Fekete and Webber (2010) argued that many of those labelled foreign criminals are merely guilty of petty offences, illegal work or of violating other administrative laws or have committed new offences created specifically to criminalise them. The biased discourse and spreading of hate and prejudice against refugees and asylum seekers by the British press and some politicians has been widely acknowledged as well as condemned (CERD, 2016, p. 4; ENAR 2015-2016, p. 14; Finney, 2003, p. 7; Hardy & Chakraborti, 2017, p. 22; Philo, Brant & Donald, 2015) and even blamed for fuelling racist violence (Bhatia, 2017; Greenslade, 2005, p. 30; Sibbitt 1997, p. 51).

There are numerous examples that could be cited to illustrate the dehumanisation and vilification of refugees and asylum seekers in the press as well as by certain politicians. However, this dissertation will provide just one, that of a British columnist portraying African ‘migrants’ fleeing for their lives across the Mediterranean in search of a place of refuge.

“You want to make a better life for yourself? Then you had better get creative in Northern Africa. Britain is not El Dorado. We are not Elysium. Some of our towns are festering sores, plagued by swarms of migrants and asylum seekers, shelling out benefits like Monopoly money. Make no mistake, these migrants are like cockroaches. They might look a bit ‘Bob Geldof’s Ethiopia circa 1984’, but they are built to survive a nuclear bomb. They are survivors. Once gunships have driven them back to their shores, boats need to be confiscated and burned on a huge bonfire”. (Hopkins, 2015)

Concluding comments

This chapter has demonstrated that the tendency to conceive racist offenders as hate-fuelled and young white males should be treated with caution. While it has proven difficult to provide a reliable profile of the racist offender and even more so of one who targets asylum
seekers and refugees, what does seems plausible is to recognise that a racist perpetrator more generally, could be of any age, gender and background. Further, the responsibility for race-hate does not lay exclusively with the offender but can extend to the perpetrator’s community. As to what causes offenders to target asylum seekers and refugees, a number of possible theories exist, particularly in relation to cultural hate. These theories all provide plausible interpretations as to why racist offenders target asylum seekers and refugees. Notwithstanding, more research based in England and Wales that considers perpetrators’ perspectives is needed, as without this qualitative study hypotheses remain theoretical.
Conclusion and Recommendations

The central aim of this dissertation was to critically consider the problem of hate crime and related prejudices against asylum seekers and refugees in England and Wales. This study has been conducted against a backdrop of recent events across Europe that have undeniably influenced public and political opinion of asylum seekers and refugees and resulted in negative sentiment and hostility. As such, this review has been timely but also valuable in that it develops some understanding in an area of study whereby knowledge is limited as well as identifies a number of gaps within research.

The first objective was to contextualise the problem within societal and political settings. This review demonstrates that the construction and establishment of hate crime and recognition of the harms that individuals and groups suffer have been processes whereby the public, campaigners, commentators and politicians alike have all been instrumental. Findings reveal that despite the fact that asylum seekers and refugees fall under the monitored race and ethnicity strand of hate crime, unlike the more established and visible victims they have often been neglected and at times, even considered undeserving of attention. As such, this group have been excluded from the social construction of hate crime and there has yet to be a comparable and noticeable societal and political concern with the discrimination, hostilities and prejudices they experience.

The second and third objectives were to critically explore the extent and nature of hate and related prejudices against asylum seekers and refugees. However, as stressed above, with this population commonly being hidden from view this has proved difficult. State agencies do not have recording mechanisms that capture, disaggregate and provide information on hate incidents and crimes against refugees and asylum seekers and as such, the levels and nature of the problem cannot be evaluated. In addition, the findings suggest that refugees and asylum seekers are facing barriers in reporting due to lack of knowledge, fear and an acceptance of their victimization. The realities of underreporting and the lack of official data have real and practical implications for state agencies and policy makers as to effectively counter hate crime, it needs first to be counted.
Through an examination of qualitative research, pointers were nonetheless identified as to the possible nature of hate offences towards asylum seekers and refugees. Victims’ accounts revealed an ordinary, everyday and low-level racism and xenophobia taking the form of verbal abuse and harassment, as well as physical violence and property crimes. There is, however, a need to undertake further and more focused research that looks at the distinct experiences of asylum seekers and refugees to reach any conclusion as to whether strong correlations exist between these commonplace and low-level incidents and crimes and the targeting of individuals because of their real (or perceived) asylum or refugee status.

A key finding of this review was that asylum seekers and refugees experience a range of other prejudicial actions. Although they do not necessarily constitute race-hate offences, these discriminatory and exclusionary practices are part of a cycle that has allowed for their criminalization and then vilification in public, political and press discourse. Ultimately, this has fueled hate and prejudice towards those seeking asylum and refuge even instigating what the perpetrator perceives as a common-sense, pragmatic and legitimized racism and xenophobia.

The fourth objective was to critically examine who racist offenders are, specifically those who are targeting asylum seekers and refugees. The research finds evidence that racist offenders more generally are rarely members of far right groups and draws attention to evidence suggesting that perpetrators are ordinary people (Iganski, 2008), span all ages, from young children to old aged pensioners and include both sexes (Sibbitt, 1997). While plausible, it is nonetheless problematic to conclusively infer without further and focussed study, that racist offenders targeting refugees and asylum seekers correspond with either Sibbitt’s (1997) or Iganski’s (2008) racist offender profile. Moreover, as highlighted above, without knowledge of the extent and type of offending, it is all the more complicated identifying who the perpetrators are. That being said, another significant finding of this review is that the responsibility for race-hate does not lay exclusively with the racist offender but extends to the perpetrator’s community.

The literature review identified a range of different theories addressing the fifth objective as to what motivates offenders. Of particular significance were explanations of socio-economic strain and how minority populations like refugees and asylum seekers are often
blamed for societal and economic ills as well as how offending can be correlated with emotions such as shame, a sense of loss or, excitement and thrill. Though these theories provide valuable insight into racist offending, they only offer partial explanations as to perpetrators’ motivations and the situational, social and emotional climates from which prejudice can emerge.

Another and perhaps more inclusive theory when considering the motivations for and pragmatic nature of racism and xenophobia directed at asylum seekers and refugees, is that of culture. Cultural ideologies and outlets can legitimise, fuel and propagate hate and related prejudices against asylum seekers and refugees. The notion that culture and hate are finely interwoven has (without intention) proved to be an underlying theme throughout this dissertation and been reflected in the considerations of how the media, politics, the law with its enemy penology, but also different generations of a community have all played a role in the shaping and spreading of Levin and Rabrenovic’s (2009) cultural hate against refugees and asylum seekers. Again, further qualitative and empirical research in England and Wales is nonetheless needed that expressly examines perpetrators’ perspectives as to why they are targeting asylum seekers and refugees (or those they perceive as such), otherwise these explanations remain theoretical and simplistic.

This research has shown that policy makers, state agencies and scholarship have all neglected to consider in any depth the problem of race-hate and related prejudices directed at refugees and asylum seekers in England and Wales. There is not only a need for improved reporting and data collection, but also qualitative studies that examine specifically this distinct group of victims. Without this data and focussed research evidence, hate crime scholarship, policy makers and state agencies are not equipped to understand or respond to the problem, much less support victims. Ultimately, the real-life value of the concept of hate crime and its policies and practices, is rendered minimal to those victims of hate crime seeking a safe haven in England and Wales.
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