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IMMIGRATION RAIDS AND RACIST STATE VIOLENCE

Monish Bhatia and Jon Burnett

Abstract: This article develops an analysis of contemporary immigration raids in Britain, arguing that they operate ideologically as well as institutionally to sustain the material and political conditions of what is a vastly unequal form of social order (that is also a form of racial order). It suggests that immigration raids are located within and develop understandings of a racial state in contemporary Britain. Drawing on ethnographic work at a migrant charity organization, it explains the raid process and its impact on individuals and families. Raids are rationalized as facilitating removal and more broadly operate as part of attempts to generate fear and encourage people to leave “voluntarily.” However, this is not achieved in many cases, and this article suggests that the real purpose of raids is to dominate and oppress illegalized migrants and those who may be vulnerable to immigration control, as well as reproducing the justification for immigration enforcement. Raids can be understood as inflicting harms and as a form of state-sanctioned racist violence which is utilized to try severing solidarities between communities. Enforcement leads to resistance and the conclusion reflects on resistance to raids, demonstrated for example by the 2021 Kenmure Street protest in Glasgow, and the solidarities such resistance ferments and sustains.

Keywords: Home Office; hostile environment; ICE; immigration enforcement; migrants; racist violence; raids; statecraft

Introduction

This article is about immigration raids in contemporary Britain. Immigration raids operate as part of a much broader “enforcement archipelago” (Mountz 2020) in which governments have invested considerable resources and energy over the last few decades. For example, £392 million was spent on the Home Office’s Immigration Enforcement Directorate in 2019–20 alone, according to the National Audit Office (2020: 6), which describes the vision of immigration enforcement as aiming to “reduce the size of the illegal population and the harm it causes.” This overriding vision is broken down further, aiming to “prevent illegal immigration

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through greater compliance with immigration laws,” “tackle the threats associated with immigration offending” and “maximise returns of immigration offenders and foreign national offenders from the UK” (National Audit Office 2020: 6). However, this article suggests that immigration enforcement can be understood very differently. Immigration raids, this article argues, operate at the apex of a form of statecraft seeking to expand the range of bodies and agencies responsible for immigration enforcement, and mobilize consent for this expansion. They operate at the centre of a symbiotic process of “rolling back” and “rolling out” the state, and through convergences of criminalization and immigration control. As is well established (Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration [ICIBI] 2015), immigration raids are frequently ineffective in their own stated terms of facilitating removals. Yet this is not, and never has been, the point. This article argues that one of the core functions of raids is to instil fear among impacted communities (for further discussion see Atkinson 2021). We suggest that immigration raids are utilized in broader attempts to sustain and reproduce the justification for immigration enforcement, and argue that raids operate ideologically as well as institutionally, sustaining the material and political conditions of what is a vastly unequal form of social order.

In developing this analysis, this article suggests that immigration raids can be understood as a form of violence. Over the last few decades a considerable body of work has demonstrated the need for conceptions of violence which foreground the actions of state agencies and institutional practices, not least with regard to understandings of racist violence (see, for example, McVeigh 2015; Virdee 1994). Discussing law enforcement in the United States, Myisha Cherry (2017: 4) has demonstrated how state racism and state violence can be mutually reinforcing categories, with the former frequently the prerequisite for the latter. Joy James (1997) has made painstakingly clear that historical understandings of racist violence must foreground how states have variously legitimized violence, been indifferent to it, colluded with forms of racist violence and carried out repressive violence of their own. This body of scholarship has been developed further through analyses elaborating the violent consequences of the interrelationships between crime control and immigration control (Menjívar and Abrego 2012) while simultaneously demonstrating how immigration raids operate as racial practices (Hing 2009). What this article does is explore the violence embodied within immigration raids in two parts. First, it situates immigration raids within a broader analysis of immigration control and as a particular form of state strategy. Second, building on this discussion, it utilizes ethnographic work conducted by Bhatia between 2015 and 2017, which included participant observation at a migrant charity, and interviews with six migrants subjected in various ways to enforcement practices (raids, arrests, detention and deportation), and explores how the violence of immigration

raids is manifested, lived, experienced and resisted. The conclusion reflects on the growing resistance to raids, immigration enforcement and borders more broadly.

Immigration Raids as Statecraft

Critical and analytical literature on the rationales and functions of immigration enforcement in Britain has explored the construction and policing of internal borders (see, for example, Evans 2008; Sitkin 2014; Aliverti 2020). As this literature has made clear, while immigration raids have a long history (Gordon 1981), their frequency increased substantially in the latter decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. For example, between October 1973 and November 1978, twenty-five “passport raids” (of workplaces or homes) were documented, including on boarding houses, restaurants and textile factories (Gordon 1981: 33–35). When referring to an operation in 1973, during which people unable to produce passports during house-to-house searches in Tottenham Court Road (London) were taken to police stations, MP Roy Jenkins (1973: 1496) told the House of Commons that he was “very doubtful” that they would be repeated. However, to say that this was misplaced would be an understatement. Between 2010 and 2015, some 102,300 “immigration enforcement operations” were carried out across the UK, of which raids make up a key component (Burnett 2018).

These raids are generally carried out by Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) teams, operating regionally around the UK, and their stated purpose is to “ensure compliance with immigration laws for the benefit of the community and the economy, and to enforce immigration law” (UKVI 2019). ICE is one among several departments within the Immigration Enforcement system, including Rapid Response Teams, a Criminal and Financial Investigation unit and, as of 2020, a Clandestine Operational Response Team (focusing largely on channel crossings). In their analysis of immigration raids, Corporate Watch (2018) suggest that raids are frequently carried out through two mechanisms—dawn raids and workplace raids—which operate alongside a range of other enforcement activities including on public transport, around bus and train stations and in public areas (the latter of which began to decrease after 2015) (Corporate Watch 2018: 66). Immigration raids carried out “early in the morning” are done so for “operational reasons,” according to former Immigration Minister Liam Byrne (2007: 1827), who over a decade ago told Parliament that “in 2005 and 2006 there were 8,865 and 13,953 police supported operations respectively,” including those carried out in this manner, and around 6,000 workplace raids per year between 2009 and 2014 (Corporate Watch 2018: 66).

Increasingly, raids have been utilized in conjunction with a form of rolling back the state by way of reducing (or eviscerating) available support and services to

irregular migrants—the primary target of immigration enforcement and raids. Roll-back implies that the state has withdrawn from social and economic spheres, as suggested by Dodson (2006: 225): a metaphor implying “the departure of the state or a governmental absence.” In this context specifically, the roll-back of the state is enacted in official terminology in order to precipitate attempts to force irregularized migrants to leave, or to discourage entry.

Certainly, this “roll-back” has long roots, with policy measures enacted in the 1990s and early 2000s creating the framework through which refused asylum seekers would (most often) be forced into destitution as a means of encouraging removal. Moreover, these measures coalesced with measures stretching back to the 1970s variegating access to the NHS and the welfare state more broadly. Thus, throughout the 1980s there were periodic reports of social services carrying out passport checks on those attempting to access services (Gordon 1981: 75). The Immigration Act 1971 made it an offence for someone with limited leave to remain to breach conditions relating to their occupation, and in 1996 it was made an offence to employ someone whose immigration status (or lack of it) prohibited them from taking up employment. Indeed, this rolling back of the state has further involved repeated attempts to reduce access to legal aid and support for those subject to immigration control and in particular those whose status has been irregularized (Webber 2012). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, these measures have directly impacted up to 1.2 million people (Connor and Passel 2019) and have resulted in exploitation, serious mental and physical illness, and in extreme cases starvation and deaths (Bhatia, 2020b).

Most notoriously, these measures have been precipitated under the rubric of the hostile environment policy (now called compliant environment), announced publicly by then Home Secretary Theresa May in 2012, but again, with a lineage stretching back much further. Building on the above, the measures enacted were rationalized as reducing enforcement and encouraging “voluntary” return, in part because they cost around a fifteenth of the cost of enforced returns (see, for example, Walsh 2021). But these measures have simultaneously reworked the parameters of immigration enforcement. This has included the “statutory duty” of certain bodies (such as local councils and NHS bodies) to provide nationality data to immigration officers. In this context, the intensification of data-sharing agreements about patients liable for immigration enforcement that have been established (albeit not without challenge) between the NHS and immigration authorities (Papageorgiou et al. 2020) have been described by Privacy International (2021) as one part of a much broader “surveillance regime” cutting across all areas of immigration control from intelligence gathering to data surveillance and data analytics.

In this regard the roll-back of the state—by reducing access to a fundamental pillar of the welfare state—further operates as a form of rolling out the state both

through widening the pantheon of agencies responsible for immigration control, on the one hand, whilst containing the capacity to precipitate immigration enforcement, not least through immigration raids, on the other. This symbiotic relationship is further embedded within other aspects of the hostile environment. It is well documented that the increased penalties for employers employing undocumented workers, whereby fines can be reduced for co-operating with immigration control (or informing on workers), has on occasion led to immigration raids (Owens 2016). Similarly, fines levied on landlords, resurgent pressure on educational sectors to collate data, expanding police provisions (again, not without resistance) and utilizing bodies such as the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) as nodes of immigration control further expand the capacity for enforcement. These measures are designed to ensure that life for illegalized migrants is as difficult as possible.

Immigration raids, then, work as a form of state power through which the parameters of immigration enforcement itself are continually being reworked and reshaped. It is activist groups that have provided the most comprehensive analysis of the way this operates in practice, detailing how this is structured through collaboration and coercion (see, for example, Corporate Watch 2018: 69–71). As they demonstrate, raids generally follow a timeline from gathering information and picking targets to conducting enforcement activity and working through its aftermath. Intelligence ostensibly underpins enforcement, in part gleaned from the mechanisms outlined above, and further through things like an Annual Threat Assessment (ATA) identifying immigration “threats” and the extent to which they are prioritized. At the same time, Operational Intelligence Units (OIUs) produce “intelligence packages” for ICE teams, in particular those relating to national campaigns aligned to National Tasking Board (NTB) priorities and larger-scale enforcement operations. Likewise, Receipt, Evaluation and Development (RED) teams manage “information” received from the public, the police, the Home Office and other “partners” (ICIBI 2019: 13–44). As Corporate Watch (2018: 65–72) has documented, in 2016 just under 50,000 tip-offs from the public were annually providing “the bulk of initial intelligence” leading to immigration raids, with a further 17,000 from government agencies, 7,000 from CrimeStoppers and some 150 from MPs.

An Anatomy of Raids

Immigration raids operate as a form of state power coordinated from above, but in practice manoeuvred and mediated through a distinct apparatus and simultaneously embedded within attempts to secure consent from below. Building on this, we make the following analytical points about their operation.

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First, although immigration raids have their own distinct rationales, and although ICE teams generally “do not carry out criminal investigations” (ICIBI 2019: 22), they operate alongside and in some respects merge with forms of “crim-migration” (the linking of criminal justice and immigration) control (Stumpf 2006). Aliverti (2012: 420–422) has highlighted that the “period between 1997 and 2009 [saw] the fastest and largest expansion of the catalogue of immigration crimes since 1905,” and this trend has involved the creation of new immigration offences and the “making of offences that have specific application in the immigration field and replicate existing offences.” Meanwhile, there have been various moves to align immigration officers’ powers with mainstream criminal justice agencies (see, for example, Home Office 2016). Furthermore, the attempts to utilize the police (or policing) in immigration control have led to the emergence of localized multi-agency immigration teams. These teams were established in 2008, and through them a “watch list” of “immigration offenders” is reproduced for the purpose of facilitating immigration enforcement (Burnett 2018). According to Griffiths and Yeo (2021), multi and inter-agency working has been central to the operation of the hostile environment, with the Home Office’s Interventions and Sanctions Directorate (ISD) (established in 2012 to oversee its implementation) working with partners “across government and public and private sectors, to ensure that access to benefits and services is restricted for irregular migrants and that sanctions are enforced” (Griffiths and Yeo 2021: 6).

Second, in this broader network of partnership working, raids are both opportunistic and cynical. Alongside the utilization of a modern slavery agenda as a proxy for immigration enforcement activities (Craig et al. 2019), immigration raids using local authority migration funds and resources have been carried out under the banner of combating rogue landlords (Immigration Enforcement, 2019). At the same time, immigration enforcement, in conjunction with homelessness charities and advocacy groups, has been carried out under the banner of combating migrant homelessness (Morgan 2020). In all these cases, the existence of serious abuses (of working conditions, housing standards and destitution), conditioned in large part by immigration policy, operates as part of the excuse for immigration enforcement itself. Furthermore, the language and rhetoric of upholding and protecting rights provides part of the ideological rationale for immigration raids and enforcement, and this in itself frequently has the effect of pushing down conditions (in employment, for example, and in housing) even lower (Burnett and Whyte 2010).

As well as being utilized opportunistically, this policy framework enables the disciplinary power of raids to be appropriated, with the ICIBI highlighting in 2019 how “NGOs and trade unions told inspectors that they suspected some employers had decided to use the Home Office ‘strategically’ to rid themselves of illegal workers who were proving troublesome by seeking to ‘unionise’ employees” (ICIBI 2019: 50).

Third, whilst raids may in some contexts be rationalized as a means of “saving” or protecting migrants, not only is immigration enforcement and control the immigration authorities’ fundamental priority, raids reproduce and reinforce particular forms of social order and relations. On the one hand, akin to what Garland (2001) describes as “responsibilisation,” the “deputising” (Griffiths and Yeo 2021: 532–534) of immigration control operates through coercion and co-option. It is the threat of financial penalty coupled (as we explore below) with public shaming which is utilized to underpin employers’ compliance, whilst further encouraging employers to work in alliance with the Home Office to turn in employees (see Bales 2017). On the other hand, immigration raids are simultaneously underpinned by the continued mobilization and attempted reproduction of public consent for immigration enforcement predicated on the notion of migration (particularly irregularized migration) as representing a threat: be it through the broad tropes of “crime,” “culture,” having access to resources and so on (Musolff 2015). Such a dynamic has had a role in underpinning the expansion of immigration enforcement through a range of sites, such as care homes or wedding venues.

Fundamentally, immigration raids operate to reproduce the social order which raids themselves embody. This form of social order is not only manifested in things such as Britain’s participation in the war on terror and their fall out in terms of wholesale death, maiming and the subsequent uprooting of millions. Nor is it merely manifested in things like the outsourcing of border controls, or expansive forms of monitoring and surveillance (Bhatia 2021). It is also manifested in a framework of immigration raids which, as is well established, is racialized—targeting particular groups of people of particular nationalities because they are seen as easily removable, or in order to fill up pre-booked charter flights (Webber 2012). It is manifested in a framework of immigration raids which has encouraged, appealed for and facilitated informing and anonymous tip-offs from the public despite the awareness that on its own terms (of prompting raids leading to arrests and removals) this policy is rarely “successful.” Certainly, there is an awareness among policy figures that such forms of “intelligence” are untestable, and yet there is a desire to diversify it further (ICIBI 2015). Regardless of the forms of intelligence, raids are largely ineffective, with just around one in six out of some 44,224 raids on people’s homes between 2014 and 2019 leading to removals, according to the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) (Taylor 2021). But as Kundnani (2021) argues, the underlying rationale is not just removing (or not), but reproducing the disposability of those who are or who may at some point be vulnerable to it. Speaking of the “infrastructure build-up” on the US–Mexico border, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore (2008: 148) have emphasized that the goal of the wall, above all else, was always to “create fear and legitimate the state that built it.” Likewise, immigration raids, we argue, operate as attempts to

legitimate the order which they embody, and fundamental to that is the reproduction of fear, which is where our attention turns to next.

Raids and the Reproduction of Fear

The function of raids is not only to exclude, but it is also to disorient and destabilize migrant individuals, families and communities, and to impose a form of terror. There is a need to understand how raids are experienced, the process behind them and what they say about the tactics of a racial state. During an interview, Mercy¹ from East Africa, a single mother of three, mentioned her refused asylum case and said that she submitted a Fresh Claim² (and new evidence in support of her claim). While the claim was under consideration, she was subjected to a dawn raid—as explained:

It was around 7am in the morning. My children were getting ready for the school. I was with my two-year-old lying in bed. They [immigration officers] banged the door. Not sure whether it was my son or daughter who went to the door to answer. I heard them saying “we want to speak to your mum.” Before they [children] come in to let me know, these officers already stormed into the flat. They were already screaming “you are under arrest blah blah.” They came straight into my room.

[They were] three women and four men. So, seven of them . . . They asked me: “do you know why we are here?” I said “I don’t know; I had put an application.” They said, “We will look into that later, for now you will need to come with us.” They asked us to pack “fast, fast.” I started packing. I was in shock. Like, I could not think, I was confused. My children were getting ready for school and now we are packing everything. We didn’t have much time to pack. We didn’t have much time even to have breakfast. We left pretty much everything behind [i.e. belongings]. They [officers] bought two/three bags, but it was not enough to put things inside. In less than an hour after they came, we packed whatever we could, and got put into that van. I could not call anyone for help, as they [officers] took my phone away.

(Interview with Mercy)

Migrants’ movements are controlled and disrupted through a whole range of bordering tactics. These include (but are not limited to) pushbacks at land and sea borders, and re-directing migrants to dangerous routes that expose them to the increased risk of injuries and death in transit. For those who manage to cross the border, and are in-country, they are subjected to enduring conditions of detainability and deportability (De Genova 2013). There is another aspect of governing

human mobility that the state uses which is not sufficiently reflected upon, that is, *kidnapping*. Tazzioli and De Genova (2020: 871) argue that kidnapping migrants is a tool of border enforcement. By moving beyond the narrowly legalistic, criminological perspective (which associates kidnapping with strictly non-state activities) Tazzioli and De Genova show the ways in which kidnapping can be deployed as a state tactic of domination and “repurpose” the term kidnapping to analyse how state powers capture and exert control over migrant mobilities (Tazzioli and De Genova 2020: 868):

[kidnapping is] a spectacularly punitive tactic staged as a purported “deterrence” measure; as a physical constriction and forced relocation exercised over migrants and refugees’ bodies and lives; as a form of temporary, arbitrary *de facto* detention . . . interdiction, capture, seizure, confinement, sequestration, detention, and containment intersect, overlap, and combine in kidnapping, and how the mobilisation of various constellations of them culminates in state practices of bordering that ought to be recognised as kidnapping.

Mercy clearly highlights the fear (of the unknown), along with elements of forcible entry, coercion, taking away the means of contact with the outside world, asportation, relocation and traumatization. There is a degree of (fearful) acquiescence to authority, so as to avoid confrontation with seven officers. In 2020, a report emerged alleging that immigration officials have used coercive tactics to gain access to people’s homes without having or showing a warrant. The law allows them enter the premises only if the occupant gives “informed consent”; however, many individuals lack the knowledge and awareness of rights and are unable to refuse or challenge due to risk of getting into further trouble.³ Immigration enforcement is presented to the public as necessary through the official narrative of controlling borders and protecting the nation. However, it must be viewed as kidnapping of migrants from the community and as the exertion of dominance and control.

In another case, a woman called Fatima, a single mother of four from West Africa, explained how being subjected to a raid bought back traumatic memories. Fatima was a victim of torture. She did not claim asylum on arrival and was warned by people from her country of origin about the Home Office’s treatment of asylum seekers and the ever-present threat of detention and removal. In her words:

They told me to not apply for asylum and get on with your life—no one will care or bother about you. But if you apply for asylum and tell them story of your life and all that, and because the money they will end up spending on you,⁴ they will end up refusing the case and deporting.

(Interview with Fatima)

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After living undocumented for over a decade, she got caught up in a situation that resulted in her immigration status (or lack of) becoming known to the authorities. Fatima had no choice but to seek asylum. She went through a detailed medical screening via an organization that supports survivors of torture. Despite providing medical and psychological reports confirming torture, her claim was rejected, and an Immigration Tribunal judge insinuated that she was a “disingenuous” woman who was only seeking asylum to avoid removal from the country. The entire processes of application and appeals further affected her physical and psychological health. Fatima and her children were then subjected to a raid:

All of a sudden one day, Home Office people came to the house early in the morning. Around 7 in the morning. They came banging on the door. So loud! We all were like, what is going on? The officers just walked in without permission. They said they are deporting us and we should pack immediately. Errm, errm, oh my God [indicating panic]. I didn't even know what to do and who to call. My brain was running in so many different directions. I was going around and around. I was like what to take, what not to take, what to leave behind? Will I be able to come back to take the things that I leave behind? Who will look after my things? They were helping children pack their things. It was my children who were deciding for themselves what to take. They [officers] shouted I should pack my things quickly, so I was running around to put my things together . . . My sons really love their school and one of them had a test, and he was studying until late, preparing. He couldn't go for it. We left after 20 or 30 minutes of packing. I had no idea where we were going or going straight on the flight and getting deported? We were treated like a piece of garbage—like just get out, just get out of this place.

They took us to the immigration reporting centre and we were there in a closed room for two–three hours. All this time I was thinking what is happening to us? You know, these are not just things, this was our life. In 20 minutes how much I could pack? And I was thinking about deportation and what will happen to me? What will happen to my children? Then from reporting centre they put us back in van and started driving. We were taken to [city name] airport and we were there for another two hours. From there we went to London Heathrow and then to detention.

(Interview with Fatima)

Raids are intended to make migrants “disappear” from the community (Buff 2008), particularly because of the way they are carried out to maximize fear and submission. As we argue in this article, the process is degrading and can consist of an element of surprise, creating panic and blur in order to make the prospect of escape

impossible. Being subjected to a raid reignited memories of maltreatment in the country of origin for Fatima—of being abducted, held in confinement and tortured. Both Fatima and Mercy also mentioned the sheer distress of their children, who began to question the reasons behind their family's treatment (more below). The forces of racism are embodied in immigration controls. Those deemed “illegal” and “bogus” are treated as a “nuisance,” racially inferior and “undesirables,” and rendered vulnerable. What appears as a “colour-blind” strategy of migration control has a racializing and criminalizing effect and is experienced as such (Hing 2009). After all, it is the deep-seated racial framework (and white supremacy) that shapes the immigration laws, policies and practices (El-Enany 2020).

Raids and racist violence

While explaining biopower, Foucault (2003) argues that states define and create the categories of “inferior,” “abnormal,” “degenerates,” “deviants,” “dangerous” and “threats” along racial lines. Those categorized as an “inferior” race (or “sub-race”) must be excluded and segregated from those categorized as a “superior” race. The focus of biopower is not to protect the state against the state, but to protect the state from the so-called threat posed by the “inferior” or “sub-race,” thereby, protecting the superiority of (the “super”) race. Racism not only divides humans into types, but also normalizes strategies that allow for the “inferior” race to be exposed to violence and harm, expulsion, and social, political and even literal death (Cherry 2017; Cisneros 2016). In “Necropolitics” (2003), Mbembe draws on (post-) Foucauldian and Fanonian debates to understand the contemporary social and political order. He argues that the racialized poor are conferred with the status of the living dead, and they exist in (between life and death) spaces that make living impossible. Here they can be exposed to small doses of daily deaths by getting pushed to the edge, or outer edge, of life. Indeed, the practices of immigration controls, policing of internal borders, and the creation of detainable and deportable spaces—all make life precarious and expendable (for instance, see Mayblin et al. 2020). Individuals are stigmatized, humiliated, subjected to racist violence and kept in a state of (invisibilized but permanent) injury.

Bjorgo and Witte (1993) argue that victims of racist violence are not only targeted in their capacities as individuals, but as representatives of minority groups in terms of numbers and their position in society (such as people seeking asylum and so-called “illegal” and “bogus” migrants, who are considered “un-British” and are unwelcomed). Victims are often defined as “them” who are distinguished from “us,” portrayed as threats to “our” culture, race, welfare and social fabric, and subjected to (violent) exclusions (Virdee 1994; Ray 2018). While broadening this understanding, Bhatia (2020a: 47) argues that racist violence is deliberately inflicted through laws, policies and practices, and incidents occur not due to

lapses in procedure or policy failures—they are not ‘spectacular’ or ‘unusual’ either—but rather strategic, functional, mundane and operating with a cruel rationality. They need to be understood and analysed as systematically built into the legal and policy frameworks. Injuries are perpetrated by and through racism, which also serves to dehumanise the victims and justify their treatment as legitimate, deserved and appropriate responses.

Violence is institutional and collective, and it targets the groups constructed as a sub-race. The violence can be psychological, material, social and/or corporeal (also see Bhatia 2020b).

In the fieldwork, the very process of raids/deportations and being “treated as nobody” (Mercy’s words) disrupted children’s sense of identity and made them feel confused, inferior and invisible. Mercy further explained how children experienced the raid:

[They] got really scared. The women officers were talking to them nicely and sitting with them. But they [children] just looked terrified. My two-year-old was OK, but the other two were not. I did not know how to explain it to them what was happening—should I say: “Emmanuel and Grace—we are being taken somewhere. I don’t know where and I don’t know what will happen.” Or should I just tell them: “we might be getting deported and never return here.” They knew something very bad was happening to us. I wanted to protect them but I did not know how at that time.

(Interview with Mercy)

The enforcement agencies view migrant bonds, ties to the community, memories and existence as unimportant and unworthy. On reaching the immigration reporting centre, children soon realized they were not going to see their friends and teachers ever again or continue with school—which induced a sense of separation and loss. Fatima mentioned her eight-year-old son questioning whether the family were bundled into a van and held in confinement because “we are African people?” (Fatima’s words). Both mothers highlighted the impact of dehumanization, but also the powerlessness and not being able to protect their children from racism and harm in that situation. It is important to note that existing international evidence clearly demonstrates that raids and fear of raids are detrimental to psychological and emotional well-being of individuals, children and parents, and poor migrant communities. These enforcement practices produce heightened fear, insecurity, social isolation and exclusion, which can induce anxiety, depression and mental health breakdowns (Capps et al. 2015; Thronson 2008; Barajas-Gonzalez et al. 2018; McLeigh 2010). Racist violence is an integral part of the regime and is carefully crafted.

Raids result in the temporal confinement of individuals and families, and it is one of the state techniques of stealing migrant time (which goes together with kidnapping),

whereby, time itself becomes a target of power (Bhatia and Canning 2021). The raids create a debilitating space into which people are pushed. In some cases, this also spreads into migrant communities. It was noted during the fieldwork that the anxiety and fear of potential raids led to two families leaving their apartments and staying with friends. In these cases, the parents also stopped doing the school run, to avoid getting caught. Similarly, in one case a man stopped working, relocated to a different city and was couch surfing at a friend's apartment. There was one other instance where a woman mentioned never using underground transport, as she believed that unannounced raids and arrests often take place outside the stations. Raids and the hostile environment they are part of are geared in part to trigger an unsettling effect. Furthermore, two separate cases of workplace raids were recorded in Bhatia's research, where individuals were not only criminalized, apprehended, and treated harshly, but they also lost their wages and were subsequently rendered destitute. In a third case, a Pakistani man had many months' worth of savings stored (in a coffee jar) in the apartment, which was confiscated (or "lawfully stolen") during the raid by the authorities. In all these cases, the raids did not result in a successful removal. Likewise, Mercy, Fatima and their children were eventually released back into the community and became part of the statistics of four in five who do not get removed (Taylor 2021).

Despite the low success rate and high costs, raids (at workplaces, homes and other venues) have continued. It can be argued that removal is not necessarily the end goal of raids, but it is rather meant to humiliate, racially subjugate and inflict harm on the "other." Raids can also be viewed as a cruel form of punishment—which is rendered invisible due to being inflicted by an agency that is meant to be situated outside of the formal criminal justice system. The raids and arrests are also communicated to the wider public (Murray 2016; McEwan 2021; Evans 2021; Home Office website⁵)—to justify their existence and importance in targeting those living "illegally" and make claims about people "abusing" the system and "taking away the scarce resources" that "rightfully" belong to British citizens. Through such strategic moves, the state shows that it is doing something about the "migrant problem" and at the same time also attempts to block or undermine the emergence of solidarity and resistance. The state reworks and reproduces social divisions along the lines of particular forms of racial order and in doing so attempts to undermine forms of social solidarity, rendering the racist violence invisible.

Deportation by attrition?

Raids are utilized to create fear, and they operate in conjunction with strategies used to force those vulnerable to immigration enforcement to leave the country "voluntarily" so as not to be caught and deported. The purpose of this removal by attrition is supposedly to increase the probability of illegalized migrants to "self-deport" without the need of intervention from the immigration authorities. In other

words, it pushes for voluntary compliance with immigration laws through a harsher interior enforcement regime. Also, as discussed earlier, voluntary returns are significantly cheaper than enforced returns—according to Home Office estimates (2013), the average cost of the former is £1,000 and the latter £15,000.

But does fear and attrition achieve the desired outcome? The main rationale of the hostile environment policy framework was to make life in the UK so difficult that a large proportion of illegalized migrants would give up and leave. However, as Table 1 shows, there has been a steady decline in both enforced and “voluntary” returns since 2015 (Home Office 2021). The National Audit Office clearly highlights the inability of the Home Office to measure whether enforcement activities have the effect of encouraging people to leave the country “voluntarily” (National Audit Office 2020: 28). Returning to the point of the US–Mexico wall, one of the functions of the border wall is to make citizens believe that the wall is needed. In a similar manner, the point of immigration raids is to make citizens believe they are needed in order to protect them from the “illegal” “threat.” Despite the fact they are resource draining and have little utility—the raids do not cease to exist.

Table 1 Enforced Returns and Voluntary Return

| Type of return | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020* |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Enforced Returns | 12921 | 11903 | 11741 | 9236 | 7193 | 3327 |
| Voluntary Returns | 30210 | 28474 | 20979 | 15702 | 12324 | 4646 |

*In 2020, the Home Office continued with removals despite the global pandemic.

As mentioned earlier, the fear of raids and enforced removals have a lasting effect on individuals, and it impacts their mental and physical health—this strategic reproduction of fear is racist violence (Bhatia 2020b). However, the fear does not necessarily translate to “self removal.” An overwhelming number of individuals encountered in the field were not able to leave the country and the reasons for not leaving were multiple and complex. Out of sixty-eight individuals encountered, sixty-three could not return due to armed conflicts, persecution or other crises or violence. Some were also part of a mixed-status family (i.e. where a partner and/or a child were British/European nationals, but the individuals themselves lacked status or had a refused asylum claim). Three individuals were bought up in the UK and had no or only limited ties to the country of origin. Only two were willing to return “voluntarily” and signed up for the Home Office’s Voluntary Returns Service. They were, however, stranded in the UK due to tense political situations in their countries of origin. Despite largely failing on their own terms, raids continue to exist. It can be argued that this is

because the success of raids cannot be measured by enforced removals or quantified through any other variable. The raids are about punishing illegalized migrants, inflicting injuries, disciplining migrant communities more broadly and attempting to legitimize more immigration enforcement.

Concluding Thoughts: Resisting Raids, Resisting Racist Violence

By grounding the realities of poor, working-class communities, minorities and migrants, grassroots organizations pose a direct challenge to immigration enforcement operations that are designed to inflict violence and harm, and to destroy the social fabric through fermenting divisions. These groups and networks have adopted various strategies, such as physically blocking raids, distributing practical information about rights, building legal knowledge and creating awareness. They are also engaged in providing training and equipping communities and neighbourhoods to challenge raids, collecting intelligence on raids and disseminating real time information via social media and other modes of communication about ongoing enforcement operations, and assisting at-risk individuals and families to avoid raids and arrests. In the process, such networks have highlighted the criminality of state and corporate actions, and confronted and exposed racist immigration controls which cause widespread human suffering. As one leading network succinctly explains:

Immigration controls are part of a vicious global system of capitalism and colonialism. The British Empire and other colonial powers are not just history. Powerful corporations and governments are still colonising and destroying the world for profit, and the entire economy functions on plundered resources such as oil. They use immigration controls to protect the wealth they have looted over centuries, to push down wages, and to stop us from uniting. Our weapon is solidarity. The only way to fight immigration controls, and other attacks by the rich and powerful, is to create networks of resistance that bring together individuals and communities. We need to come together on the streets, in our areas and workplaces, and fight side by side with our neighbours. Immigration checks and raids on our homes, streets, communities and workplaces are violent attacks on us by the racist state. They can have extreme consequences, including lengthy periods of detention, deportation and, in some cases, death. Raids and checks need to be opposed wherever and however we can.

(Anti-Raids Network website)

The opposition to raids is growing across the UK, and it was particularly noticed at a protest that took place in Glasgow's Kenmure Street—a working-class neighbourhood in the south of the city. On 13 May 2021, the Home Office carried out

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raids and bundled two men into an enforcement van. Disturbed at the sight, neighbours surrounded the vehicle and stopped it from moving. Within a few hours, hundreds of locals, and people from across the city gathered in protest of the raids and chanted: “These are our neighbours. Let them go.” The day was dubbed by some as the “Battle of Kenmure Street” (Reid 2021). What such forms of solidarity and mobilization embody is the antithesis of a violent regime which has been carried along by and is ushering in forms of authoritarianism and nativism. At a point where these forms of authoritarianism look set to intensify further (Webber 2022), the lessons contained within such mobilizations are needed more than ever to expose and challenge racist violence and criminal state behaviours and build a movement to abolish immigration enforcement and borders.

Notes

1. Pseudonyms are used throughout this article.
2. Fresh Claim refers to the evidence that individuals can submit (further submissions) to the Home Office after the appeals stage of the process. For more information, see: <https://righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/freshclaim/>.
3. For more details, see <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/nov/25/uk-immigration-officials-accused-using-coercive-tactics-access-homes-without-warrants>.
4. It is important to point out that people seeking asylum are entitled to accommodation on a no choice basis and to cashless vouchers. Accommodation is often privatized, substandard in nature and lacking basic health and safety provisions (Bhatia 2020b). The cashless ASPEN card is pre-loaded with £39.63 per adult/per week (equivalent to £5.70 per day) and an additional £3 for each child per week.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/search/news-and-communications?organisations%5B%5D=home-office&parent=home-office>.

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